

Michelle Hines
within the contest of no contest





World Record #1: Largest Ear of Corn 1994, b&w photograph

"In the early fall of 1994, I harvested this mammoth ear of sweet corn, measuring 6 feet 6.5" and weighing over 175 pounds. The chemicals used to enhance growth were developed in collaboration with agricultural chemists at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. The formula contained an active ingredient composed of accelerated nitrogen soil dispersion fertilizers and was used to create stakes that could reach the water tables surrounding the plant. In September, 1994 the corn was declared the world's largest."

at something great and epochal, well, at least great at something. Once you've recorded the world longest dump or largest ear of corn, you own and occupy your own tangent of the world, to which no one else can lay claim.

The same tone lies beneath the effectively faked *Supernatural* series, represented here with Hines terrific still image of a crop circle and the shaky video document of the ubiquitous yet unseen yeti creature of deep woods lore. Presented as an alleged video still, her crop circle image, complete with plane shadow, captures in one image the portentous mood that hovers around the crop circle belief system and supernatural beliefs in general. In *Yeti*, Hines provides an extended version of the infamous yeti footage shot by campers in the late 1960s. Handheld (read: anxious and excited) camerawork provides only a succession of maddening glimpses of the supposed creature, which is a commonplace quality to all supernatural videos.

Near the end of *Yeti*, when we catch a few closer glimpses of the creature, Hines video (like the films and videos she is referencing) has its own hey-that's-someone-in-a-monkey-suit moment. This is not a flaw in her fakery, but rather an essential and intentional faux pas. Hines' *Supernatural* series is less about a convincing reality (as are the *World Records*) and more about the need people have to believe in the supernatural.

This need cuts to the core of what runs through all of Hines' work. In whatever form she is replicating or mimicking actions and subjects that are sometimes absurd, they are moments that butt against that prevalent, interior sense of isolation and aloneness that rises dangerously to the surface of our consciousness with, it seems, ever-increasing frequency: /

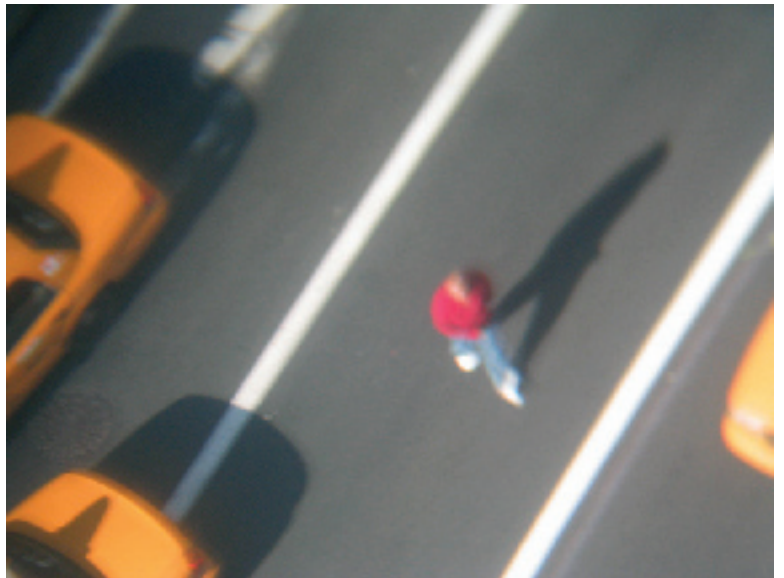
I have to begin by pointing out how much time Michelle Hines has spent being a completely unrepentant pants-on-fire liarhead. And how you can be this and still be filled to the brim with genuine empathy for your fellow man and other lunatics.

For the past decade, Hines has been exploring the variable textures of private obsessions made public, anonymity vs. the rabid desire for fame, recognition and acceptance, and the absurd manifestations of these desires. But her work should not be misunderstood as merely a mocking indictment of the self-centered maelstrom of our pseudo-real media saturation. She is not making fun of people who set ludicrous world records or do celebrity impressions or believe in supernatural entities. She is not a condescending rationalist. And she lies well because she understands the truths behind the lies.

In her most obvious lies, the *World Record* series, Hines strikes that essential quality about world records: that there needs to be something vaguely unbelievable about the record in order for it to impress. Hines' occupies a space somewhere between the Guinness Book of World Records and Ripley's Believe It Or Not. The world records she concocts are fairly ludicrous, but they are believable. Largest ear of corn? You spend a moment recalling the hugeness of the food and chemical industries and suddenly her intentionally hokey Farmer Hines image takes on a credible reality.

