

METRO PICTURES

Bankowsky, Jack. "Gretchen Bender at Metro Pictures," *Flash Art* (Summer 1988): 134.

Flash Art

GRETCHEN BENDER

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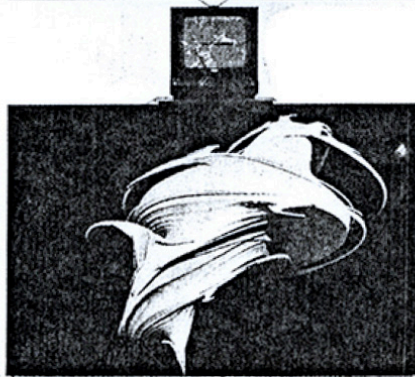
From the start, Gretchen Bender has monitored the revolution in communications we are currently living with ecstatic anticipation. Yet she has avoided the unequivocal aestheticization which characterized the Futurist response to industrial advance earlier in the century.

Bender's primary fascination leads her to the exemplary symptom but the work clicks when she zooms in for scrutiny. A piece entitled *People In Pain* features movie titles culled from film magazines scattered over a wall-size expanse of warped black plastic underlit with neon. The work tracks the eerie process by which media-fueled publicity insinuates itself into our cosmologies. A number of the films are unfamiliar as they have yet to be released; others, which opened and closed with little ado, vaguely jog the memory; and still others have entered the lexicon of everyday signs. Bender times her movie choices so that the titles go from obscurity to instant recognizability in the course of the exhibition. When her show opened, *Wings of Desire* was a cryptic slogan: by the time this review hits the stands it will be the new Wim Wenders film everyone's seen.

Bender has it over the Futurists on another count. They resorted to illustrative pictorial conventions to tell us that "the world was moving faster than ever before": Bender had the hunch to address her zeitgeist in its own idiom: television, photography, and computer-generated graphics. A series of TVs with slogans across the screens—"Relax," "I'm Going To Die," "Open The Door"—works like Barbara Krugers with moving images. The 10-minute gallery visit wreaks productive havoc with the continuous regularly broadcast programming, underscoring the fact that television's flow exceeds the viewer's capacity to assimilate it. The monitors are sandwiched between still photos ranging from images of carnage to computer graphics which don't do much but diffuse the conceptual punch.

All in all though, you have to hand it to Bender: in place of obligatory lipservice to the media-changed world, she enters the flux of tech-culture and attempts to navigate its complexities.

Jack Bankowsky



GRETCHEN BENDER, UNTITLED (OPEN THE DOOR).
COLOR TELEVISION, SILKSCREEN ON ACETATE, METAL SHELF,
LAMINATED PHOTOS, 113" x 72" x 15"