COLD HARBOR

DIRECTOR
Donigan Cumming

DURATION
2:55

YEAR
2003

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE
English

CATEGORY
Video Art



DESCRIPTION
With *Cold Harbor*, Donigan Cumming uses a minimum of elements to create a powerful anti-war message. At first, the video seems enigmatic, almost abstract. An amateur Handycam moves tentatively around a hospital room, panning and zooming from the view out the window to the dark-skinned old man lying on the bed. The image is shaky, blurred, often out of focus. Off-screen, a radio or television blares the news. On the soundtrack we also hear Cumming's own voice quoting from a general's memoirs: "I've always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made." Even without knowing that the text read by Cumming is from Ulysses S. Grant's American Civil War memoirs, the carnage it describes seems senseless enough. The general's description of the battle's catastrophic outcome is soon matched by the news announcer's account of a more recent, familiar conflict. By the time we hear the words "Taliban," "Al-Qaida" and "U.S. air strikes have killed..." Cumming's critical stance becomes clear. Meanwhile, the camera moves around the old man's body as if he were an object, peering up his nose and zooming in so close that his skin becomes a pattern of pixels. Is he a war veteran? Is he even still alive? By focusing on the frailty of one man's body, Cumming reminds us that the orders generals give always take their toll in human flesh.

Marcy Goldberg, Visions du réel, 2002

SOUND
Stereo

KEYWORDS
Soldier, Regret, War, Old age, Violence

THEMES
Socio-politics