



GALLERIES

The Appearance of Content: Collaborations at the Swiss Institute and Ludlow 38

By Will Heinrich | 12/08/10 3:37am



Shadow Fux, at the Swiss Institute in Soho, is a collaboration between painter Rita Ackermann and filmmaker Harmony Korine, but it's not about fusion: It's about cutting.

It begins with deleted scenes from Mr. Korine's 2009 documentary-style, VHS movie *Trash Humpers*, which is about more or less what it sounds like. Two men in old-man masks perform a series of ritual masturbations: They waggle blue plastic light sabers, held at the crotch; they masturbate dildos, held at the crotch; a third man tells a

story while wielding a fishing pole, held at the crotch. A fat little boy in a suit yells abuse at someone off camera; a woman in another geriatric mask stands in the woods singing the 1928 Carter Family hit, "Single Girl, Married Girl." It's true that the old men get to hump identical purple stuffed animals, but the humping seems, in this context, a mistake, because the piece is concerned not with development or culmination but with repetition, like the clicking of a broken reel of film.

The strongest paintings are those with the least film showing through, and the strongest images from the movie are the ones, projected on the back wall, that are actually moving.

Most of the rest of the images in the gallery were produced by painting over blown-up stills from the movie; one, *bmhex*, creates a vertical hermaphrodite by attaching a piece cut out of one blow-up to the top of another. The figure's dexter half is standing on a mattress, outside; the sinister one is on a bike, ready to ride away. Another, *Trouble Is Comin*, a full-length portrait with mask and russet wig, has a piece of painted canvas fixed over the bottom, so that the figure's hand is continued by long streaks of dripping gray paint. What's most striking is the disjunction.

Ms. Ackermann's colors are those of a nearby but heightened and somewhat simplified world, like a 19th-

century circus caravan or a grade-school art class writ large. Her forms are not entirely figurative, but also not entirely not—the clouds and bodies and hands are all on the point of resolving into something else.

The show is most successful when it's least formally collaborative. The basic idea of probing the dreamy line between sense and nonsense, or between content and the appearance of content, is common to all of it, but the strongest paintings are those—for example, *secret klubs*, Beckmann does Gauguin—with the least film showing through, and the strongest images from the movie are the ones, projected on the back wall, that are actually moving.

ACROSS THE STREET from P.S. 42 on the Lower East Side, at Ludlow 38, a narrow gallery with a gray floor that steps up when you come in and then down again, like a tiny amphitheater, as you go into the back room, three longtime friends and collaborators, Simone Forti, Fred Dewey and Jeremiah Day, have been thinking out loud.

To the left, as you enter, are pages from writer, editor and publisher Fred Dewey's notebooks, on which he's used newspaper clippings, photographs and his own frantic circles to try to make the abstract and historical concrete. Mr. Day's *The Jefferson Project*, to the right, documents the closing for reconstruction, in 2004, of major monuments in Washington, D.C., with handwritten text on photographs. The largest shows four panels, like a windowpane, with two Jefferson monuments and two Washington, framed by leaves, viewed from across the Potomac. (If you count the photograph itself, that's three degrees of remove.) The accompanying text begins, "In the end, Jefferson knew that the constitution could not preserve the revolution. ... [F]or each 100 people there should be a Council of 10 people—town hall democracy, the root of the revolution, must be preserved." At the same time, on a screen hanging from the ceiling, in Ms. Forti's *News Animation Improvisation*, the artist and dancer, alone on a wooden floor with a pile of newspapers, wrestles with the news of the day; in the back room, her *Anatomy Maps* place handsome, stolid line drawings of bones and organs over equally stolid and handsome black-and-white maps. The skull is in China, the tailbone in the Horn of Africa and the female organs of generation come springing from the Nile Delta. The heart and lungs might have started in the States, but now they're in Mexico, and upside down.

The question is, whose body is this? Are we simply projecting our human concerns onto an inhuman world, trying to reduce the chaos of world events to an order on the scale of our own bodies? No—the image of the body underlies every map we make, however impersonal or abstract. And is this thinking out loud aimed at some goal or transformation? No—the thinking itself is the thing.

editorial@observer.com

FILED UNDER: GALLERIES, LUDLOW 38, SWISS INSTITUTE