

Tout Terriblement

The individual works that comprise this exhibition have stayed with me and formed links over the course of several years. Some of them I'd never actually seen or experienced first-hand -- they were either "told to me," or I overheard someone talking about them and became curious, or they jumped out at me from a photograph or a line of text, so that in the time between my first knowledge of the work and my encounter with it, a certain level of refractive fantasizing and embroidery overtook and lashed together works which previously had no reason to be related, but which by then had no other possible way of making sense.

I have leaned the show's title against the title of a legendary exhibition designed in 1947 by Frederick Kiesler at the Hugo Gallery in New York.

The purse in the entryway is made of a silk printed with a narrative pattern called "Deauville," designed by Raoul Dufy for Bianchini-Ferier in the 1920s. I would be happy if this exhibition itself could follow the logic of the confounding, endless interlinking of various vignettes drawn from cosmopolitan seaside delights of which this pattern is constituted -- composition as explanation.

The dreams and nightmares of Rainer Ganahl, described in hysterical detail under the face of Sigmund Freud as it appeared on the 50 Shilling note, count the days leading up to the Austrian currency's passing into obsolescence, while crystallizing the framework of dreams that money can buy. One night's recording laments the inability to follow through on the task due to the inexplicable fragility of the dream:

"The dream was on my forehead in a liquid support, unable to be fixed, to be rendered memorable, in order to make a note I moved a couple of centimeters for paper and pencil -- now, all support is gone, the ghost out of the bottle."

The shape of the air is rendered in spiked, drone-like cathedrals in Hugh Ferriss's 1922 "virtual" renderings commissioned to demonstrate the types of built volumes permitted by the then recently imposed New York City zoning laws.

And the unsettling photographs of groups of people around Berlin's Alexanderplatz

(from Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda's series "Outtakes and Excerpts") suggest that, "...in the sometimes desolate void of the public sphere, one is at the center of one's own life, yet lost in

anonymity.” Made with a mass-market camera whose shutter releases only when a subject within the frame is smiling – after all, a camera is meant to collect smiles – these images pivot on a paradigm shift in which that expression is not a choice but an imposition on the subject.

“World Trade Center,” a Sumaang Leela (courtyard theater) play performed by the Sana Leibak Nachom Artistes of Imphal is a synthesis of what once seemed to me to be incongruent media, gestures, fantasies, and political “realities” to create a complex narrative, that is, in the words of L. Somi Roy, who documented and theorized this particular production, “knocking at the doors of the ownership of the memory of 9/11.”

Megan Sullivan’s idiosyncratic “shelves” are the kin of John Hejduk’s drawings: “Fighting Angels,” two individual forms whose interpenetration and coloration takes them from the possibility of use to a zone of allegory. “Crystal Blue Persuasion,” by Chuck Nanney, is a hard-edge painting in metal car flake paint, tortured over stretchers made of tree branches, stultifyingly succinct. A hand-knotted rug by Evelyn Wyld (ca. 1920) -- presumably made in the basement of her girlfriend Eileen Gray’s shop, named after the fictional personage Jean Desert -- is a relief to eyes tired of looking at banal 2010 abstractions in a diluted post-war style. Antony’s notes for “Our Lady of the Flowers,” installed as a screen for a fist-sized Etruscan-by-way-of-Art-Deco bust by Eyre de Lanux (as if the bust were somehow implicated in this mid-nineties East Village send-up of Genet); and a shrill Nymphenburg statuette, shielding itself from the all-pervasive pink glow of Lutz Bacher’s “Pink Out of A Corner (to Jasper Johns) 1963” test out correspondences according to the rules of the ensemblier, giving preference to the misleading pose, a havoc of chronology, and the dissolution of categories.

“Everything else seems to be a downer. I don’t know why,” says Lukas Duwenhögger as the “fashion designer” “Arturo Pellegrino” in his 1991 video “From Cotton Via Velvet To Tragedy.” “Perhaps we could destroy the Statue of Liberty?”

Please write me:

The Lonely Empress

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I have rented it for 5 years"

Nick Mauss, October 2010

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