



GARETH LONG: *KIDNAPPERS FOIL*

Kidnappers Foil is an immersive moving image installation by Toronto-based artist Gareth Long that explores reproduction and circulation in mainstream media and the social, cultural, and technical histories of amateur American filmmaking through the lens of the itinerant Texan filmmaker Melton Barker.

Between the late 1930s and mid-1970s, Dallas native Melton Barker traveled from town to town across the American South and Midwest, using a single script to produce hundreds of unique iterations of the same film: *Kidnapper's Foil*. Offering local children an opportunity to see themselves on the silver screen and a shot at fame, Barker convinced families to pay to cast their children as the stars of his Hollywood-style production. Over the course of one week, Barker

Kidnappers Foil es una instalación audiovisual inmersiva del artista basado en Toronto, Gareth Long. La instalación explora la reproducción y circulación en los medios de comunicación tradicionales, así como también las historias sociales, culturales y técnicas de la cinematografía amateur estadounidense, a través del lente del cineasta itinerante Texano Melton Barker.

Entre el final de los años treinta y mediados de la década de los setenta, el nativo de Dallas, Melton Barker, viajó pueblo por pueblo recorriendo el sur y el medio oeste de los Estados Unidos, utilizando un único guion para producir cientos de iteraciones de la misma obra cinematográfica: *Kidnapper's Foil*. Barker convenció a las familias de niños locales a que pagaran para que sus hijos formaran parte

would assemble his young cast, produce and print the film, and screen the finished movie in a local venue for all of the town to see. At the conclusion of each screening event, Barker would pack up his filmmaking materials and make his way to the next town to begin production on the next iteration of *Kidnappers Foil*. In total, he directed more than three hundred productions, most of which have been lost. The surviving copies of *Kidnapper's Foil* have been preserved thanks to the extensive efforts of the Texas Archive of the Moving Image and its director and founder Caroline Frick.

Interested in histories of amateur production and seriality, Gareth Long utilizes the surviving prints of Barker's cinematic oeuvre as ready-made material for his installation. The artist's synchronized projection reveals the contrast between these films, and how the aesthetics change in response to the time of their making. Yet in these differences, the collected films reveal themselves as an unlikely archive of American history and culture: capturing forty years of social life, appetites for fame and celebrity, and the evolutions in technology that allowed these films to be made and preserved.

Long's gallery presentation reframes Barker's work as a conceptual project by dislocating the films from the local context in which they were made and screened. The artist's juxtaposition of the films compromises the assumed authenticity and originality of Barker's output, resuscitating the films in their digital afterlife, allowing them to be copied and decontextualized endlessly.

This installation—shown here for the first time in North America—features recently discovered prints of *Kidnappers Foil*. And like Barker's films, this installation constitutes an artwork that is the same but different in its new iteration.

Cover Image: Gareth Long, *Childress, Texas version (1936) of The Kidnappers Foil*, filmed by Melton Barker. Courtesy of the artist.

Below Image: Gareth Long, *Allentown, Pennsylvania version (1948) of The Kidnappers Foil*, filmed by Melton Barker. Courtesy the artist.



del elenco de su producción al estilo de Hollywood, ofreciéndoles la oportunidad de verse en la gran pantalla y lanzarse a la fama. En el transcurso de una semana, Barker reunía a su joven elenco, producía y grababa la película, y finalmente la proyectaba en una sala local para que todo el pueblo pudiera verla. Al final de cada proyección, Barker empacaba sus materiales cinematográficos y se iba al siguiente pueblo, para empezar la producción de la próxima iteración de *Kidnappers Foil*. En total, Barker dirigió más de trescientas producciones, la mayoría de las cuales se ha perdido. Las películas sobrevivientes han sido preservadas por los esfuerzos de Texas Archive of the Moving Image y su fundadora y directora Caroline Frick.

Interesado en historias de producción amateur y serialidad, Gareth Long utiliza las grabaciones subsistentes de la obra cinematográfica de Barker como material ready-made para esta instalación. La proyección sincronizada que propone el artista revela el contraste entre las diferentes películas, así como las formas en las que cambia la estética como respuesta al momento en que fueron realizadas. Sin embargo, en estas diferencias, la recopilación de estas películas se revela como un archivo inusual de la historia y cultura de los Estados Unidos: captura cuarenta años de vida social, apetitos de fama y celebridad, y los desarrollos tecnológicos que permitieron realizar y preservar estas películas.

La presentación de Long en la galería replantea el trabajo de Barker como un proyecto conceptual al apartar las películas del contexto local en el cual fueron realizadas y proyectadas. La juxtaposición de las películas por parte del artista pone en juego la supuesta autenticidad y originalidad del trabajo de Barker. A su vez, Long resucita dichas películas, otorgándoles vida digital eterna y permitiéndoles ser infinitamente copiadas y descontextualizadas.

Esta instalación—mostrada por primera vez en Norte América—presenta grabaciones de *Kidnappers Foil* recientemente descubiertas. Y, tal como en las películas de Barker, esta instalación constituye una obra de arte que es la misma pero diferente en cada nueva iteración.

Transcript of Dialogue

KIDNAPPER 1: Look, that's Betty Davis over there giving that party. Get her and her old man will pay big dough for her.

KIDNAPPER 2: Ok, let's wait around after the party and catch her.

KIDNAPPER 1: C'mon, let's hide.

GIRL 1: We sure enjoyed the show, Jean!

JEAN DAVIS: Thanks, see you later.

ALL GIRLS: Bye!

KIDNAPPER 1: Look out for Betty Davis, we gotta watch her.

KIDNAPPER 2: Ok, you grab her and I'll get the car started.

BETTY DAVIS: Help, Help!

