

## BUTLER ■ GALLERY

*89 Seconds at Alcázar*

**Eve Sussman & The Rufus Corporation**

August 13 – October 2, 2005

The Butler Gallery is delighted to announce the Irish premier of *89 Seconds at Alcázar* by New York based Eve Sussman and The Rufus Corporation. The work is an exquisite re-creation of the moments leading up to and immediately following the scene portrayed in the renowned masterpiece *Las Meninas* (The Maids of Honor) painted by the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez in 1656. It is a celebration of painting, a refined choreography and a high definition video revelation. It had its first showing at the 2004 Whitney Biennial, New York, where it was the hit of the exhibition. The piece was sold in a limited edition of 10 and is owned by the Museum of Modern Art and is in the collection of Ninah and Michael Lynne. Mr. Lynne is co-chairman of New Line Cinema.

*About 89 Seconds at Alcázar:*

Considered by Sussman to be the “first cinéma vérité moment”, the painting *Las Meninas* has been historically revered as groundbreaking for its ambiguous photographic quality and its use of perspective whilst engaging the viewer into a dialogue about representation of the image. Various motives within the work such as the reflection of King Philip IV and Mariana of Austria, Queen of Spain in the mirror, the self portrait of Velázquez, the famous gaze of the Empress, Infanta of Spain and the frozen gestures of the maids, and Jose Nieto, the Queens Chamberlain, caught half in the doorway contribute to the general critique of the work as successfully capturing a moment, as in photography.<sup>1</sup>

*89 Seconds at Alcázar* brings Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* to life. Shot in high definition digital video, a 360° Steadicam take reveals the entire scene in the salon of the Alcázar (Palace of the Hapsburgs). Actors play King Philip IV and his wife Mariana of Austria, their daughter the Princess Margarita, along with the servants, Velázquez himself, two dwarves, and a Spanish mastiff. Sussman's inspiration for the video was her first glimpse of *Las Meninas* at Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid where she was amazed at the snapshot-like quality of the painting, which predates photography by centuries. “Any gesture, at any point, is interesting,” notes the artist. “You can take any minute and a half from the whole *89 Seconds at Alcázar* piece, and it does the same thing. It's some moment coming together and falling apart.” Rather than re-create *Las Meninas*, Sussman used it as a point of departure for improvisation and artistic revision while staying faithful to the time period in which it was created. Eve Sussman and choreographer, Claudia de Serpa Soares, collaborated with the actors to invent the action in the room. The shooting took place over four days in May 2003 in a garage space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and required a month of set and costume design. Sussman and Rebecca Graves collaborated on the creation of the setting that accurately captured 17th century Spain. Their research included studying the 1660 architectural plans of the palace with consulting architect Robert Whalley in order to recreate accurately the scale of the room in the Alcázar. Costume designer Karen

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<sup>1</sup> PR from showing at Union Gallery, April 2005

Young's recreation of the Baroque wardrobe for the eleven actors began with research at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute, and in the exhibition *Manet/Velázquez: The French Taste for Spanish Painting* (2003). Jonathan Bepler, who composed the score for Matthew Barney's *Cremaster Series*, developed the soundtrack with over 64 tracks of ambient, foiled and vocal recordings, to culminate in an atmospheric score that makes the room come to life.<sup>2</sup>

She may be an anthropological spy coming in from the cold, but Ms. Sussman differentiates her work from that of a film director. "The bar is lower for video pieces than it is for movies," she said. "I am trying to make video art that is as emotionally involved as a feature film or novel - as psychologically rich and stunningly beautiful - but might only be 15 minutes or half an hour long. I have no shame or embarrassment about trying to make beautiful things. But I also want to make things that are edgy and a little bit emotionally twisted and convey a strange sort of energy." Unlike the familiar postmodern appropriation of the 80's, in which artists like David Salle used canonical references to deconstruct art history itself, Ms. Sussman uses cutting-edge technology to revel in the very painterliness of her subjects. And unlike such early video artists as Bill Viola and Gary Hills, who used video to create metaphorical landscapes, Ms. Sussman has used video to explore the pictorial evolution of a masterpiece.<sup>3</sup>

A suite of digital C-prints of stills from the film, on loan from a private collection, will also accompany the film in the Butler Gallery.

Most recently, Sussman has been working on *The Rape of the Sabine Women*, a musical based on the myth of the Sabine Women placed in a 1960's setting. It has been shot in Athens, Hydra and Berlin.

## **ADMISSION FREE**

Butler Gallery, The Castle, Kilkenny, Ireland

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<sup>2</sup> PR from showing at Rice University Art Gallery, Houston, Texas, July 2004

<sup>3</sup> From interview with Phoebe Hoban, The New York Times, February 6, 2005