



ART MAGAZINE

ISM•OLOGY

BETA ISSUE



RE • VIEW



Exhibition view / La Loge / 2014

The exhibition at La Loge features a set of videos shot by Californian Shana Moulton. The colours scale ranging from green apple to pastel pink and the low-tech images superposition can remind the viewer of Ryan Trecartin's work. However, the heroine Cynthia, Shana Moulton's performative alter-ego, hypochondriac with a hair-do à la Dorothy Hamill, is way less manic. Her state of mind between "anxiously bored and ecstatic", as the artist herself describes it, is closer to a sweet, urban and sentimental character in the style of Miranda July.

The artist as the subject interacts with objects. Very few human beings exist except for herself. The domestic environments that she stages are crowded with decorative items, cosmetics, dressing gowns, magical ceramics, that often perform as an extension of her body. The HD screen is an interface where everything is absurd and possible.

Making fun of the alleged miraculous power of some products, her videos compile some of the most relevant examples of the humane use. One of the videos, altered by her, fingers on a more than 200 years old desk, which oddly seems to belong to the past. This video freely draws on the work of German cabinetmaker David Roentgen, who inserts in this furniture a whole system of internal mechanisms that activate openings of drawers within other drawers...almost ad infinitum.

Extreme rococo refinement, scenery within the scenery, theatre on its own, this algorithm made of wood and locks is a crazy example of a wave of energy and technicality supporting the appearances and the almost insane idea that we

have of comfort. The visual experiments are also conducted on more trivial material such as a tissue box that becomes ghost-like. Later on, cotton pads peel Cynthia's skin off. In the video "Excerpt", the body of the heroine itself turns into a sort of a boulder clay from which a masseur manages to extract a big bowl. Again, in another video, empty clothes are dancing ironically in order to charm. In her universe, there is a fine line between Art and Leisure, especially in one of the skits in which the colouring of a lol-cat on a vase is almost metaphysical. The general atmosphere of a Bed and Breakfast combines / matches images of a psychoanalytical or esoteric nature and überkitsch graphic designs from different periods of time. The rhythm is intentionally flat. Aquarium music annihilates the differences of intensity between the events.

Shana Moulton's subtle or withering videos offer us a calm and psychedelic therapy, in which the relaxation session, moisturizing creams and other feng shui instruments will leave us in an amused meditative state of mind. Nothing life-changing happens, the magic becomes a routine. Thus, Cynthia's doubts lead her to seek out a form of ecstasy or an ever growing tranquility; however, in her universe where everything is magical, everything is also boring and repetitive.

We implicitly discover the portrait of an individual who impacts on the object as much as the objects impact on him/her, hypnotize and break him/her up.

by Anna Solal / Translated by Chloe Duretete

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INTER • VIEW



Paradise Gardens + Spa: Butterflies Wallpaper, 6, 2014 channel video installation, 4k

with Jonas Nebe

by Rebecca Schöneise

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Machine Fair, Engine, 2011

GAMING INTO MINDFULNESS

"It's a never-ending game of disintegration. I challenge the viewer by not living up to his or her expectations. I am denying the satisfaction of solving the riddle, hidden within the depth of my artwork." By turning his filmic cabinet of curiosity into an intriguing jigsaw puzzle of hybrid geometric patterns, Joas Nebe teases the viewer into accessing his game. He believes: "Riddle games of this kind spark creativity and pass on the role of the artist to the viewer." I talked with him about the making of his most recent film, "Machine Fair", the secret behind his protean futuristic mazes of the urban arena and the reverse psychology of his paradoxical logic of disaster.

I. Splashing the City

"Besides experimenting for the first time with the sixteen-nine format and all it implies in terms of portraiture of the urban landscape and of the people affecting it, in "Machine Fair", shot entirely in Berlin, I am no longer working with immobile sets of photographs but with filmed footage using practical vehicles like the bus or the underground system to shoot and scabble about the material." Thus, in "Machine Fair" the feeling of an imminent threat of disaster emerges directly from the city itself. It's the commuting system, the city's life-blood so to say which his camera is merely sucking in and splashing out on the screen: "In gathering the material for "Machine Fair", the bus functioned like a rocket or needle, as if penetrating the body of the metropolis. Later I reduced this penetrating momentum as much as possible. I intended to give the impression as if the city reflects back on the beholder."

