

Diana Thater*Between Science and Magic*

David Zwirner, New York

11 February – 13 March

Just how many times can you watch a magician pull a rabbit out of his hat? This is surely not the central question asked by Diana Thater's new film installation, *Between Science and Magic* (2010), but it is one that will occur to most viewers, and in the end its answer will be seen to supersede the work's more obvious concerns and conceits (which does make it central in some sense). For the answer to that question is 'more than you would think', and the reason is that Thater's new work, for all its reflexive exfoliations – perhaps *because* of all its reflexive exfoliations – is an object lesson in cinephilia, both Thater's and our own.

The title of Thater's piece is drawn from the late Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (1962), in which the father of structuralism, forever staking out the dyads of our understanding, describes art as halving the axis between 'scientific knowledge' and 'mythical or magical thought'. For nearly two decades, Thater's artistic province has been the camera arts, which have long enjoyed dual membership in the societies of science and magic. It only makes sense then that *Between Science and Magic* is dedicated to filming a representative from the first while revealing the mechanisms of the second (and if you're paying attention, the first as well). That is, what we see is a magician, decked out in tux and tails, repeatedly perform the illusion of making a live rabbit (Josephine is her name) appear in what was his demonstratively empty top hat. We see him do this (Greg Wilson is his name) from two angles simultaneously: the first one fixed, and filmed by Thater, the second from a series of clockwise positions, filmed by Thater's assistant. These two angles are then 'screened' side by side, so that we see Wilson both from the front and in the round (we catch glimpses of Thater and her assistant, too); but what we are really seeing is the refilming of a previous side-by-side screening of the same footage on the screen of the Los Angeles Theater (a Golden-Age-of-LA relic), all of which is now being reprojected in the gallery, split-screen-style, by two synchronised 16mm projectors, replete with a soundtrack of the previous recordings and projection. So much for the exfoliation.

Over and over again the rabbit appears, and with each iteration, with each successful conjuring of the illusion, we get a little closer to figuring out how the trick works – both the magician's and the artist's. The precision of the former's choreography is matched by the mechanics of the latter's apparatus. Each is exacting; both, we come to realise, are refugees from the era of what Hollis Frampton named the 'last machine' (aka film, when precise parts and movements could be 'seen'). If we attend to science to figure out what the world is like, and we attend to magic to be amazed, then somewhere in between, the camera arts let us do both, and we love them for it. *Jonathan T.D. Neil*



Between Science and Magic, 2010 (film still). Courtesy David Zwirner, New York

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