

# Extreme Beauty: Approaches to the Real

Janet Burchill & Jennifer McCamley

Juan Davila

Elizabeth Newman

Constance Zikos

Extreme beauty is a fierce event, like the will to live in someone who knows they are dying. Sophocles presents a manifestation of one such moment in the splendor of Antigone caught between the choice that will lead to her death and the symbolic erasure of what Sade referred to as a second life.

The works in this exhibition are presented against a tide of different forms of erasure, maneuvers which, in the realm of the social, are often not commented upon. The practice of these artists, it seems to me, address such forms of erasure. Their works designed not merely for acquisition or for the purposes of denial, negation or foreclosure. If these mechanisms are the ground upon which we operate and each of us act to organize a subjectivity in the face of/ the event of these maneuvers, how we chose to navigate them defines our social links.

If the beautiful, according to Lacan, points us in the direction of the field of destruction, it is because it serves as a barrier before an unspeakable truth, namely the radical desire that is this ‘field of absolute destruction’. “It is obviously”, he writes, “because truth is not pretty to look at that beauty is, if not its splendor, then at least its envelope.”<sup>1</sup>

What then is conveyed in the moment of a glance? What is rendered visible? Can we speak, as Franz Rosenzweig does, of a content generated “as speech of the unspeakable, a first, speechless mutual comprehension, for all time indispensable beneath and beside actual speech”?<sup>2</sup> If art transmits something of this ‘speech of the unspoken’ before speech, which defines us as human and particular, the individual nevertheless remains with this unspeakable interior. In the moment of a glance, a thread is drawn yet “the life aroused in the beholder does not arouse the beheld to life; it at once turns inward in the beholder”.

These works involve painting which “concerns visibility itself, and thus pertains to everything – to sensation in general”<sup>3</sup> and let us recall Malévitch noting that “the futurists, while forbidding the painting of feminine thighs, the copying of portraits, have also removed perspective.”<sup>4</sup>

These works have been chosen for the activity they embody as approaches to the real, their generative presence in solitude asserting a social tie. The wager of this exhibition concerns these threads.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lacan, J. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book VII. 1959-1960*. Translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1982. P. 216- 217.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*. Translated from the Second Edition of 1930 by William W. Halo. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985. P. 81. I'll try to get hold of the new translation of this text.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, *The Crossing of the Visible*. Translated by James K. A. Smith. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004. P. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Noted in the first two versions of Malévitch's *Du cubisme et du futurisme au suprématisme*, cited by Marion, *Ibid*, p. 92, note 20.