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# Merging Artists

By Elizabeth Zimmer

**"Video, which we see every day, is something I refuse to hate. It's so much a part of our culture. I'm interested in breaking down the way we are trained to see."**

Cathy Weis is telling me about *A String of Lies*, her evening of video and performance opening April 27 at P.S. 122. In it, Ishmael Houston-Jones performs a duet with himself, using live and prerecorded video. Weis fuses her own body with that of dancer Jennifer Miller—"her lower body, and my upper body, in a video mix. You'll see me, Jennifer, and a big screen which is the compilation of the

More than technological wizardry is at stake here. Weis, 45, grew up dancing ballet in Lexington, Kentucky, before heading to Bennington, where she met up with contemporary performance artists and never looked back. Her first video captured her grandmother at 95; "it was," she says, "a way to hold on to her." She's done video editing and documentation, studied with photographer Robert Frank, and won prizes for her work in stained glass. "But my heart wasn't really in it," she observes. "None of that gives me the thrill

that performing does, the feeling of being alive that no other art form has. I grew up with that, and I like it, the social thing of actually collaborating, what happens when strong, talented individuals work together."

But several years ago she began to find moving difficult and quit performing; in 1990 she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. "After I climbed out of my black hole, I kind of became the woman warrior. The Achilles Track Club hooks disabled people up with marathon runners, who encourage you to move more. Their spirit was strong, so exhilarating."

Her motion may be restricted, but she's found technological ways to keep stage pictures moving. Video monitors roll around in rubber tires, dangle from bungee cords, are pushed on carts or bicycles. "A head floats up into the rafters and goes swinging down on a bungee cord, like a trapeze artist; the TV swivels so it can keep facing front." Spectators at her concert can merge their own images with that of Newt Gingrich. "If you had a kid with Newt, this is what it would look like. Horror upon horror." The dance with Miller, she says, "is not a heavy number about



**Light reign: Cathy Weis**

disability; it's a clown dance"

Weis herself is a powerful pixie, determined to keep going, to draw new metaphors from the technology that has become so intimate and familiar. "There's an element of physical danger to this work that you normally don't feel with video. We wrestle with cameras, throw monitors around. And we put things together in unexpected ways." She also takes things apart. "There's a monitor on a bicycle that breaks apart into a unicycle. In the piece, Jennifer and I have a relationship, and she finishes by blowing up my head." ■