



Geoffrey Pugen, *Sahara Sahara*, 2009, still from a two-channel video in HD, 5 minutes 30 seconds.

Toronto

Geoffrey Pugen

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Geoffrey Pugen's two-channel looping video *Sahara Sahara*, 2009, traces the actions of a group of female vigilantes as they roam the streets, vandalizing cars and toppling gas stations. Their motives are unclear, but their resolve is obvious, even when a team of burly bounty hunters follows their trail into the woods resulting in a tense hand-to-hand altercation. If this sounds like a B-movie classic, that's entirely Pugen's intent; he has slyly borrowed from heist and action genres, conflating the styles here in a series of rapid cuts. He uses two wide-screen monitors to present simultaneous montages of the men and women in their respective locations, to mirror identical clips of figures leaping in or out of the frame, and to depict one action over both screens, as with the shot, accompanied by a seething whine, of a key scraping along the long side of a sedan. Pugen highlights other stylized cuts like these with amplified sound treatments—the rattle of a spray can, the thwap of a slingshot—to create a taut mood if not a clear plotline. The video climaxes as the two teams confront each other in the woods, but a smoke grenade tossed by veteran performance artist Johanna Householder—appearing here in a brilliant cameo—foils the bounty men and permits the women to escape and regroup. Thus the video begins again, leaving these warring camps fighting in perpetuity.

Though it's not entirely clear whether our band of heroes is actually such or in fact corrupt—or even whether Pugen's video serves a greater political cause—one thing is certain: Leaving it up to a group of killer dames to fight Big Oil, albeit one gas station at a time, makes for a seductive story. Pugen's playful screenwriting and deft camera skills make him one to watch.

— Jen Hutton