

*Eric Hattan -- 'Liquid Concrete' By ROBERTA SMITH Swiss Institute 495  
Broadway, at Broome Street SoHo Through Feb. 15*

Eric Hattan's New York debut escapes with its life, squeaking past the threat of an increasingly generic format: a tangle of video monitors flickering with brief scenes of everyday life. But Mr. Hattan, who is Swiss, seems to specialize in such scrapes. He has worked with video for nearly two decades, evolving a distinct combination of banal subject matter and agile, off-kilter camerawork. His brief loops, one to a monitor, capture the daily choreography of people and things (mostly things), played out in fleeting instances of random beauty, odd coincidence and benign violence that occur at the periphery of vision or consciousness. His attention is caught by a small dog scurrying behind its owner, a plastic-foam coffee cup spiraling dizzily down the street, a gauzy curtain billowing at an open window. There are scenes that might or might not register when staring distractedly out an apartment window (a red car parallel parking, a drainpipe gushing water) or gazing through the windshield of a speeding car (black trees against a full moon -- an exceptionally beautiful sequence). There are also mysteries, like the lighted gap beneath a door that elicits a voyeuristic thrill until you realize it belongs to a bus. Casual yet oddly concentrated, Mr. Hattan's little vignettes evoke the tradition of street photography and amateur snapshots, as well as Situationist Art's fabled "drift" through the urban environment. As complements, the Swiss Institute is also showing Zoe Leonard's photographs of a New York City tree in four states of disarray and Michel François's "Actions," a CD-ROM of idiosyncratic miniperformances that stand just beyond the daily flow that transfixes Mr. Hattan.

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