

Alan Currall at Rupert Goldsworthy

New Yorkers have seen many spectacular video installations in recent years. Perhaps for reasons of economy, this small gallery returned to the basics by placing a monitor before a chair in an otherwise bare room. The stripped-down installation seemed appropriate to the work of Alan Currall, a British artist based in Glasgow, whose six short videos are as unadorned as the room in which the viewer sat.

Currall is his own cameraman—if turning the camera on and off counts as videography. He records indoor vignettes from a stationary vantage, performing skits that target the absurdity of mundane reality. His deadpan humor and crisp sense of timing are actually his best subjects. *Word Processing* features his off-screen voice giving specific instructions to a tiny computer chip seen in extreme closeup. Emphasizing his orders by tapping his fingertips near the chip, Currall curtly explains that he will ask it to move or alter

“letters, or numbers, or groups of letters, or groups of numbers” in repetitive variations on a limited range of options. These are exactly the tasks a computer chip can perform when directed in the correct language. Unfortunately, they can’t be bossed by terse voices, which means the chip is unable to perform its assigned functions.

Currall sets himself up for failure as a boss once again in a skit in which he practices firing someone by telephone, never mind that the phone is disconnected. Standing in a small cubicle, he repeatedly picks up the dead receiver with phrases along the lines of “Hello? You’re fired,” “Yes, speaking. You’re fired,” and “Yes, you’re fired. No, you’re fired. OK, bye.” Watching Currall’s lanky body pace back and forth as the monotonous phrases accumulate to no apparent end, one is struck by the peculiar blend of Buster Keaton and Bruce Nauman in his quiet assault on managerial authority.

Sitting before the camera in *Jetsam*, he calmly details his exploits as a space alien who assumed human form and went to art school (choosing to be English because he “couldn’t do the Scottish accent”). Language is obviously important to Currall’s endeavor, but even without words his humor is directed toward the unreliability of literal meaning.

Drawing a chair on a blackboard, Currall throws himself backwards trying to sit in it. Finding a chalk drawing of a pitcher pouring milk, he licks the drawing from the board. Perhaps Currall is foolish to try to slake his thirst thus, or perhaps his fool’s pose allows him to raise once more some basic questions about representation and reality. —Grady T. Turner

Alan Currall: Video still from *Sit*, 1993;
at Rupert Goldsworthy.

