

Hairy situation

Video art show puts the focus on hair

Artspot

Creative Loafing

By Felicia Feaster

Oliver Smith presents the video diptych “Horror Vacui” as a kind of he said/she said fugue on the problem of hair. In Smith’s survey of women seated in a hairdresser’s chair, the artist distorts their faces into gargoyle masks, suggesting something of the contortions of beauty. Far more effective is Smith’s absorbing treatise on male vanity and hair loss. Rogaine ads, shiny heads surveyed from every angle and Smith’s quickly paced editing give a sense of escalating dread to the subject of baldness. A musical score with a steady, foreboding heartbeat effect underscores the elements of mortality and the symbolic loss of virility and sexuality associated with hair loss -- for many men their first encounter with the cruelty of a looks-based culture and a beauty industry that quickly jumps in to manipulate frail egos.