

LIAM GILLICK

*Mountains? What Mountains?*

28.4. – 3.6. 2023

Meyer Kainer presents an exhibition of works by Liam Gillick, originating from a text written in 2022 for *The Philosopher*. First published in 1923, it is the journal of The Philosophical Society of England, a charitable organization founded in 1913 to provide an alternative to the formal university-based philosophical education. Gillick's text was on the subject of art and philosophy and intended as a guide for a general reader. The exhibition continues from *Schreibtischuhr* 2017 at Meyer Kainer which considered art, in the words of John Rajchman, "in and of philosophy."

In the main gallery, a square CRT monitor sits on top of a mountain range formed from rolls of office carpet. On the monitor we see *Pain in a Building*, 1999, originally a slide show of images taken by the artist, to verify whether or not Thamesmead Estate in South East London could still be a location for the production of a movie. It is where the character Alex DeLarge lives in the film *Clockwork Orange* (1971). Sitting in mute observation of the mountains and the endless loop of British utopian public housing first occupied in 1968 is a series of wall mounted powder-coated aluminium forms. Each one is a framework with either horizontal or vertical bars. Framed within the bars are cartoonized eyes, each with different colored scleras – or whites of the eye. The disembodied eyes look down upon the scene, framed by vestiges of abstraction that is derived from the contemporary language of cladding, renovation, building systems and optimization. The eyes represent characters referred to in the essay for *The Philosopher*. Artist A+ and Artist A+ alongside their critical doubles – theorist, curator and gallerist.

*"Artist A+ claims to be outside of the influence and conscious application of contemporary philosophy. Let's imagine that their work is super-subjective, i.e. it only expresses that which the artist intuitively feels an ideal, if flawed, expression of their own art language, within their own terms and not derived from any outside conceptual models or subject to any judgment. Or maybe they prefer to think of what they make as "an-art" rather than "anti-art", meaning it thrives without the oxygen of art's history or intellectual context and therefore does not operate against it either – like anaerobic versus aerobic.*

*Yet "Artist A+" is not operating outside of philosophy – their approach is already accounted for in philosophy. The "outsideness" of their conceptual models is a conceptual model. The way they describe their own condition of exteriority from discourse is, in fact, borrowed from philosophical writing around the place of creativity within theories of aesthetics. "Artist A+" has another problem, as soon as their work is out in the world, at the moment of exchange, the artist who claims to be outside of philosophical discourse cannot escape the fact that the analytical and critical terms brought to bear upon their work emerges from philosophy of the contemporary period, which itself provides the discursive base of contemporary art criticism.*

*"Artist A+" is also working today and carefully follows the "correct" journals, conferences and varied published material produced by philosophers. Despite appearances, and against their desires, they are not operating within philosophy but are always kept away by their own self-nomination as "a contemporary artist" – only able to reach in and out to find areas of interest and suggest routes towards philosophical understanding from an outlandish position. The artist attempting to operate within philosophy is an alchemist, boiling up contemporary philosophy in a laboratory of desire, throwing references, images and structures into the brew in an attempt to walk alongside philosophy while*

*carrying an increasingly unwieldy baggage of video projectors, artist's statements, installations and propositions. Yet, this contradiction between the "Artist A-+" wanting to be outside and being pulled in and "Artist A+-" wanting to be inside and being permanently self-excluded, is where contemporary art gets its tension and its staying power. The difficulty in pinning down contemporary art is due to the paradoxical condition of its producers, who both exist inside and outside of philosophy at the same time. There is an endless pull towards philosophy for "Artist A-+" and an alienation from it for "Artist A+-". "Artist A+-" cannot reach a condition where they are fully operating within philosophy. This is because they cannot fully enter the territory of philosophy without giving up the condition of endlessly becoming an artist.*

*Every art work is incomplete evidence of the continued intention to become an artist. "Artist A-+" and "Artist A+-" are both committed to the endless process of crossing an unknown mountain range where scaling one peak only reveals further peaks beyond. Without this they would not be endlessly becoming an artist and there would be no art to make. Philosophy can offer a path through the mountain range, but the difficulty of following it would also remove the view of the mountains to come and therefore delete all the art to be made in the future. Even if "Artist A+-" followed one of the often contradictory paths offered by philosophy, in order to continue being an artist in a state of becoming they would be doomed to keep pointing to the paths while repeating the assertion that the mountains exist too, as the paths must lead somewhere. The tension between the guiding path and a creative terrain is where the endless unresolvability of contemporary art gets its endurance.*

An important aspect of Liam Gillick's work is his critical and fictional writing. The exhibition reflects this narrative turn in visual arts, whereby authorial writing is brought to the fore, combining different literary forms and genres such as prose, poetry, drama, fiction, and "uncreative writing". In the upper part of the gallery Liam Gillick plays out an alternative life for an important work by Irish modernist designer Eileen Gray, and self-consciously comments on her ambiguous relationship to the ideals of democratic and accessible design. The installation *Three Borrowed Gray Rotations* (2021) comprises three appropriations of Gray's iconic wooden side table *De Stijl* (1922). Each table is paired with a child-size stool designed by Gillick and based on the *Ulmer Hocker* by Max Bill, produced for the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm. On the tables we can find copies of *Between Fable and Parable* (2021), a limited-edition book by the artist in a nod to John Baldessari's *Ingres and Other Parables* (1971). The book is a down scaled from the artist's usual format to match the size of a Catholic prayer book. The tables and stools are scaled down to match the transformation. The book links characters from potential fables and parables with their "doubles" from the world of contemporary corporate "double speak" which eludes both fable and parable but maybe reveals new allegorical models. The work was originally shown in the refectory of The Broumov Monastery in the Czech Republic, which houses the only copy of the Turin Shroud north of the Alps.

Text: Liam Gillick