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Marie José Burki
Lehmann Maupin Gallery
540 West 26nd Street, Chelsea
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BY HOLLAND COTTER

With so much small-scale cleverness floating around Chelsea at present, it's refreshing to come across Marie José Burki's straightforward videos, which say what they mean to say pretty directly, without preciousness or pretension.

One, titled "Chicken," records a chef preparing a dead bird for cooking. The stainless steel kitchen looks as cool and clean as a laboratory. Slam goes the cleaver and off comes a limb; the stomach is split, the skin pulled off. How could you eat a meal produced by such carnage? The camera just stares and stares.

A three-channel video offers continuous, ground-level panning shots of crowds of young people lounging around the grass in a sunny park. They picnic, listen to music, flirt, snooze, leave their trash. Simultaneously, a small screen on another wall plays an image of someone flipping through a scrapbook of news clips about the destruction of the World Trade Center, the war in Iraq, violence across the world.

Are the two films connected? Are the people in the park participants in a political demonstration, maybe listening to speeches? If not, shouldn't they be? The fact that images in the two films are not connected is precisely the point. It's as if they were produced on different planets. The big, real world flashes by on one; manicured people sun themselves on a manicured lawn on the other. For some viewers the political suggestions of Ms. Burki's work, however oblique, are too obvious, a bad thing. For others they are squarely on target, and the mystery is that she still needs to be making them at all.