Above: Emily Wardill, Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck, 2007. 16 mm color film, 12 minutes. Photo courtesy of the artist, Altman Siegel, San Francisco, STANDARD (OSLO), Oslo, and Jonathan Viner/Fortescue Avenue London.
Emily Wardill:
**Sick Serena and Dregs and Wrecks and Wrecks**

Emily Wardill’s 2007 film, *Sick Serena and Dregs and Wrecks and Wrecks* suggests how stained glass windows from the Middle Ages—through the years between 400 and 1500—presented lessons to the illiterate masses on morality and virtue and how visual forms of mass media function similarly today. The work features such characteristic aspects of the artist’s practice as elaborately constructed theatrical sets and deliberately esoteric acting methods used to evoke the complex nature of contemporary social interaction and interpersonal communication. Wardill’s use of these techniques exaggerates the artificiality of her films as a way to focus attention both on the details of her stagecraft and the ideas and rhetoric presented in the text of her films' dialogue and voice-overs. Her films’ dialogue and voice-overs suggest an overall sense of dysfunction. The techniques utilized to create and present the film strongly affect our understanding of its examination of the morbid implications of the original while shifting our expectations of the film’s possible narrative and content to conjure a scenario involving an invalid (Sick Serena), social undesirables (dregs), and examples of literal material and/or figurative human destruction (wrecks and wrecks). While actual events in the film do not correspond directly to the title, the often unsettling actions of the characters or the frighteningly disturbing content of their dialogue do suggest an overall sense of dysfunction. Wardill juxtaposes images and sounds associated with sacred religious places with scenes that feature more profane and awkwardly humorous examples or descriptions of human behavior to emphasize the perpetual discrepancy between our moral and spiritual aspirations and our frailties, weaknesses, and ultimate fallibility.

The film’s title, *Sick Serena and Dregs and Wrecks and Wrecks*, was inspired by Wardill having seen the phrase “sex and drugs and rock and roll” miswritten as “sex and drugs and rock and rock” in graffiti on a wall in Cuba. The original phrase has become commonplace in contemporary language and is typically used to describe the cultivation of a rebellious, liberated, and even dangerous life at odds with conventional moral standards. Wardill’s adaption of the miswritten version of the phrase retains the moral implications of the original while shifting our expectations of the film. The film’s title, *Dregs and Wrecks and Wrecks and Wrecks*, runs contrary to the way that mainstream narrative films and television drama create a more imaginary and synthetic experience to encourage the passive consumption of visual information. *Sick Serena Dregs and Wrecks and Wrecks* ultimately suggests how we have been indoctrinated to understand the world through images and serves as a reminder of the power that images possess to convey and control meaning and the urgent need to question and even resist that authority.