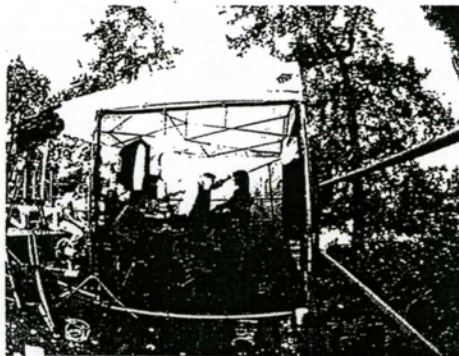


Art in America

FEBRUARY 2002



Warren Neidich: *Backstage Day #1*, 1995-96, C-print, 30 by 40 inches; at the Laguna Art Museum.

LAGUNA BEACH

Warren Neidich at the Laguna Art Museum

In 1995, Warren Neidich made a geeky/neo-hippyish literary pilgrimage across the country, following the route of the character Sal in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. The unexpected pot of gold at the end of his cross-country journey, in southern California, was the media brouhaha surrounding the O.J. Simpson trial. Up for the adventure (naturally), Neidich secured himself a press pass and commenced to photograph the behind-the-scenes activity in the temporary press shanty, which had been dubbed "Camp O.J." Hyperbolically, but affectionately, Neidich describes the scene he found there as "sublime."

Neidich's series of C-prints give the impression that he shot the event underwater, due

to the extremely wide-angle lens he used. The fun-house-mirror quality of the photographs is augmented by plastically vibrant colors. Neidich's artistic choices are well suited to his portrayal of the bizarre, omnipresent demi-monde of media that underlies the "reality" continually presented to the public as news. Neidich catches news anchors checking their makeup, vamping for the camera or standing around looking bored. A talking-head sort of guy sleeps outside a production trailer, his mouth slightly agape, showing a defenseless face that won't ever be seen on TV.

Rough-hewn, tentlike scaffolding structures are filled with umbrella-shaped light filters. Orange traffic cones and multi-colored electrical wires are the guts underlying the spectacle. The delightfully agitating debate about whether life exists independently of its imitation is everywhere being acted out here. An ABC news desk sits beneath a bulletin board crammed with O.J.-related press clips and other similar leavings, demonstrating that this news operation has been under way for some time—roots have been put down. Workers wearing "Camp O.J." T-shirts testify to the creepy, touristy, souvenir-gathering mind-set surrounding the high-profile murder trial.

In the galleries, Neidich painted the walls on which his photographs were installed with dizzying black and white stripes. He posits these as an allusion to the ubiquitous stripes of the French Situationist Daniel Buren. The connection to O.J. was vague, but the stripes did help evoke a deco-

rative, jailhouse-rock quality appropriate to the implied notion that O.J.'s guilt was less important than the moneymaking circus surrounding his trial.

—Sarah Valdez