

# The Kitchen

512 W 19th Street New York, NY 10011  
(212)255-5793 [www.thekitchen.org](http://www.thekitchen.org)

## Gretchen Bender: “Tracking the Thrill” August 27 - October 5

“I believe that an acceleration into, rather than a resistance to, our multi-layered visual environment will reveal structures or open windows to the development of a critical consciousness we can’t yet perceive as useful from within our immediate vantage-point.”—Gretchen Bender, 1991

The Kitchen is proud to present the work of Gretchen Bender (1951–2004), whose scaffolds of electronic screens, hypnotic repetitions of appropriated footage from television and film, and aggressive sound were put forward as a tactical match for a cultural field increasingly defined by special effects and immersive viewing experiences. Titled “Tracking the Thrill”—and curated by Philip Vanderhyden for the Poor Farm, and organized for The Kitchen by Lumi Tan and Tim Griffin—the exhibition presents a focused selection of the artist’s video projects, underscoring how she purposefully crossed contexts of gallery, theater, dance club, and network television in order to “present a conceptual landscape and...use the media against itself—to have it be entertaining and critical at once,” as Bender said in a 1991 interview.

From August 27 to September 21, The Kitchen’s theater space will feature Bender’s *Total Recall*, an eighteen-minute “electronic theater” work and “sense-around,” as the artist described it, modeled here after its original presentation at The Kitchen in 1987. Consisting of eight channels of video distributed across two dozen television screens—in addition to three film projections newly digitized by The Kitchen for this presentation—*Total Recall* sets footage and CGI interstitials from sources as diverse as the day’s network news and General Electric commercials to a soundtrack by electronic composer Stuart Argabright.

The exhibition continues through October 5 in The Kitchen’s upstairs gallery, which will present *Wild Dead* (1984), a two-minute, single-channel video Bender exhibited in different iterations and varying contexts early in her career. The work appeared alongside static objects in galleries such as International With Monument, and at the club Danceteria on 30 West 21st Street, with live music accompaniment by Stuart Argabright’s band Death Comet Crew. The music, images, and editing techniques that appeared first in *Wild Dead* would subsequently be incorporated into the artist’s first electronic theater work, *Dumping Core*, performed at The Kitchen later that same year. The present installation of *Wild Dead* is based on documentation of these early efforts. Bender’s own documentation of *Dumping Core*—the other channels for which are currently lost—will be shown at the gallery’s entrance.

Seeking to use media “against itself,” Bender during the late 1980s and early ’90s employed her editing techniques in music videos directed by colleague Robert Longo for groups such as Megadeth, New Order, and R.E.M, while directing her own video for Babes in Toyland. However, her most influential work in the commercial sphere was likely the opening credits for “America’s Most Wanted” (1988). Deploying her rapid-fire edits and image juxtapositions there

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in order to tease out the biases and paranoia of an increasingly surveilled society at the close of the Reagan presidency, Bender nevertheless created a visual vocabulary that was sui generis for mainstream television during the decades that followed. “Tracking the Thrill” takes its title from Bender’s use of that phrase to describe her own crossing of contexts and desire to figure and sustain critical techniques within the media-sphere itself.

*Total Recall* will be shown hourly, Tuesday–Wednesday, 12pm, 1pm, 2pm, 3pm, 4pm, 5pm; Thursday, Friday, and Saturday will have additional 6pm performances. The performance is 18 minutes long. There is no late seating.

A panel discussion featuring Dara Birnbaum and Hal Foster, moderated by Tim Griffin, will take place Saturday, September 21, at 6:30, following the final showing of *Total Recall*.

An exhibition catalog published by Poor Farm Press will be available for purchase at The Kitchen. The book features essays and interviews by Stuart Argabright, Amber Denker, Michelle Grabner, Tim Griffin, Carla Hanzal, Robert Longo, Peter Nagy, Lane Relyea, David Robbins, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Philip Vanderhyden.

## **About Gretchen Bender**

Gretchen Bender was born in Seaford, Delaware in 1951. She earned a bachelor of fine arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1973 and then moved to Washington, DC, where she was a member of a feminist-Marxist silkscreening collective for several years. She subsequently moved to New York in 1978 and had her first solo show there at Nature Morte Gallery in 1983. Throughout the 1980’s and ’90s Bender expanded her work in and outside of the gallery, staging the multi-channel video performances *Dumping Core* and *Total Recall* at The Kitchen in 1984 and 1987, respectively. Her static wall works were contemporaneously featured in seminal solo exhibitions at Metro Pictures in New York and group exhibitions including “A Forest of Signs: Art in the Crisis of Representation”, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1989) and “Damaged Goods: Desire and the Economy of the Object” (1986) at The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. A midcareer retrospective, organized by the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse in 1991, toured internationally. Bender’s work is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Pompidou Center, Paris and the Menil Collection, Houston. Bender passed away in 2004 from cancer.

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## **About The Kitchen**

The Kitchen is one of New York City's most forward-looking nonprofit spaces, showing innovative work by emerging and established artists across disciplines. Our programs range from dance, music, performance, and theater to video, film, and art, in addition to literary events, artists' talks, and lecture series. Since its inception in 1971, The Kitchen has been a powerful force in shaping the cultural landscape of this country, and has helped launch the careers of many artists who have gone on to worldwide prominence.

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