

The Beauty of It All

Lisa Young finds a moment of seduction in mundane repetition.

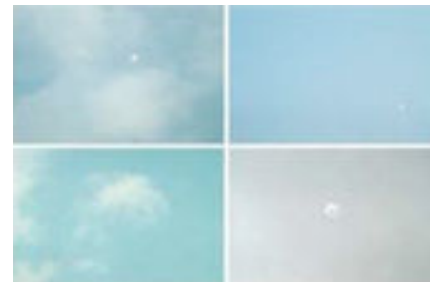
IN [REVEIWS](#) BY [JONAH LOWENFELD](#) 2008-12-10

The loudest artwork currently on view at the Cue Art Foundation is the one farthest away from the door, and it is hard not to be lured toward Lisa Young's video installation, *Lyra Angelica* (2004). Those who follow figure skating may immediately recognize the girl in the powder blue costume — as Michelle Kwan. Young, although not a skater herself, is a fan of the sport in general, and of the legendary American figure skater in particular. Projected onto the gallery's back wall are four adjacent videos in which Kwan lutztes and toe-loops her way around the ice. What might seem like a single performance being shot from alternate angles is actually a synchronized presentation of four separate competitions that took place in 1998.

According to the artist, the inspiration for *Lyra Angelica* came when she decided to cut down her VHS library. Figure skaters compete using a single program for a full year, and Young had four recordings of Kwan skating to the same music, following the same choreography, in the same costume. She had intended to “keep just the best performance and get rid of the other three,” but Young soon became more interested in the comparison rather than choosing the best.

A number of Young's works at Cue stem from this impulse to acquire and arrange, and some are more successful than others. *Flocking* (2008) consists of 418 sheep figurines lined up with military precision along a 16-foot white tabletop. In *Fortune Hunting* (2008), Young catalogues her collection of fortune cookie messages. The diagram on the gallery wall categorizing the fortunes is off-putting in its complexity. A laptop nearby provides access to a user-friendly web-based search portal of Young's database (www.fortunehunting.org), but it seems to go largely unused.

In her best works, though, Young loosens her grip and sets up what she calls “systems that allow for a play between being in control and out of control.” The results occasionally surprise even Young herself. *Drives* (2008) is a 10-minute video made up of short clips (3-5 seconds) from the world of professional golf, showing every drive in the 2006 PGA Tournament. Young expected neatly repeating shots that trace a parabolic rise and fall, but ended up with



[Lisa Young Exhibition](#)

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Lisa Young, "Lyra Angelica," 2004. Video, 5 minutes.
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a string of clips in which the balls move erratically, the sky changes color from shot to shot, and because one never sees the ball take off or land, the footage looks more like a UFO sighting. Tiny white orbs race toward the viewer, shoot past the camera, or eerily hover in place. The soundtrack, *Signal to Noise II* by German composer Robert Henke, is a multi-layered drone that sounds almost mechanical. It is very *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Young has a thing for sports as a subject for her work. *Practice* (2007) is an “anti-highlight reel” of a recreational golfer, alone on a series of different greens, practicing his putting. Young shot this piece in seven “chapters.” In each one, the golfer putts five balls into a hole. Once he does – and sometimes it takes a few shots – the screen fades to black, and the next chapter begins with the golfer surveying a new challenge. When he misses, we hear him sigh in frustration. For Young, the unwatched practice session is “a metaphor for art, writing, music – anything that anyone does in the hope that there will be a successful public outcome.”



Lisa Young, "Practice," 2007. Video, 25 minutes. © Lisa Young.

Though other works are compelling, Young’s most successful public outcome is *Lyra Angelica*. The apotheosis of the show, it involves Young’s many identities: the Collector, who compulsively saves the footage; the Archivist who exhibits the collection; the Sports Fan, who watches an athlete and imagines the untold hours of practice that makes what she sees possible; and the Permissive Artist who allows a measure of uncertainty into her practice, knowing that perfection is an unattainable ideal.

Young recognizes that as a fan she is complicit with what the sport depends upon (capital, for one, represented by the advertising on the walls of ice rinks) and what it perpetuates (a society with a “Cinderella complex” that encourages girls and women to believe that all their dreams can come true, even as it mercilessly scrutinizes the efforts of athletes like Kwan “for evidence of failure”). Yet, Young says, “I am seduced and critical at the same time.” The moment of seduction is vital. From that seduction, Young has created a collection of works that celebrate the beauty of it *all*: the botched triple flip, the missed putt, the less than ideal things in our perpetually imperfect world.