

Bill Arning in catalogue *Influence, Anxiety & Gratitude*  
MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Ma., 2003

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Michael Blum's *Three Philosophers* is a video expansion and modernization of particularly mysterious picture of the same name by Giorgione (1477-1510), now in the collection of the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna. Giorgione's painting, as do many of his masterpieces, resists easy interpretation. Instead it is more likely to induce in the viewer a self-reflexive reverie. Blum updates the three sages as urban prophets wearing animal masks, standing in subway stations and shopping areas, and offering quixotic quotes from Bertrand Russell, Marcel Proust, and Bertolt Brecht. The three monitors are distributed throughout the exhibition. Encounter just one animal-headed creature asking us to consider a philosophical query, might be bemusing but three becomes unsettling. Video is often held to be a less capable medium for inducing reflective states because of its literalness. Blum exaggerates that literalness by setting his players in heavily trafficked urban situations shot in real, extended time with overwhelming extraneous quotidian detail. Yet the spatialization and imagery of his work has a good shot at challenging Giorgione's work effectively on its mystery quotient.