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Gretchen Bender, *Total Recall*, 1987, Eleven channel video installation on 24 monitors and 3 projection screens, 18.2 minutes, with sound track by Stuart Axenbriam. Installation view at *Gretchen Bender: So Much Deathless* at Red Bull Arts, New York, 2014. Photo by James Brewer. © The Gretchen Bender Estate.

PERFORMA REPORTS

Gretchen Bender

Red Bull Arts New York

March 6–July 28, 2019

Gretchen Bender: So Much Deathless is at times frenetic and deafening, always kinetic, and overall an exhibition that does justice to Bender's uncompromising creative energies. The show is the first retrospective of this "Pictures Generation" artist, bridging rarities with more commercial productions from the opening sequence to *America's Most Wanted*, to *Total Recall* (1987), a large-scale installation that employs 24 television monitors and three projection screens.

Dissatisfied with limitations of the still image and driven by an urge to respond to geopolitical problems that roiled the United States in the 1970s and '80s, Bender's attention turned to the broadcast image, which seemed uncannily capable of mediating incendiary politics and illusive entertainment with equal ease. She began searching for, as one exhibition wall text puts it, an "interference pattern in the circuitry of culture." In *TV Text and Image (Metro Pictures Version)* (1986–97), vinyl texts pasted over monitors displaying broadcast content simulate a filtering mechanism, and spelled out key markers of social context such as "public memory" and "class, race, gender." More subtly, *Flash Art* (1987) shows a single monitor playing a montage of women musicians (I identified Janet Jackson, Annie Lennox, and Dolly Parton) intercut with a series of female nudes by David Salle. Countering the male gaze, it explores possibilities for feminist self-representation.

Today, the moving image dominates art biennials, and most modern and contemporary art museums. In 1984, Bender remarked that her efforts were aimed at confronting "the violence of living in contemporary society with a clear eye." Her words and work would prove more prescient than she could have known.

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