

ARTFORUM



Chris Kraus, *Gravity and Grace*, 1995, 16 mm transferred to video, color, sound, 89 minutes.

LOS ANGELES

Chris Kraus

CHÂTEAU SHATTO

1206 S Maple Ave Suite 1030

March 24 - May 19

Before Chris Kraus became a literary icon for her sharp, funny *romans à clef* and cultural criticism (often brilliantly churned together), she was by her own account awkwardly moving through the New York underground and art world as a “failed filmmaker.” It was

her frustration with her lack of success in film that led her to pen her most famous novel, *I Love Dick* (1997), and there she found her voice as a writer: intimate, incisive, self-deprecating, and radically subjective. Her complete filmic oeuvre, currently on view at Château Shatto, is not a footnote to a literary career but its own gritty struggle—rendered in shades from surreal noir (*The Golden Bowl or Repression*, 1984–88) to luridly intellectual (*How to Shoot a Crime*, 1987). This range reveals a young artist trying out different voices and modes of making, sometimes finding humor and pathos in the process. My favorite of her earliest films is *Terrorists in Love*, 1983, which opens with a striking and fierce woman reading a manifesto in a bar: “We are minor members of the Paris Semio-Kinetic Post-Surrealist School, North American branch.” This line embodies Kraus’s approach to the film: Through a strong feminist voice, she melts theoretical critique into jokes about its pretensions, followed by genre- and gender-bending scenes set to charming musical interludes. In the middle of it all, the two titular terrorists catch each other’s eyes from across the room and fall in love.

The exhibition and Kraus’s film aspirations end with *Gravity and Grace*, 1996, a feature-length film that toggles between mainstream aesthetics, underground spunk, and art-world pseudo-intellectualism. The film is a record of the competing forces at play for many artists. And with a dollop of self-awareness, it is a mode that Kraus has manifested with genius throughout her long career.

— Andrew Berardini