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Review: Dashiell Manley takes on 'The Great Train Robbery'

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An installation of Dashiell Manley's "The Great Train Robbery..." (Lee Thompson)

When Edwin S. Porter made the film “The Great Train Robbery” in 1903, he counted on the audience to connect scenes that were discontinuous in time and space. Dashiell Manley asks us to do much the same, creating three related installations at three different locations: LAXART, Redling Fine Art and a storage locker a few blocks away (accessible via Redling).

The works, which are all different versions of each other, were inspired by Porter’s innovative film that defined not only the western genre but cinematic storytelling as we know it.

Manley dissected the film’s third scene three times, translating its action into turn-of-the-century shorthand characters and painting them onto large canvases.

He painstakingly created a two-channel video, frame by frame, in which he interacts with the canvases and restages some of the film's action. He then collected the detritus from the making of the video and arranged it on the back of the canvases, sealing the results under Plexiglas. These large, two-sided objects lean against steel frames designed to look like wall studs. Together, they create a loose maze-like structure that is slightly different, but familiar, at each location.

The piece is a translation of the process of shooting a scene multiple times, as well as a reflection on that translation: an endless hall of mirrors.

Process, process, process, but to what end? The work is challenging, but I wonder if the payoff — that everything is constructed, in progress, contingent — is worth the effort.

Redling Fine Art, 6757 Santa Monica Blvd., (323) 230-7415, through June 29. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.redlingfineart.com

LAXART, 2640 S. La Cienega Blvd., (310) 559-0166, through June 22. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.laxart.org