In a far more infamous piece, *Peristaltic Action*, Hines sets up the lie that her body has produced and expelled the world's largest feces, a colon-busting 23 feet of unbridled ambition laid out on the lane of a bowling alley. Presented as stills, complete with date and time markings, the impossibility of the act is belied by how convincingly it is rendered. The grimacing effort of expulsion is as persuasive as the pride on her face when she's measuring her accomplishment.

There is an affectionate tone to both these works. As I said, Hines is not mocking world record holders, but is attempting to connect with the impulse that drives this behavior; an earnest desire to be the best. If not

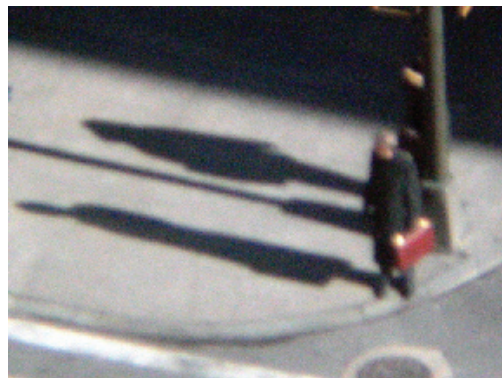


need to believe I can grow the largest ear of corn because then I can do anything. I need to believe in the supernatural because if I don't, magic things will never happen to me.

The same applies to the actor in Hines' *Celebrity Impressions* video. Impressionists occupy that same beleaguered ground as stand-up comedians, Tasmanian devils of self-loathing whose work is borne from that yawning chasm of alienation that exists between them and the rest of the world. Hines' impressionist is sometimes lousy, sometimes pretty good, but always utterly committed. It is his non-stop fervor that is compelling. It is the same fervor that chases a bipedal primate through the snow or believes that aliens tattoo our cornfields.

In all of these works, there is a thinly-veiled impulse to combat aloneness, the undeniable singularity of existence and it is in this context that Hines most recent series, *Through Binoculars*, makes utter sense and reiterates that her practice has always been about much more than pop culture replication. Surreptitious images of pedestrians, photographed from a great height and through both a binocular and telephoto lens create an otherworldly distance appropriate to the subject. Formally, pavement, color, and light play to create unique pictorial depictions that often verge on abstraction.

Through Binoculars is an obvious series of work, photographing the public without their knowledge,



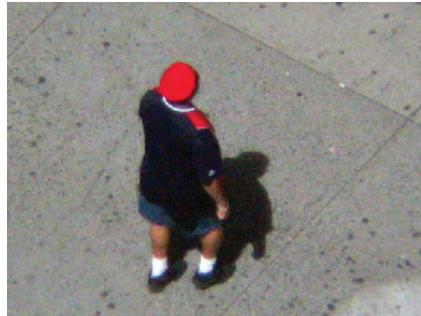
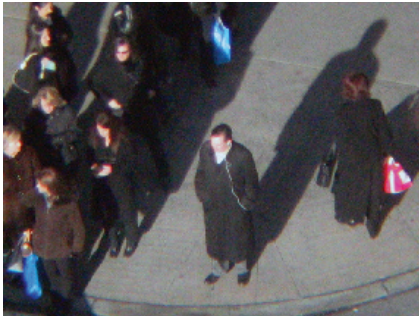
and yet it's startling how often people just look freakishly alone, even in the midst of a dense and cosmopolitan environment. Unlike the other series, there is no shock value, humor, or pop culture residue here, just your fellow man, the street, the occasional street marking or pylon. Yet they are in many ways much more startling images. They cut a little closer to the bone than the world's biggest shit.

With an edge of bleakness that is almost harrowing, *Through Binoculars* is the moment in Hines' work where the empath appears to supercede the liarhead. But, as anyone knows, you can lie and still know the truth. No contest.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