II. Flashing the Fast and the Furious

And reflecting it does, indeed: For, by plunging the camera into the commuting system of the city, and by speeding up, reframing and multiplying the filmed footage, "Machine Fair" depicts a hallucinatory labyrinth that carries the air of a street racing adventure. It creates the dizzying effects of an immersive game environment, a motif Nebe has been experimenting with before, e.g. in his Philosophical Cartoons (see Humanize No. 8). As the need for speed spins out of control Nebe denies the viewer the possibility of ever crossing a finish line. It's here in fact that his riddle game sets off. In a paradoxical logic of constant denial, the accumulative effects of his encyclopedic microcosm fold back on themselves, revealing dark chambers of excess and eco-ignorance. Nebe stresses: "Our postmodern knowledge society asks for high speed of reactions and more and more multitasking. Its excessive use reduces the IQ and diminishes intuition." It's the dogma of speed, the affluence of information and the disappearance of privacy, which he believes turn our society into a mode of dumb and dumber. Conversely, his film becomes an antidote to revving engines and roaring machines. When Nebe's spatial trajectory keeps shifting into higher gear, leading up to a break necking tunnel chase through what looks like a magnetic resonance imaging tube, "Machine Fair" turns into a flashlight machine, flashing the fast and the furious and slashing the speeding eye of the spectator inwards. This shock therapy is a brutal attempt of saving and re-conquering in a flush a moment of mindfulness and reasoning.

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III. Taking the Reason Prisoner

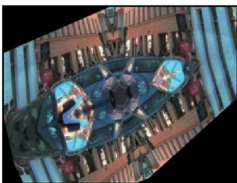
To Nebe, "fantasy and creative intelligence are important survival skills today." So is chess, an analogy he keeps referring to: "Chess exemplifies my game with the viewer. In a world of shortening attention spans, it's an ideal concentration-practice. One always has to think a few steps in advance." By screening the insanity of our daily chase towards evolutionary bankruptcy, Nebe in a clever move takes the reason prisoner, only to appoint reason to be the king of his game of chess. He calls for a close review of the encyclopedia of our philosophical and cultural foundations. In his opinion reason has the potential to direct a path away from the horror vacui he is depicting: "The model of enlightenment has increasingly been discredited, wrongfully I believe. Today survival and coexistence are only possible if governed by the faculty of reason. Labeling and connoting intellectual categories help to bring new relations into sight and to gain unexpected terms of knowledge."

V. On the Far Side of Paradox

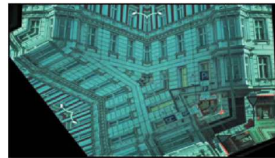
His concept of novelty emerges from a sharpened awareness towards the inconspicuous. By tracking down human traces in the urban environment, yet showing places bereft of people, once more Nebe employs a paradoxical strategy: "If anything my art intends to serve as a portrayal of those inhabiting the spaces depicted. I don't show humans, but it's the people I care about. I am after those who are usually left out of the big picture." One way of referring to the dehumanizing effects of humans becoming interchangeable parts in a gigantic machine is by humanizing the machines themselves: "I worked with the idea how we start looking at machines as human beings. The older the things get, the more we attribute some kind of personality to them; cars for example start having these ticks and oddities, which is precisely which makes them appear human." This makes me curious to ask: "What do you believe your 'tic' to be?" Without hesitation Nebe answers: "My tic ... well, I guess one of my tics is to track things down to the very end. The tic of my cartoon machine is that it's hermetic. Nothing is ever quite what it seems at first glance; so it always calls for a second glance." So just in case "Machine Fair" got you checkmated the first time, check it out again, but keep in mind: Play on the far side of paradox to slip into a state of mindfulness.

IV. Fair is Foul and Foul is Fair

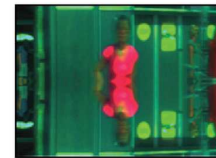
Against this emphasis on the faculty of reason, it may come to a surprise that there was a time, in which Nebe became deeply involved with shamanism. Correspondingly, "Machine Fair" is imbued with the very same totemic theme we've come to know in his Totem Toons (see Humanize No. 9). It's a flight of fancy into a future in which fair is foul and foul is fair. Hovering through the polluted air of outer and inner spaces, it displays battlefields of a technological hurly-burly and the violent disintegration of selfhood. It's a freaky tell of fears becoming fable. Nebe explains how he combines the magical with the rational: "Chaos is always on that side of my work which I try to master by rationality. That way I try to use it in a productive way. Frenzy and destruction inherent to chaos are horrifying and yet may be the origin of something new."



Machine Fair, Motive Force, 2011



Machine Fair, Flywheel, 2011



Machine Fair, V-Belt, 2011

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