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Sofia Sinibaldi ***Eye to Eye Delirium***

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Opening Reception January 31, 6-9pm

Ways of Seeing: Notes on *Eye to Eye Delirium*

“You may be sure that the famous soft watches are nothing else than the tender, extravagant, solitary, paranoiac-critical Camembert of time and space.” –Salvador Dalí¹

Until a few years ago, the exact mechanism that triggered the formation of holes in Swiss cheese had remained unknown. The carbon dioxide released by bacteria was thought to cause the holes, but it turns out that they form around the microparticles of hay present in milk. In other words, the consequences of unseen contamination are the holes we have come to know, expect, and desire. However, this isn't always the case. When something slips through the cracks undetected, it can also spell catastrophe.

The holes in Swiss cheese are the point of departure for Sofia Sinibaldi's recent body of work, which includes sculptures and photographs that use real slices of Swiss cheese to compose frame-within-a-frame images. Sinibaldi could be said to follow in the footsteps of Dalí, his famed painting *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) depicting gooey “melting clocks” set against the Cap de Creus peninsula. But if Dalí was fascinated with the “super-soft” plasticity of Camembert, which, for him, was primarily a question of shape and form, then Sinibaldi's work on Swiss cheese advances these concerns while occupying a wholly different conceptual terrain.²

Her sculptures re-schematize the Swiss cheese model of accident causation developed by James Reason. Each slice of Swiss cheese represents a line of defense against hazards and failures while the holes demarcate the weaknesses and vulnerabilities that threaten complex systems. Accidents occur when the holes align and the hazards pierce through the slices unimpeded. Given the reality that we live in proximity to disaster, Sinibaldi has constructed her Swiss cheese slices from silicone, a shock-absorbing material. They are reinforced by steel frames and affix to the walls at right angles, running parallel to one another in a formation that loosely evokes Eva Hesse's *Contingent* (1969). This title speaks to the uncertainty that Sinibaldi is wrestling with in her own work. When you ambulate around and look through the slices of Swiss cheese, you are actually encountering a set of contingencies. The sequence of planes conveys what could go wrong from one moment to the next when hazards penetrate the different levels of a system.

The question then becomes, how do you sit with the discomfort of knowing that disaster can strike at any time? Sinibaldi's photographs reveal that this uncertainty can provoke a paranoid gaze. “Paranoia is a *delirium of interpretation*,” says Rem Koolhaas, referring to Dalí's Paranoid-Critical Method.³ Sinibaldi's image-making follows the logic of delirium to constellate a dissonant inventory of things, transposing onto photography the materiality of her sculptures and the latent threats that they model. Where the uninitiated see holes, she sees eyes with which to view the world anew. Interestingly, the holes in cheese are known as “eyes” among cheesemakers. A slice of Swiss cheese therefore functions as an optical device, like a mix between a pair of binoculars and a peephole, in much the same way that Bugles become claws and Pringles become beaks, i.e., through play.

This ludic mode of navigating and mapping space may constitute psychogeography, but it is not a throwback to Situationist practice. The cropped images register something more sinister than the playful shooting process belies. They reproduce the vantage point of the security apparatus and its ubiquitous tools of surveillance, bringing to mind a group of Sinibaldi's earlier works that pictured laser-red crosshairs. Under the guise of safety, the slices of Swiss cheese serve as masks or barriers that enable her to focus in on and distill the details of her surroundings from a secure distance.

¹ Conroy Maddox, *Salvador Dalí: Eccentric and Genius*, Taschen 1994:64.

² Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, Dover Publications 1993:10, 317.

³ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, Monacelli Press 1994:238, Author's italics.

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I'd like to capture them. To retain things passing? No, just to play. I am reminded of a scene from Agnès Varda's *The Gleaners and I* (2000) in which she uses her left hand as a viewfinder to frame the semi-trailer trucks that she passes on the freeway. As soon as she has them in her sights, she closes her hand into a fist as if to crush the trucks one by one. There are some instances when an act of play appears indistinguishable from an act of aggression. It is just as hard to distinguish between a relatively benign failure and the type of failure that can break down a system through unforeseen concatenations. We may never know the difference, but Sinibaldi's work discloses the fact that the paranoiac's way of seeing the world is less an operation of the mind that we consciously reproduce for surrealist ends than an automatism we inherit from a world of unknown unknowns.

- Matthew Grumbach

Sofia Sinibaldi (b. 1992, Guatemala City) is an artist living and working in New York. She got her BFA from San Francisco Art Institute in 2016. Her work has been recently included in *Gern En Regalia* (NY) and *Red Zone* (LA).