

Future Noir

Janet Biggs mixes documentary shots for art's sake at the Gibbes

BY NICK SMITH

Like Tears in Rain

Opening Fri. May 4, artist lecture at 7 p.m.

On view through Aug. 12

\$9/adults, \$7/seniors, students, & military,
\$5/children (6-12)

Gibbes Museum of Art

135 Meeting St., 722-2706

Philip K. Dick would be proud. Over the past 25 years, *Blade Runner* has gained a life of its own, inspiring countless movies and TV shows, writers and artists.

Ridley Scott's groundbreaking film was a mélange in the first place, mashing up film noir, European comic books, a William Burroughs-inspired title, and Dick's source novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Like other cinema of the early '80s, it borrowed secondhand visual elements with bald-faced cheek, charming its way out of predictability with a few bright new ideas.

The story of the movie's production is an inspirational tale of triumph against the odds, extensively documented in Paul M. Sammon's book, *Future Noir*. But its extended lifespan is the real story — the way that fans, filmmakers, and artists have taken images and words from the film and made them their own.

You can see it in the work of French photographer Phil Eustis and Californian sculptor Stephen Hendee. To hear it, you only have to go as far as the Gibbes. Featured new media artist Janet Biggs uses Vangelis' endur-

ing electronic soundtrack and key words from the script in her convoluted video installation, *Like Tears in Rain*.

The slow, mesmerizing sounds underscore footage of The Citadel's Summerall Guard's high Prussian marching step and Death March, emphasizing the precise, repetitive movements. Although the checkerboard floor of The Citadel's Quad is photogenic, Biggs concentrates on the expressionless guards instead of perfectly composing each shot. This is one instance where documentary style catch-it-while-you-can videography doesn't lend itself to aesthetic unity.

The rest of the footage shows a blind Anne-Greta Schricker riding a horse, watching her using the *Blade Runner* dialogue to gauge her whereabouts; and polar bears swimming back and forth in a tank at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago.

What does it all mean? Biggs wants to take the divergent imagery, linking self-control and the relinquishing of free will, the mechanics of war and inner peace, and investigate the relationship between what we grasp for and what we actually attain. Like Ridley Scott, she takes images that are dimly familiar and places them in a new context. The results are jarring, although Biggs' emphasis on commitment, discipline, and the surrender of self to repetitive action is effective.

Although *Tears* is flawed — Biggs herself admits that she's constantly developing and improving the piece — it's still great to see the Gibbes embracing video art by putting

on this show. It's a better example of the form than last year's *The Best Decision Ever Made* by Christopher Miner, who handled the engrossing theme of bereavement in a backhanded manner. There's a good range of exhibits in the museum at the moment, including profiles of 20th-century artists Edward Jennings and Otto Neumann.

By his early 30s, Charlestonian Jennings had created a host of gouache, watercolor, and ink beasts drawn from Greek myth and his own imagination. *A Lonely Soul* includes a selection of his theatrical mask and costume designs, traditional landscapes, and street scenes in oils and anthropomorphic figures. His interest in the shapes and subtler colors of nature is apparent here, as well as a juxtaposition of sexually ambiguous humans with obviously horny flora. A portrait of Jennings looks out at visitors to the exhibition — a nice touch that's repeated in Neumann's show, *Modern Expressions*.

Neumann also had an interest in Greek myth, indicated here in "Argus and Mercury" (monotype print on paper). A couple of early



A STILL IMAGE FROM BIGGS' MULTI-CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION *LIKE TEARS IN RAIN*

woodblock prints help the viewer understand Neumann's progress from simple illustrative work to the more abstract figures he became known for. Eliminating fingers, toes, and fine features, Neumann created Michelin Man-like characters with continuous lines and glowing colors. By retaining the Grecian element, he showed what Hercules might look like on a supersized McDonald's diet.

A lot of care has been taken over the Jennings and Neumann shows so that they complement each other and each piece flows into the next. They're both strong enough to make the Gibbes worth a fresh visit. ■