

## **Double Fantasy**

### **Superstar: The Pat Loud Story**

By Melissa Anderson  
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Video artist Cecilia Dougherty has a gift for revising popular culture, often imagining its icons as lesbian celebrities. *Grapefruit* (1989) offers a sapphic spin on John and Yoko; a doubled Joe Orton becomes a dyke couple in *Joe-Joe* (1993). *Gone*, her remarkable new work (screening as the closing-night showcase of the New York Underground Film Festival on March 11 at 8:30 and 9:30 at Anthology Film Archives), is perhaps her most ambitious project. A video using double-screen projection, *Gone* was inspired by the second episode of *An American Family*, the landmark 12-hour cinema verité series documenting the Loud family, broadcast on public television in 1973. Episode two features matriarch Pat's arrival in New York City during Memorial Day weekend in 1971 to visit her 19-year-old son, Lance, who lives in the Chelsea Hotel and wants to work for an "underground magazine." The segment serendipitously captures both the world of Warhol superstars—Pat and Lance bump into Holly Woodlawn in the hallway of the Chelsea; Lance and his male "companion" Soren take Pat to see the play *Vain Victory*, featuring Jackie Curtis and Candy Darling, at La MaMa—and the excruciating communication breakdown between mother and son. Preening, narcissistic Lance and shellacked Pat go through the motions of intimacy but find it impossible to relax around one another.

Dougherty, who saw the series when it was first broadcast, was fascinated: "I couldn't believe I was seeing how these people were with each other, for real, on television." She began work on *Gone* four years ago, transcribing the episode and imagining people she knew "saying the dialogue, without setting up the family dynamic." Set in present-day New York, *Gone* boasts a cast of contemporary underground superstars—writer Laurie Weeks as Lance, stylist Frances Sorensen as Soren, painter Amy Sillman as Pat—and features Le Tigre's "My My Metrocard" on its soundtrack. Yet *Gone* is not merely a re-creation of *An American Family*; more poignantly, it's about leaving home to live in New York with the hopes (and attendant frustrations) of making artistic contributions in an increasingly inhospitable environment. "What are your cultural choices today?" wonders Dougherty, who chose the two-channel video format because when she first started to edit *Gone* two summers ago, "it started looking like an indie movie, and I was really appalled. I saw my tape dragging into typical narrative logic with funky characters, and I really didn't want to do that. I started imagining there was something simultaneous so that the dialogue actually had the context of a lot of things happening." In *Gone* the disconnect between Pat and Lance is just as compelling as New York's disconnect with its artists—where the NASDAQ screens of the new Times Square are eclipsing the Chelsea Hotel's iconic stature.