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ARTS & DESIGN

MICHELLE HANDELMAN

'Dorian'

Participant Inc.

253 East Houston Street, Lower East Side

Through May 31

Inspired by Oscar Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Gray," Michelle Handelman's video installation "Dorian" takes viewers on a delirious bad trip from innocence to experience to death. The surrealistic 52-minute narrative is projected onto four screens that are set up in a square with a circular, revolving bench in the middle for viewers to sit on. A downbeat mix of "The Wizard of Oz," "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" and "Mulholland Drive" set to ethereal, avant-garde music, the video follows the nightmarish adventures of a young woman named Dorian, played by the drag impresario Sequinette. She first appears on the rocky banks of the East River with an old suitcase, looking like an aspiring actress just in from the Midwest. Discovered by a photographer, she is transported to a studio where she models punkish fashions.

From there she plummets into a hallucinatory evening of clubbing and riding around in a limousine in the company of various menacing, gender-bending characters. Then she is in her squalid bedroom, half-naked and drugged out. A mysterious, probably chimerical masked woman whose nude body is covered in glittery black paint hangs out with her, reading a book about Wilde. Finally Dorian confronts a vision of her dead self in the form of a scrawny, ghoulish, violin-playing old man (Jack Doroshow, who is also known as the drag queen Flawless Sabrina).

There are periods of tedium, but on the whole the film casts a captivating spell while delivering a mordant commentary on the decadence of contemporary culture.

KEN JOHNSON