

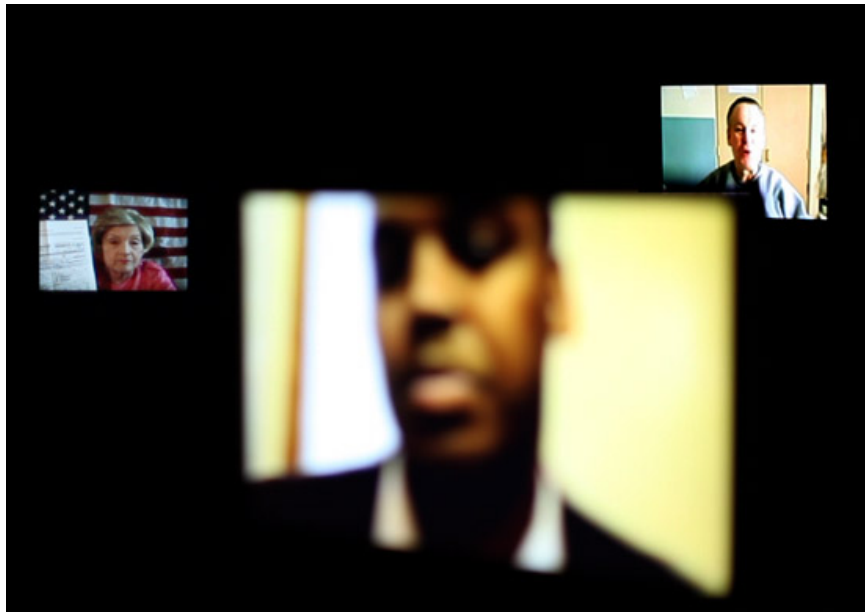
Art

How Tiger Woods Haters on YouTube Inspired an Art Show

By Catherine Wagley

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Categories: Art, Art & Technology, Video Art



Courtesy of the artist

A view of Natalie Bookchin's "Now he's out in public and everyone can see"

After Tiger Woods ran into a fire hydrant and his wife pulled him bleeding and unconscious from his Escalade, and after he withdrew from tournaments and admitted to serial infidelity, vloggers talked about it. Artist **Natalie Bookchin**, whose other projects had already dragged her deep into the pile of "junk, not-junk and precious material" that is YouTube, came across some of these Tiger-Woods-reaction vlogs. They fascinated and frightened her, and so she searched for more.

"People were taking on different voices" -- sometimes impersonating characters in the story -- "and saying things like, 'He used to be white, now he's black,'" she says. That had always been a frustration with Tiger, his refusal to just be "black." "Cablinasian," he once called himself (a word he coined to combine caucasian, black, American Indian and Asian). But now that he'd been sexualized by media scandal, no one could overlook his blackness, some vloggers pointed out. Vloggers also "kept slipping," Bookchin found. "They'd be talking about Woods, then suddenly about Barack Obama."

"Now he's out in public and everyone can see,"

Bookchin's installation in a darkened gallery at **Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE)**, is the culmination of a project that started with Woods and lasted the next two and a half years. Bookchin watched, archived, edited and then repurposed YouTube videos in which people, speaking into webcams from bedrooms, kitchens or offices, expounded on scandals around well-known African-American men.

These clips play at LACE on 18 monitors that surround the viewer on all sides. "You're actually in it," says Bookchin, whose other projects with material sourced from YouTube include homemade videos of teenage dancers assembled as if in a chorus line and exhibited at the Municipal Gallery, and a series of video diaries about layoffs that screened at LACMA.

But with those past projects, you were watching the screens, not engulfed by them. At LACE, sometimes you hear an onslaught of voices, all more or less saying the same thing -- "I always thought he was black," "He used to be black," "I'm not saying this because he's black," "There's a time and a place to show your blackness." Sometimes the voices disagree, and other times only one or two vloggers speak while other screens go dark.

"I want people to think they know who it's about," Bookchin explains, "but just as they think they've caught on, to wonder." She omitted all names and most other identifying specifics from the videos she used. You hear about a break-in and a "black man in a white house," and imagine it must be Henry Louise Gates Jr., then realize it could be Woods -- didn't he visit the White House just before he crashed? Or it could be Obama, who lives in the White House; someone *did* just mention a birth certificate.

"It's not about these men at all. It's blackness itself that become the scandal," Bookchin says. This is why, once you've been standing among the monitors for a minute or two, you stop trying to tell who's talking about whom. You start to just watch the changing faces and listen to the voices, each of which exudes that "expertise" you can only have when you're reciting opinions alone, with no one there to counter.

The vloggers became Bookchin's collaborators, and she imagined herself in conversation with them. She liked some of her collaborators better than others, however. Certain voices were embarrassing (like the people who say some awful, caggy version of "It's not that I have

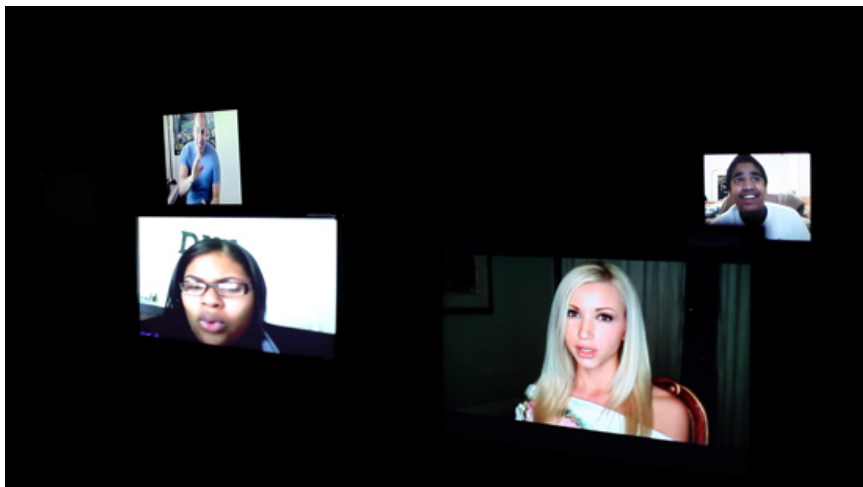


Courtesy of the artist

anything against black people"). Others were bigoted and repulsive. She remembers working with her sound editor, both of them yelling angrily at the monitors. Then, when someone more thoughtful popped up, they would be relieved. "Thank God you said that," they'd say.

Bookchin collected videos right up until a few months ago, when she had to stop if she wanted to be done in time to exhibit. Each new voice offered another fold, another twist, which is why she wanted to hear more. "It's like a history lesson about our contemporary moment," she says, "where race is such a problematic issue, and where you're always only seeing a partial view that's so charged and politicized." She wove videos for "Now he's out in public..." together as if telling a story, but it plays all day, and people might arrive in the middle or leave before the end. So maybe it's not the kind of story that starts and stops. "It's a self-perpetuated loop," she says.

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