



Laura Horelli: *I have been considering making a video about a ski resort in northern Finland and showing it in a gallery in Berlin, 2007, video, approx. 15½ minutes; at Barbara Weiss.*

BERLIN

Laura Horelli at Barbara Weiss

This past spring, everyone in Berlin was hot for Knut, the first polar bear cub born in the city zoo in 30 years. At dinner parties, people discussed Knut's inarguable cuteness, exchanged links to Web sites where one could watch Knut play and debated Knut's destiny. While Knut was certainly an agreeable topic, there is something ominous and saddening, in our environmentally fragile era, about Germany's crush on a wild (if that's the right word) animal.

The issue of stylish society's fantasy relationship with our shifting,

suffering ecosystem was the subject of 31-year-old Laura Horelli's solo show, "I have been considering making a video about a ski resort . . ." Berlin-based and Finnish by birth, Horelli presented an assemblage of advertorials, computer printouts, photocopies, color photographs and a video exploring the marketing of such getaways to tourists across Europe.

Horelli's video follows the fictional investigation by her alter ego—a young female artist played by two women, neither of them Horelli—into the planning and marketing of ski resorts in northern Finland, China and Germany. Exploiting concerns about climate change, these destinations, increasingly reliant on the production of artificial snow, capitalize on genuine global fears. Horelli scrupulously researched resorts that have been completed successfully and others that have failed. In the process, she accumulated material on the historical, economic and cultural context for these "natural" getaways, while simultaneously producing a faux documentary conflating facts on her subject matter with the fictions she spins about the autobiography and impressions of her "artist" narrator.

Horelli is a master at spotlighting the strangeness of certain social and conceptual conventions. In a previous video, *Social Distances* (1999/2000), which was screened at the Prague Biennial, she addressed cultural constraints on comfort levels for personal space, charting the precise distances, down to the centimeter, between pairs of conversing speakers who share varying degrees of intimacy. It is unnerving to discover that things we assume to be natural—our comfort zones with other humans; the physical environment, including its weather patterns—are culturally constructed. Her exhibition is a striking call to stop cooing over Knut and responsibly contemplate the consequences of our unnatural relationship with nature.

—Ana Finel Honigman