JEAN DAVIS: Betty Davis, my little sister, has been kidnapped. Oh, what shall I do? Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad!"

DAD: What's the matter Jean, what's wrong?

JEAN DAVIS: Betty's been kidnapped!

DAD: Kidnapped?!?!

JEAN DAVIS: Yes, she was standing right over there. A man came out and put her in the car and drove off. She was screaming for help.

DAD: What did they look like?

JEAN DAVIS: I don't know. I didn't see his face.

DAD: C'mon, let's call the police.

BOY 1: Look, there's a bunch of the gang.

BOY 2: What's up?

BOY 3: I don't know, let's go and see.

BOY 1-3: Hi gang.

OTHER BOYS: "Hi, boys! Sit down."

BUTCH: Listen to this gang, Betty Davis has been kidnapped

BOY 1: Betty Davis, well I know her.

BOY 2: So do I.Well, what's it say, Butch?

BUTCH: It says she was kidnapped yesterday afternoon after her birthday party. And her father's offered a ten thousand dollars reward for any information leading to the capture of the kidnapppers.

BOY 3: Ten thousand dollars? Gee whiz, that's a lot of dough.

BOY 4: Boy, I say it is.

BOY 5: What could we do with a thousand dollars?

BOY 1: What could we do with it? We could have a swell party with presents and everything.

BOY 2: I say we could.

BOY 3: I'll tell you what we'll do, Gang. We'll find those kids and maybe will get the thousand bucks.

BOY 4: That's a swell idea.

YOUNG 1: May I go too?

BUTCH: Naw, you're too little you might get hurt. Come on, Gang.

YOUNG 1: I'm big enough. I'll show them, I'll get my gang and get those kidnapppers too!

YOUNG 1: We are going to look for the kidnapppers that have Betty Davis.

YOUNG 2: But what if they get us too?

YOUNG 3: Oh, they won't hurt us I'm not afraid.

YOUNG 4: Well, why don't we go look for them?

YOUNG 1: Let's look on the other side of town.

YOUNG 2: Come on, let's get going!

GIRL 1: Listen girls, have you heard the news?

GIRL TWO: What is it?

GIRL ONE: Betty Davis has been kidnapped

ALL GIRLS: Kidnapped?!?!?!?

GIRL 3: Gee, I sure would hate to be in her place.

GIRL 4: I wonder what they'll do to her.

GIRL 1: I don't know, but her dad's offering a ten thousand dollars reward.

GIRL 1: Here comes Butch and the Gang. I wonder where they are going.

GIRL 2: Hi Butch, where you fellas going?

BUTCH: We're going after the kidnapppers who took Betty Davis.

GIRL 1: Oh boy, can we go too?

BOY 1: Nah, you'd probably crumb everything.

GIRL 2: Oh, is that so?

BOY 2: Yeah, we don't want any sissies in this gang.

GIRL 3: How you gonna track them kidnapppers anyway?

BOY 3: Yeah we'll show you about that if we find them.

GIRL 4: Well, if you did find them, all you'd do is run. And we can run as fast as you can.

BOY 4: Says you smarty.

GIRL 2: Oh come on, please let us go.

GIRL 3: That's what I say. We never have any fun.

BUTCH: Well, what do you say gang, should we let them go?

BOY 1: I guess so, if they stay out of the way.

BOY 2: Let's get going.

YOUNG 1: Gee, I'm tired and hungry. I could eat almost anything.

YOUNG 2: I bet Betty's hungry too.

YOUNG 3: I bet those kidnapppers won't feed her a thing.

YOUNG 4: I wouldn't cry if they kidnapped me.

YOUNG 1: I bet you wouldn't.

YOUNG 2: I wish we could find Betty and get ten thousand dollars.

YOUNG 3: If I had a ten thousand dollars I'd buy a bicycle.

YOUNG 4: If I had ten thousand dollars I'd buy a thousand worms.

YOUNG 1: "Get them, and you'll get the stomach aches too."

GIRL 1: What are you going to do with your part of the reward money if you get it?

GIRL 2: I'm going to take my part and go to college and learn my ABCs.

GIRL 3: I'm going to take my money that I get and buy me some new clothes.

GIRL 4: We better wait until we find the kidnappers before we start spending the reward money.

GIRL 2: We've been looking three days and we haven't found them yet.

GIRL 3: Let's not give up gang, we may find them.

BETTY DAVIS: Help!

KIDNAPPER 1: Stop your crying, nobody can hear you around here.

BETTY DAVIS: You just wait, they will get you for this.

GIRL 1: Listen gang. What was that?

GIRL 2: That sounded like someone screaming to me.

GIRL 3: Its coming from that old cabin over there.

GIRL 4: I bet that's her gang, c'mon lets go.

GIRL 2: I'm scared; I don't believe I'd want to go.

BOY 1: I thought you girls would be trouble if you came along.

BOY 2: Yeah, just a bunch of sissies.

BOY 3: Well, you're not so brave yourself smarty.

BUTCH: Well, there's nothing sissy about us, c'mon gang.

BUTCH: Go gang go!

JEAN DAVIS: It's Betty! It's Betty! It's Betty!

DAD: My Betty, safe at last.

DAD: Gang, the police just phoned and said that you captured the kidnappers and deserve the reward.

BETTY: And to show my appreciation, I'm going to give a party for the entire gang tomorrow afternoon.

YOUNG 1: Ahh Gee, we're too late they already found her.

YOUNG 2: We are late for everything.

YOUNG 3: We never have any luck.

YOUNG 4: Maybe we'll get some of that money.

YOUNG 2: Maybe we'll be invited to the party anyway.

YOUNG 1: Go up there and see.

DAD: Come on in gang, and get the money.

Kidnappers Foil is co-curated by Max Fields and Andrew Hibbard.

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