

Arts

Seduced by the clenched fist of the mass media

LOVE just happens. You know, like the movies?" It is sympathetic advice from a mother to her bored and lonely daughter who wants more out of life.

'Love Stories' are videos by Robert Randall and Frank Bendinelli, which are filled with similar lines. Boy meets girl at a disco, boy meets girl at a gay health club, girl meets girl, and takes her home for a nightcap. Whatever the particular hetero or homosexual affair, the clichés and the quotes roll out. It is an endless regurgitation of popular romances, soapies, comics and teenage and "adult" magazines.

These videos are being played at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. 'Brief Encounter', 'Love Fever', 'Blind Date' and 'Yours Forever' are some of the titles indicative of the 'True Love — Real Life' situations which unfold. And there are some pretty sordid and sizzling affairs.

But how is our experience of the "Randelli Classics" any different from watching soapies on TV? What these deceptively simple, boppy and colorful videos do is expose with a barely perceptible note of irony the "language" of

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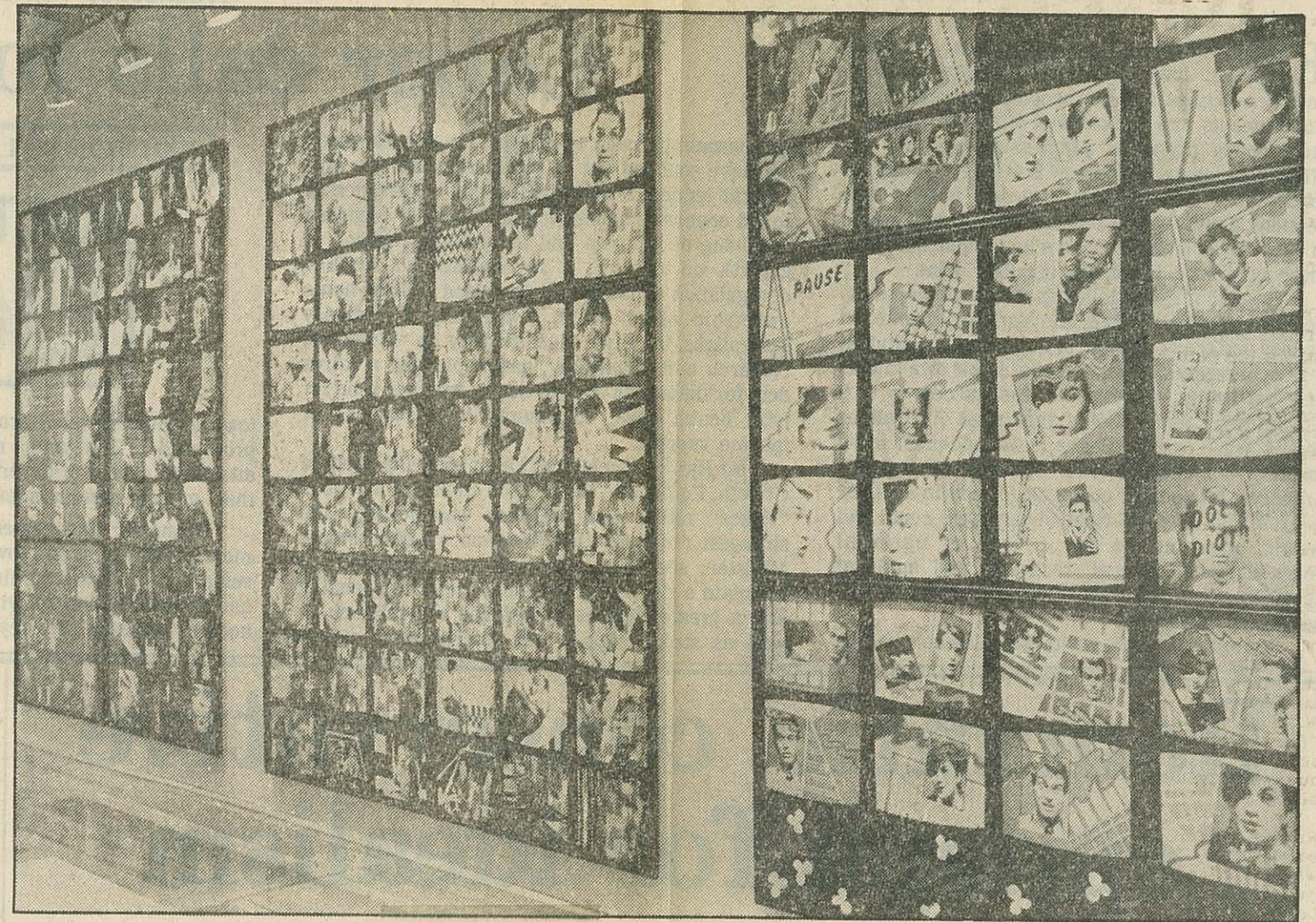
love, sex, and romance. They explore the ways in which these "real life" experiences are portrayed through the image and word of the media. The difficulty is in telling where the reality ends and the romance begins.

Speech is uttered like lines well rehearsed and learned by heart. Body gestures and movements are stilted and stylised. A range of video techniques, pulsating color, graphics and framing devices are borrowed from comic strips and cartoons. Along with a mindless rhythmic musical beat, they construct a deadpan version of reality.

Randall and Bendinelli walk a thin line between criticising and celebrating popular culture. They satirise the language of the romance, but at the same time are absorbed by it, sold out to its ideals, and seduced by the stories that their videos tell. And so, as the viewers, are we.

In this 'Love Stories' seems expressive of an attitude particularly pertinent to the art of the eighties. It acknowledges the clenched fist and stultifying hold which the language of the mass media has on our lives and emotions. In short, it says that if you can't beat them, join them and enjoy it while you can. (The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Dallas Brooks Drive.)

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The wall of frames from the Robert Randall and Frank Bendinelli exhibition of videos.



The poster for Robert Randall's and Frank Bendinelli's exhibition 'Love Stories'.