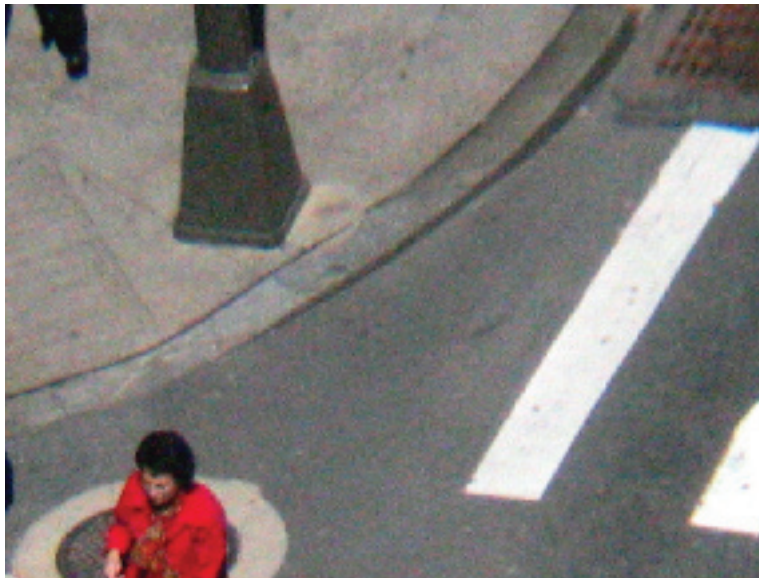


Celebrity Impressions [1997]
video, rt: 40 min.



(center)
Yeti [1997]
video, rt: 10 min.

Through Binoculars Series, 2004 - 2006
color photographs

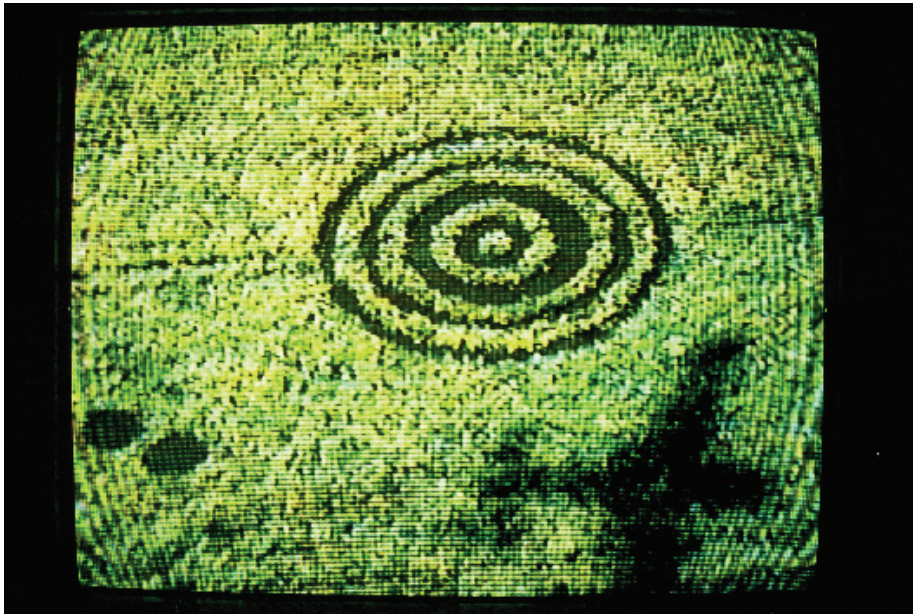




World Record #4: Peristaltic Action, 1995, video stills (6 of 8)

"In February, 1995, working in conjunction with nutritionists at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, I adopted a super fiber-rich diet which allowed me to successfully produce a single extruded excrement measuring the exact length of my colon: 26 feet. I documented the extrusion at the Cranbrook-Kingswood High School Bowling Alley, Bloomfield Hills, MI, which offered a length of floor suitable for the process and measuring the results. The cathartic diet was supplemented by a high intake of Metamucil fiber substance. The weeklong endurance prior to the event was ensured by the employment of a plug specifically designed to curtail any premature excretions."

Orgone 96 Crop Circles
1996, video still



MICHELLE HINES • Within the Contest of No Contest • September 16 to October 28, 2006

Michelle Hines grew up in the midwest. A childhood member of MENSA, Hines revered the Guinness Book of World Records and the Lives of the Saints. Hines received a BFA from Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, dropped out of the University of Notre Dame, and received an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art. Hines has exhibited her videos, stills and photographs internationally, including: Apex Art, NY, NY; White Columns, NY, NY; Derek Eller Gallery, NY, NY; Clementine Gallery, NY, NY; Bellwether Gallery, NY, NY; Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY; MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland; and SMAK, Ghent, Belgium. Hines has had her work featured in numerous periodicals and books including John Waters and Bruce Hainley's book "Art: A Sex Book" and the recently published "Fotolog Book" by Andrew Long with a foreword by Momus (aka Nick Currie). For the past seven years, Hines has corresponded with her penpal, Mr. George Kaminski, the World Record-Holder of the largest collection of four-leaf clovers; amassed while serving a 30-year prison sentence within the confines of the Pennsylvania Dept. of Corrections. Hines lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. mhinesprojects@gmail.com



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