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Southern California: Plentiful sunshine, except patchy low clouds near the coast. Highs mainly 70s at beaches, 80s just inland, 100-108 in deserts. Weather map, Page A14.

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Now You Perceive It, Now You Think You Do

WASHINGTON — The revelation that part of a fireworks display seen during television coverage of the Beijing Olympics was in fact a trick of digital editing is the latest news media moment to make a riddle of "reality." The special effects were inserted, seamlessly, into a spectacle viewed by hundreds of millions — making it a challenge to prove what actually happened.

ART REVIEW

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The metaphysical fog surrounding the Beijing fireworks is underscored by "Realisms," the second part of "The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image." The show, an exhaustive survey of film and video art, is in the final weeks of its run at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum. (Part 1, "Dreams," which concluded in May, focused on cinema's escapist tendencies.)

"Realisms," organized by the Hirshhorn curators Anne Ellegood and Kristen Hileman, showcases 19 artists who find fictions lurking behind every window, door and screen.

One touchstone, heavily cited in a catalog essay by Ms. Hileman, is Peter Weir's film "The Truman Show" (1998). In it, an insurance clerk (Jim Carrey) discovers that his entire life is being staged and directed for a television audience. Many of the works in the exhibition riff on the premise of "Truman," but rarely do they improve on the movie.

In "Lonely Planet" (2006) the German artist Julian Rosefeldt portrays a hippie-ish Western backpacker on a trip through India. As he moves through a series of clichéd sequences, including a frenetic Bollywood-inspired dance number, the camera periodically pulls back to reveal spotlights, dressing rooms and other filmmaking necessities. "Lonely Planet" advances the unsettling idea

The Cinema Effect Hirshhorn Museum

Likewise the deserted blocks pictured in "New York, New York, New York," Mungo Thomson's four-screen projection, are revealed to be Hollywood sets. A "Spring Street" subway entrance dead-ends at the bottom of the stairs, chained-up bicycles keep their wheels, and palm trees shade the fire escapes. Are these streetscapes any less "real" than those in, say, the "Sex and the City" movie (which was filmed, with much fanfare, on location)?

In a host of other works characters elude labels of "true" or "false" — bringing to mind YouTube personalities like the home-schooled teenager Loneygirl15 and the jilted spouse Tricia Walsh-Smith. In Ian Charlesworth's engrossing video "John," a working-class boy from Northern Ireland auditions to play his own "type." Asked to draw upon personal experiences — a fight with a girlfriend, a confrontation with a drunken parent — he slips between polite deference and adrenaline-fueled rage with an alarming facility.

The young video artist Kerry Tribe hired actors to impersonate her in "Double," a short autobiographical piece. The five women, chosen for their superficial resemblance to Ms. Tribe, make improvised statements based on their conversations with her. Their acting abilities (and levels of flakiness) vary widely, but a fuzzy picture of Ms. Tribe gradually emerges.

Self-portraiture takes a deliciously tawdry turn in a video by Francesco Vezzoli, in which his career follows the arc of an "E! True Hollywood Story." Mr. Vezzoli, the artist behind the scan-



LEE STALSWORTH, COURTESY OF MUNGO THOMSON AND JOHN CONNELLY PRESENTS



COURTESY OF KERRY TRIBE AND 13101PE, LOS ANGELES



COURTESY OF IAN CHARLESWORTH

Tinkering with reality in "The Cinema Effect": Above, part of Mungo Thomson's "New York, New York, New York"; far left, an impersonator of the artist Kerry Tribe in "Double"; near left, a Northern Irish lad auditions to play his own "type" in Ian Charlesworth's "John."

suggests that reality is a matter of editing. In two installations, titled "Mother" and "Father," Candice Breitz weaves together snippets of dialogue about parenthood from Hollywood movies. While momentarily diverting, both works look and sound too much like Oscar-night montages.

More subtle, and clever, is Omer Fast's video installation "Godville." He

the failed 1973 heist that inspired Sidney Lumet's "Dog Day Afternoon." Mr. Wojtowicz's recollection of the event appears to have been influenced by Hollywood; when he speaks, he is channeling Al Pacino.

"Realisms" can be relentless, in the manner of installation-heavy Biennials and Triennials — one black box after another. The Hirshhorn's layout, a kind

cause this section features several installations of dizzying structural complexity. Among them are Isaac Julien's sweeping multi-screen projection "Fan-tome Creole," Runa Islam's "Tuin" (which uses three cameras to deconstruct a shot from a Fassbinder film) and Matthew Buckingham's double projection based on Edgar Allan Poe's