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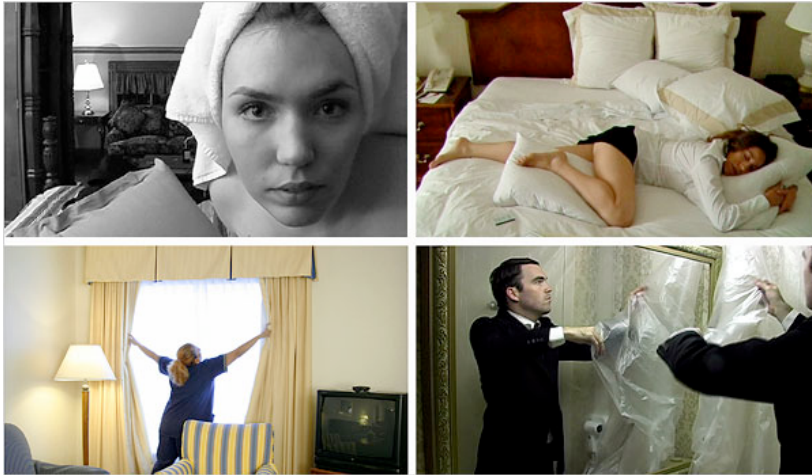
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ART

## Hotel Rooms Become Overnight Stars



Clockwise from top left: Pawel Wojtasik and Terry Berkowitz; Three Chimneys; Jorge Colombo; Tyler Coburn; Karina Aguilera Skvirsky

Stills from 7 of the 45 videos in Chris Doyle's trio of installations, "50,000 Beds," shot in 30 hotel rooms.

By LINDA YABLONSKY  
Published: July 8, 2007

AS a staging area, a hotel room is hard to beat. With an anonymity so universal it yields a strange familiarity, its seductive blend of utility and fantasy can meet almost any need. The [F.B.I.](#) has used hotel rooms for sting operations. Couples rent them for trysts as they're falling in love, for respite when they split apart. Travelers sleep in them. Business people meet in them. And when [Greta Garbo](#) begged to be alone, she was standing in a big one.

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John Pilson

Of course Garbo was performing in front of a camera, but so was the young man who came to Oliver Herring's hotel room in Connecticut a few months ago and started bouncing off the walls, tying himself in bedclothes, breaking lamps and generally making a mess in eerie silence while Mr. Herring, a total stranger, recorded it all on video.

By turns nerve-racking, touching and playful, that scene unfolds in "50,000 Beds," a collaborative video project involving 45 artists, 30 Connecticut hotels and 3 of the state's art institutions: the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Real Art Ways in Hartford and Artspace in New Haven. Conceived and designed by Chris Doyle, a Brooklyn artist whose own videos give insensate objects like lawn chairs and hot dogs what appear to be active sex lives, the project represents a new wrinkle in cultural tourism.

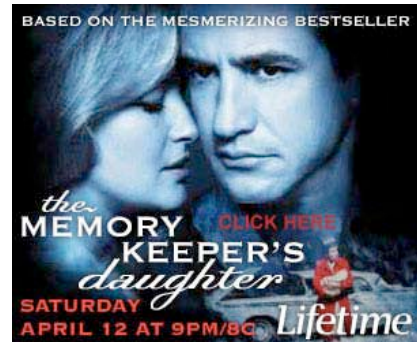
"I was making hotel-bed videos already," said Mr. Doyle, 47, explaining how he came to win the commission for an exhibition to attract new viewers to the three art sites this summer. (His "Sheets," a 2004 stop-action animation in which hotel linens toss and turn like restless sleepers, is

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permanently installed in the lobby of the Hotel on Rivington in Manhattan.) "I thought about extending my experience using hotels as studios, or as subject, to other artists, just to see what they would do."

They did a lot, and the unpredictable results go on view this month in three exhibitions opening on consecutive nights at Artspace, Real Art Ways and the Aldrich. "Just making the gears mesh between the three institutions has been tricky," said Richard Klein, exhibitions director at the Aldrich, "but Chris has been brilliant at it."

Underwritten partly by a \$90,000 grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, "50,000 Beds" — the approximate number available to travelers stopping at hotels across the state — sent each artist to a participating hotel, motel or inn to make a short video during a single night's stay.

"I'm a flight attendant who always stays in hotels, so I thought the idea was fabulous," said Jacqueline Tarry, who collaborated with her husband, Bradley McCallum, on a video portrait of a middle-aged man who identifies himself as a sexual dominant and nearly succeeds in staring down the camera. (The hotels are not identified so that the content will not reflect on them.)

Mr. Doyle, who has a degree in architecture from Harvard and a history of large-scale public art projects, has divided the three exhibitions into 15 videos apiece and created a display structure for each. Employing a series of ramps, translucent scrims, projection screens, flat-screen monitors and the occasional bed, the structures allow viewers to move through the installations at their own pace, negotiating a path from the nightmarish to the comic, from the sexy and the fetishistic to the just plain weird.

"I didn't know what I would get, and I didn't doctor the results," Mr. Doyle said of the videos, which run from 90 seconds to 23 minutes. They vary in quality and have remarkably little in common despite being shot under such similar conditions.

Consider Megan Michalak and Sarah Sharp's macabre homage to a short story by Flannery O'Connor, the Southern gothic writer who once lived on a Connecticut farm: Their video involves a woman with a prosthetic leg and the Bible salesman who loves it. An adaptation of another sort is Melissa Friedling's contribution, which uses the dialogue and ambience of the poker game that opens [Robert Altman's](#) film "McCabe & Mrs. Miller" but substitutes the hedge fund managers of Greenwich for the movie's mumbling prospectors.

"There's this whole speech that the lawyer gives about free enterprise in the film, and then, inevitably, McCabe dies," said Ms. Friedling, who carefully dressed her actors in Turnbull & Asser suits. "And these hedge fund guys are taking over small businesses and putting their money in the art world, so we have as ambiguous a relationship to them as Altman has to free enterprise." A radio tuned to a Greenwich station is the only clue to the setting, an otherwise unremarkable business hotel.

No one at the hotel blinked twice at her during the shoot, she said, even though "I had all these men asking for my room number."

Some artists chose to concentrate on the physical elements of their rooms. In "Bob Floss," David Ellis removes a generic landscape from the wall and proceeds to repaint it a dozen different ways before returning it to the wall in its "new" condition. Tyler Coburn covers everything in his room in plastic dropcloths while a horror film starring [Paris Hilton](#) plays on the television. Marina Zurkow documents details like the door jamb, the telephone keypad and the bathroom faucet, adding animations of both human and animal figures cavorting to the "Blue Danube" waltz.

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