

Nic Nicosia

Born in 1951 in Dallas, Nic Nicosia in his early work in the 1980s, helped to usher in a new era of flagrant photographic fiction after nearly half a century of documentary realism. He completed a BA in radio, TV, film in 1974 at the University of North Dallas and began studying photography after opening a camera store. Nicosia's openly contrived streetscapes and interiors draw on middle-class American life of the Dallas suburbs where he grew up and still lives. Incorporating techniques and perspectives of documentary photography, film noir, and theater, he simultaneously inhabits the role of voyeur and director. Working in large-scale black-and-white and color photographs, and most recently in film, Nicosia stages his shots to create oddly convincing but unsettling situations.



Domestic Drama #3, 1982

Nicosia's *Domestic Dramas* series from 1982 includes subjects from his own family and friends patiently posed in sets built by the artist. The themes of these "dramas," which include extramarital temptations, messy kids, and starter-home blues, are all addressed with mordant wit. *Domestic Drama #3* (1982) takes place on a blueprint for a new house, blown up to the size of a large carpet and spread out on the floor like a giant game board; a husband and wife argue furiously in the middle of it as if they were interactive tokens in the game of life. The artist has said of this series, "the *Domestic Dramas* were about being as openly fabricated as they could possibly be, as far as possible from seventies documentary photos. But I never made a conscious decision on the subject matter. I just used my life."

Continuing his examination of middle-class American life, Nicosia produced the first three of four films on view in this exhibition. *Middletown* (1997) was shot on the artist's own street, Middletown Road. In a single fifteen-minute take, to the accompaniment of original music, the camera tracks several times around the neighborhood, watching as the banality of daily life in Middletown unfolds: a stranded minivan belches smoke; a girl pulling a wagon throws a tantrum; a swimsuited woman tends her lawn. As the allegory is completed, one can recognize the repetitious journey through the insecurities and fears that make up everyday life. In his next film, *Moving Picture* (1998), Nicosia decided to take the camera inside. He chose a friend's house as the set, and shot the film by wielding a heavy camera attached to a makeshift stabilizer made out of a cut-up tripod and bungee cords wrapped around his neck. *Middletown Morning* (1999), in which Nicosia himself plays the male lead, is about an artist dealing with life's mundane routines and the anxieties of modern technology, including intrusive alarm clocks, incessantly ringing cell phones, and broken garage door openers.

Nicosia's most recent film, *Cerchi e Quadrati* (2000), was inspired by the theatrical nature of his earlier photographic series *Acts 1-9*. Written and designed like a play but produced like a film, *Cerchi e Quadrati* is also inspired by Surrealism, especially paintings by Magritte and Dali that Nicosia has admired on frequent visits to the Menil Collection in Houston and while traveling in Belgium. Nicosia later used the film set as a backdrop for a fashion shoot for Neiman Marcus.

Nicosia has exhibited extensively since the early 1980s. His work was exhibited in the 2000 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and is represented in public and private collections such as The Museum of Modern Art and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Museum of Fine Art, Houston; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, as well as many others.

¹ Michael Ennis, "Time of Nic," Texas Monthly 11, November 1999.

² Ibid.