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## Last Chance: Locks Gallery

By Holly Otterbein

In Nadia Hironaka and Matthew Suib's video diptych *Whiteout*, a soundtrack of bewitching strings and electronics performed by members of Espers and Bardo Pond — as well as audio clips sourced from a feral military control room — complements a rapid-fire array of black-and-white images of 1-foot-tall ants,



blighted homes, abstract war paraphernalia, a glistening sun, a retching volcano, drifting sand dunes (or are those snow-capped mountains?) and one lone person in the desert armed with a metal detector. Phew. Oddly, despite this over-stimulation, the viewer's senses never fry. In fact, watching *Whiteout* is gently intoxicating, like going under with a doctor's knowing hand in yours.

The fairly obvious subtext in the video are the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. (Brilliantly, Hironaka and Suib filmed it at the White Sands National Monument in New Mexico, the site of the first atomic-bomb explosion and still an active military grounds.) The woman (or man, it's hard to tell) traversing the sand dunes is an especially effective conceit: What is she doing with a metal detector? Is she trying to make sense of the desert with it, to hear its thoughts? Or perhaps the symbolism is more straightforward: A person doggedly looks for resources, for hours and hours, in a hostile terrain with an ineffective instrument.

Inside Locks Gallery, *Whiteout* is situated opposite *The Fall* (pictured), a shorter, more mystical piece by Hironaka and Suib. The same soundtrack follows a white horse in the woods of northwestern Pennsylvania, as it rocks back and forth in ecstasy. Like *Whiteout*, *The Fall* will politely put you in a trance, but it lacks the substance of the former video, so the daze can feel like a cheap high.

“Whiteout” is Hironaka and Suib’s first exhibit since the closure of Screening, their Chinatown-based video art gallery. Unlike some of us, they’re unsentimental about its demise.

“Screening was never intended to be a permanent or even long-term fixture,” say the husband-and-wife team over e-mail. “Did it expand access [to video art]? Well, we don’t have numbers to verify, but at the very least, we were able to facilitate the Philly debut of a number of very acclaimed artists in Philly — Takeshi Murata, Kelly Richardson, Lars Laumann, Michael Bell-Smith — and were the only space in Philly, other than the little black box at PMA [Philadelphia Museum of Art], where gallery-goers could count on seeing artworks on film and video every month.”

R.I.P., Screening, and may your memory live on in many more shows like “Whiteout.” Ends Aug. 11, Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square S., 215-629-1000, locks-gallery.com.

