



The distinctive point of view of Ilene Segalove's TV tapes can be seen tonight at 8 in the Gallery Theater in Barnsdall Park.

Too much TV never harmed Ilene Segalove

By Hunter Drohojowska

On the television screen, there flickers a strange scene, sort of a meld of MTV and "Saturday Night Live." Actress Molly Cleator is going absolutely bonkers with delight over the fact that everything in her hotel suite is wrapped in sanitized tissue. Even the TV. When it's turned on, the station identification reads: "Sanitized for your viewing pleasure."

This is the video art of Ilene Segalove, a dark, attractive young woman who once had license plates reading TV IS OK. Sitting at a table in her sun-filtered Santa Monica bungalow, she admitted, "For a long time, I didn't know I was particularly funny . . . then I started to listen to what I was saying, and realized *something* was going on. Life amuses me, the result of seeing the profound in the banal every minute."

The-profound-in-the-banal. Even her home is decorated with the P-in-the-B: souvenirs and *tschatsckas* of the '50s, old rattan furniture upholstered in serape stripes, a sleeping Mexican condiment caddy and toy cars lined up on the coffee table. A sensitivity toward the profound-in-the-banal is the basis for Segalove's art, as well — short, videotaped true stories of absurd human behavior in a culture of bizarre progress.

The field of video art is replete with epic tapes of

The profound slips on the banal

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artists hitting their heads against walls, sticking toothpicks between their teeth or panning the effects of light on a wheat field over the course of an entire day, but Segalove offers an antidote with her wry, acerbic, witty chronicles of life with Mom and Dad. During one of "The Mom Tapes," her earliest black-and-white vignettes, the camera is held on a pair of unoccupied, overstuffed chairs. The voice of a teen-age girl whines, "Mom, I'm bored," then proceeds to reject each of her mother's suggestions by throwing the appropriate object across the room: books, food, sports equipment, the telephone and so forth. Segalove, 34, calls her work TV, not video, and her modest stories borrow more broadly from the conventions of journalism and film than art. "Theoretically, I

support a lot of what is done in video but I don't want to sit through it," she admitted. Her latest effort, "Anatomy in Motion and Other TV Stories," is her first commission during 10 years of work. The Contemporary Artists Television (CAT) Fund in Boston, which is a collaboration between the Institute of Contemporary Art and WGBH's New Television Workshop, not only funded her seven short pieces, a total of 15 minutes, but will provide the valuable, hard-to-get distribution. Along with commissioned works by Chip Lord and Mickey McGowan, Joan Jonas, Bill Seaman and Tony Oursler, the Segalove tapes can be seen tonight at 8 at the Gallery Theater, 4800 Hollywood Blvd., in Barnsdall Park.

"I've been working in a black hole for years," she said. "This made me feel I had an identity for the first time." More gratifying still

is knowing this work will go on to the Berlin Film Festival and be shown throughout Europe.

Segalove's frustration with the limited distribution and limited access to a mainstream audience is becoming widespread among video artists. Twenty years ago, if video was shown in a museum, it was a moment for celebration. But many artists are rethinking such a strategy. "It's enough for paintings and sculptures," explained Segalove, "but not for video, which can and should have an audience of millions. In a museum, or gallery, there are a lot of rules, like being quiet. It's uncomfortable and not the right place to watch TV. That's the issue for me now. I want to tell stories with big budgets that reach a lot of people. I like slipping into people's homes when they least suspect it."

Segalove's works have been shown occasionally on PBS and on

the cable program "Night Flight," but not with any regularity. "What I've developed over 10 years is a point of view, like Charles Kuralt or Andy Rooney. What I'd like to do is be 'Ilene Segalove' and do visual assignments that automatically have a place to be shown."

Segalove became a video artist for the most obvious reason: a total love affair with TV. One of her latest tapes is called "TV Never Hurt Me." "It's fun to stand up in front of a group and say I'm the product of millions of hours of TV and I'm OK. I'm sentimental about it."

One of Segalove's early tapes explains her attraction to TV. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, her father built a fall-out shelter. At the dinner table, as a little girl, Segalove confessed her fear of a future war but her comments were ignored by her father. But when John Kennedy was shot, and the funeral was on TV, her father cried. "I think I decided to go into TV to get his attention."

Although Segalove's tapes are somewhat traditional compared to

much video art, they still baffle professionals in the industry. At UC Santa Barbara, she studied fine art, not film or video. She went on to get her master's in communication arts, rather than fine arts, at Loyola University, but knew she didn't exactly fit in. "I went to school by day, and made art by night. My teacher was the director of 'General Hospital.' I showed him the 'Mom Tapes' and he said I should get someone to play my mother and get someone else to do her voice. My work is too personal, too narrative. All the things that make it art make it difficult for people (in the industry) to show it."

For example, Segalove made a very funny tape called "What Is Business?", a "pseudo-documentary" wherein the artist interviewed sundry businessmen about their jobs and how they related to the world. "I sent it around to a lot of institutions and libraries thinking it might be good for them. They all wrote back saying they liked the piece, that it was very tongue-in-cheek, but it raised too many

questions. And education is not about raising questions. They were looking for an (instructive) tape a teacher could put on so she wouldn't have to teach finance.

"I like the look of TV," she asserted. "It's like a cartoon. I think I make living cartoons. The two-dimensional quality that is considered a negative is something I really like."

Then Segalove confesses a startling fact, that the TV she loves hasn't been made since the 1960s, the Golden Era. "I guess I stopped watching TV during the Vietnam War. Now I don't watch 'Hill Street Blues' or anything like that. Just the religious programs like Gene Scott."

Segalove loves TV from the days when it offered the profound in the banal. She is nostalgic about it. "It revolves around a childhood kind of notion of what TV was. When I was young I would rather stay home on a Saturday night and watch TV than go out to parties. I preferred TV. Now I prefer making it. It's still magical."