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Norton show explores how video artists deal with narrative

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'Double Bind (Anna Moore)' by Julie Orser explores how the portrayals of female characters in films of the 1940s and 1950s 'echoed the larger issues and fears concerned with the roles of women in post-war society.'

By [Jan Sjostrom](#)

Daily News Arts Editor

Julie Orser's video *Double Bind (Anna Moore)* has a split personality — equal parts color post-war melodrama and black-and-white film-noir mystery.

The surprising ways that contemporary video artists deal with narrative is the subject of six videos by four artists in "L.A. Stories: Narrative Video From the West Coast" at the Norton Museum. The videos haven't been shown in South Florida before.

The exhibition, organized by photography curator Tim Wride, features works by two generations of Los Angeles-based video artists. Eileen Cowin and Judy Fiskin have been exhibiting since the 1970s. Orser and Mark Daybell represent the up-and-

coming generation.

All have a fascination with storytelling.

For *Pants on Fire*, from 2004, Cowin recorded a conversation with her high school art teacher when she called him to admit she had lied about the source of a drawing she made for his class. At the time, she had insisted to her teacher that the image was taken from one of her grandmother's photographs — even though it was obvious to him that the model was Dorothea Lange's iconic photograph of a migrant mother.

Cowin, whose work frequently probes the anxieties that underlie our daily lives, had been thinking about liars, especially those who get caught. "Then, in my research, I found out that people can come to believe their own lies," she said. "I was interested in that." She decided to confront a lie that had been bothering her for 40 years.

Cowin's other work, *It's So Good to See You*, from 1999, is equally discomposing. Its four monitors roll footage of people engaged in private activities, such as sleeping or kissing. Suddenly, the subjects stop to stare at the viewer, as though they'd caught a peeping Tom.

Narrative — as in the stories we tell ourselves to define our place in the world — isn't what it used to be, Cowin said. As a people, "we no longer have a cohesive story," she explained. "We're fractured all over the place."

Orser's elaborately produced *Double Bind (Anna Moore)*, from 2007, mines similar veins of anxiety. An artist's statement says the piece explores how the portrayals of female characters in the films of the 1940s and 1950s "echoed the larger issues and fears concerned with the roles of women in post-war society."

In the color sequences, a woman cast from the mold of Alfred Hitchcock's blond heroines performs routine activities around the house. These scenes are juxtaposed with black-and-white footage that hints at a dangerous back story and close-ups of the woman screaming in anguish. The voice-over narrative teases at, but never quite gels into, a coherent story.

"I'm interested in leaving space for the viewer (to fill in the blanks) and in using visual and aural cues to bring up that archive of what we understand narrative to be," Orser noted.

Daybell's *The Kiss*, from 2001, frustrates the "happily ever after" ending favored by romance stories. The faces of a man and a woman are projected on opposite walls. Their lips pucker in a kiss, but their mouths never meet.

Fiskin's *Guided Tour*, from 2010, pokes gentle fun at the pretensions of art, pairing voice-overs of museum docent tours with images of "high" and "low" art.

The tone of the artist's *The End of Photography*, from 2007, is more elegiac. Black-and-white footage of the vernacular Los Angeles architecture that is typical of her still photography flit by, while a woman's voice recites the components of a darkroom — all lost when Fiskin stopped shooting photographs in 1995.

If You Go

What: *L.A. Stories: Narrative Video From the West Coast*

When: through Jan. 12

Where: Norton Museum, 1451 S. Olive Ave., West Palm Beach

For information: Call 832-5196 or visit norton.org