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Daily Pic: Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt and the Limits of Vision

This still gives a pretty good idea of what's at stake in "Swamp," a 1971 film by Nancy Holt and her husband Robert Smithson, now on view in the exhibition called "Robert Smithson's New



Jersey" at the Montclair Art Museum. (Click on the still for a YouTube clip from the film.) The show as a whole does a lovely job of making clear how rooted Smithson's art was in the state where he grew up. But this particular six-minute film, although indeed shot in Jersey, seems less about that and more about the limits of the camera's-eye view that we've come to take for granted. Holt and Smithson are wandering through some very high reeds: She limits her view to what can

be seen through the movie camera's viewfinder, and seems to be stumbling and lost; we hear him, on the soundtrack, making up for her view's limitation (and also making it very evident) by giving her instructions on where to walk and when to turn to get through the fen, almost as though she were blindfolded. Most of the time, when we see an image in a photo or film, it feels as though it gives full and easy access to the world it excerpts from. "Swamp" makes clear how limited its vision really is.

The piece is also a lovely window into – and metaphor for – spousal power relations, and their swampy-ness.