

Cleveland

Xavier Cha

MOCA CLEVELAND

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In Xavier Cha's film *abduct*, 2015, the footage follows, frames, and cuts together close-ups of actors performing an unsentimental, discordant series of engrossing gestures and facial expressions. Seven slick-muscled virtuosos in stylish white underwear and undershirts appear interchangeably one at a time in front of the kind of plastic curtain used in places such as slaughterhouses to modulate temperature or block noxious sprays. Heavy static and intermittent droning vibrations fill the room. The actors perform apparently purposeless but ultimately unnerving wide-eyed stares. They're like aliens practicing facial calisthenics. They spurt exhalations, body wriggles, and unsatisfying sighs. One delivers a silent insult; another receives a phantom slap then curls her tongue. Eyebrows beckon or leer. Confrontation melts into surprise come-ons. A raptor-like chomp is followed by brief and unpredictable shifts between acute expressions of wonder, anger, nausea, horror, and quick-feigned bliss. Watching *abduct* is like watching the faces of actors during all of the climaxes from Hitchcock's filmography back to back and without the aid of pacing, plot, dialogue, character, or romance. It's terrifying.



Xavier Cha, *abduct* (installation view), 2015, video, color, sound, 12 minutes 13 seconds.

Perhaps because of its effect—the performers are intense but lack personality or purpose—*abduct*, when first viewed, might seem to spur its audience to sermonize about the loss of humanity in the digital age. Yet the productive shock delivered by Cha's film is, in large part, due to its ability to resist moralizing. Instead, the point of view of the film might be summed up like this: The aliens are here. They might destroy us and our way of life. So what?

— *Marcus Civin*