

A narrative break

A filmmaker leaves plot, dialogue, even screen behind.

By JESSICA HUNDLEY
Special to The Times

ROBERT Drummond started out of the gate as a narrative filmmaker, a Vassar graduate and USC film school student poised to take on the Hollywood hierarchy. "I checked into USC completely thinking, 'George Lucas, you better watch your back,'" says Drummond. "It took me about a year to realize, 'There's something really wrong here,' and then I started to panic."

Drummond had been experimenting with digital video, and he was quickly coming to the realization that the studio blockbuster was not necessarily the most appropriate framework for his ideas. Rather than continuing in the filmmaking program, he restructured his course load to get a more unconventional film education. "I put together my own major, basically, with classes from the documentary program and some experimental classes, until I found what I was looking for." What Drummond had found was video art, and his student films quickly began to move away from straight and narrow narratives and into the realm of the abstract.

"They were the same ideas, and I hadn't been able to make them work as narratives," he says. "But once I turned to the abstract, I found that that was what I wanted to be doing. It gave me a freedom to think like I really wanted."

Since Drummond graduated from USC in 1999, his work has continued to evolve, influenced less by directors like Lucas than by artists such as Bill Viola, for whom Drummond worked as a production assistant. His pieces combine filmed image with sculptural form, compelling montages projected across resin figures, textured glass, free-standing window frames and even human models.

"Video trapped within a frame is just dull," says Drummond. "But to have it project across something really monumental, to hit something that's textured or has its own vitality, brings the

image to another level." This weekend, Drummond is about to unveil his largest project to date, a massive video installation at the Ground Zero ad agency.

"The space is a former shooting stage for a commercial production company," says Ground Zero's Andrew Gledhill, "and one of the most interesting parts of the architecture is the scrims, which let the light through and work quite well as walls, but what we've always wanted to use them for is projections." After experiencing Drummond's work at a show at the Pacific Design Center, Gledhill realized he had finally found an artist perfectly suited to utilize Ground Zero's unique design.

"Robert had a couple of pieces in the show, and I immediately thought of inviting him to use the space," says Gledhill. "One of the works was a window frame, six panes of glass, hanging alone without a wall around it. There were rain and clouds, a view through this window projected in a way that I thought was really magical."

GROUND Zero's "Memory Prismatic" will include this piece (the aptly named "A Window Inside"), as well as newly recorded visuals that Drummond created specifically for the show, a collage of stunning video images that resonant with the underlying themes of fear and memory. "I had been reading books on memory, the evolution and the actual process of memory in the brain," says

Drummond, "and I had also been thinking a lot about what is happening in the world and the kind of fears which exist right now and how we process those fears. I wanted to make something which would deal with those ideas."

The result is a compelling diversity of visuals that range from introspective talking-head interviews to serenely bucolic scenes of California hillsides to the billowing clouds of a nuclear reactor. Drummond plans to have the images projected simultaneously (yet out of sync), flickering continuously across not only the space's scrims, but also across live models (dressed by the local designer Sanni Diesner) and upon the surface of Drummond's own hand-cast glass forms.

"Basically, I'm just trying to explore the idea of memory and how memory works," says Drummond, "but it's not a statement yet. I'm still asking, 'How does it work? Come take a look with me, this is my interpretation of one way that we might process and filter information, one way we might have of using memory to understand the present.'"

'Memory Prismatic'

Where: Ground Zero, 4235 Redwood Ave., Marina del Rey

When: Friday and Saturday, 6-10 p.m.

Info: (310) 881-8000



NOW UNSCREENING: Robert Drummond projects his images across a variety of forms — resin figures, textured glass, people.

ROBERT DRUMMOND