

## Erica Eyres



**Rokeby** Galleries East

It's been a long time since 1986, and while I definitely remember watching the season finale of 'Dallas' that Erica Eyres has remade using inexperienced child actors, I don't recall much else about the episode. Except the end, of course, where Bobby Ewing comes out of the shower, risibly clarifying that the previous two seasons were but a dream. Or *do* I remember that? That's the point: the Winnipeg-born artist's work is precisely about the



patchwork formation of knowledge, how we don't recall what we've seen and, to some degree, can remember what we haven't. Here, contagious visual codes ensure that 'Dallas' is 'Dallas' even though the freckly 'JR'

junior looks about six and pours Coke from a decanter. The Victoria Principal manqué (if I've identified her correctly) acts about as well as Principal could, and has the same Christmas-tree-shaped hairdo. 'Sue

Ellen' is convincingly swivel eyed. Etc. Eyres's conflation of humour and sociocultural commentary is a theoretically appealing one, but in reality, the chewed-up dialogue and unedited Pinteresque pauses that punctuate 'Pam's Dream' (2010) make the video a perversely painful watch. Refuge is offered, though, by an accompanying clutch of drawings. Here, in borderline-uneasy scenarios (a sex tape being filmed, a child holding up a weird doll), what we understand and what we don't interweave disquietingly and – my apologies, little thespians – immediately. **Martin Herbert**

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ART

## Art Talks | *Erica Eyres*

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*Art Talks is an insight into the works of some of our favourite artists, as seen by them*



Still from *Pam's Dream* by Erica Eyres

**Erica Eyres** is an artist interested in exploring the psychological drives of the human species through the prism of mainstream culture and quasi-familial relationships, employing the motifs, language and narrative structures of soap operas and low-budget films in her idiosyncratic video work. In ***Pam's Dream***, the artist has cast young children as characters in a classic episode of *Dallas*, which famously ditched a whole season of plotlines in order to bring back Bobby – a character whose sudden death had caused a massive slump in the ratings. When Pam awakens at the beginning of the first episode of the next season to

find Bobby in their apartment, she claims she has “had a nightmare, a terrible nightmare”. It was widely considered the most wonderfully ludicrous moment in television history, and it challenged the suspension of disbelief at a global level. Here, the artist tells John-Paul Pryor the reason why she has recreated the episode with children playing the roles of the scheming protagonists.

**Erica Eyres:** “I've always been interested in imitating television genres, so my videos resemble those formats to a degree, although my videos have an element of amateur awkwardness that separates them from the original. I started watching Dallas a few years ago and really got into the absurdity of it. I loved the idea that a whole season suddenly became a dream because they needed to bring back Bobby for the ratings. Pam is one of the few characters that are not 'evil', which is probably why she is married to Bobby – they are the most redeemable characters in the show. In the 'dream episode' Pam is a bit like Lewis Carroll's Alice, as she goes through this surreal journey only to wake up and find that everything is back to normal. The girl that played Pam in the video was the only actor who didn't have to wear a wig – her wig got lost in the post and didn't arrive in time. But I think that works with the themes of reality versus dream or fantasy. Pam always has a basis in reality because she's less disguised than characters like JR Ewing, who is almost a Shakespearian malcontent. I was really interested in the awkwardness of casting children to act out a show that pre-dated their own memories. The wigs and the costumes really highlight the absurdity of Dallas and I like the way the lines took on completely different intonations when delivered by the kids. Sometimes you can see that they can't stop themselves from laughing, which undermines the over-the-top melodrama of the original. There are so many conflicting emotions going on in your head when you watch them. There's the absurdity of the situation and the natural and unselfconscious sense of comedy that children have – sometimes they seem adorable or awkward, other times they're convincing and there's something disturbing about them acting out the roles of these sordid characters. I'm not sure why humans desire escapist fiction. I would say that most fiction is escapist to some degree, however Dallas has a really over-the-top element, and it was seminal in terms of soap operas because it was the first to make use of the season cliffhanger, and one of the first to be shown in a prime-time slot. The children who acted in the video knew more than I expected them to, I think their parents probably watched it and told them about it. The girl who played Sue Ellen

told me that her friends all said she should play that character. I thought, 'How do your friends know who Sue Ellen is, and why are you so eager to play the alcoholic whose husband is always cheating on her?' Although I should say that JR and Sue Ellen seem to have got it together by that season, and she's laid off the booze. But then again, maybe it was just the dream talking.... I haven't seen past season eight so maybe they go back to their sordid ways."

Text by John-Paul Pryor

*Pam's Dream is exhibiting at Rokeby until 4 March 2011.*

*John-Paul Pryor is Arts & Culture Editor at Dazed Digital and writes for Dazed & Confused, TANK, Another and The Quietus. His debut novel Spectacles will be published in 2011 by Seabrook Press*