

Captivating minimalist mandalas



"Study for Alone in Public" (2012) from Wendy Richmond's "Navigating the Personal Bubble," at the RISD museum.

By Cate McQuaid

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Eyes on the laptop

Walsh's paintings ignite private contemplation, and "Wendy Richmond: Navigating the Personal Bubble," an absorbing video installation also up at the RISD museum, portrays it. Richmond asked several friends and acquaintances to work on their laptops in public settings with their computer cameras on. She projects that footage on three large walls that surround the viewer.

Computer technology did not create the cocoon individuals can wrap themselves in when they're out in the world. Books and newspapers have always been a handy force field on a subway. But the built-in computer camera does afford an intimate view of its user.

There's a lot of brow furrowing and chin scratching. Richmond has listed the more common gestures on the wall, a choreographic notation of privacy: touch mouth, sip, slump, smile, purse lips. An almost comical dance sometimes sweeps across the screens as first one person leans her chin on her hand, and then the next.

Ultimately, these videos are

portraits, mostly of people so absorbed in their own activities that they are not self-conscious. But when two blond women with exquisite posture appeared on the screens on either side of me, I wondered if they were performing for the camera, the way someone sitting for a portrait might compose herself.

It's lulling to be surrounded by images of people who are lost in thought. It is safe to watch them, to study them, because they seem so unaware. Then, when someone apparently more self-conscious appears on the screen, as in life, the game changes. Richmond's installation invites the viewer to attend to those subtle shifts. She investigates private space, but always at the edge of public awareness, an edge where we are most uncomfortable.

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DAN WALSH:
UnCommon Ground
WENDY RICHMOND:
Navigating
the Personal Bubble

At: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, through Oct. 21 (Walsh) and Nov. 4 (Richmond). 401-454-6500, www.risdmuseum.org