

The first solo exhibition in Italy of works by Daniel Faust is devoted to “Museum” photographs taken by the artist from 1981 to 2010. The subjects of this vast collection are strident, highly original details or views, captured in single shots in museums around the world. This collection, which is also indirectly a travel diary, reveals his particular interest in curious collections, often with an eye on popular culture. In these works, Faust focuses on objects, displays, demonstrations of rhetoric, educational failures, ridiculous mirabilia and shadow plays. Through Faust’s eyes, the museum loses its authoritativeness as an institution and becomes a model of the world, with all its monstrosities, paradoxes and endearments. The artist expropriates the scientific approach to collecting, ordering and display, and applies a wholly “other”, rather uncanny sensitivity to it. The “Museum” complete series consists of 7500 images from 150 diverse museums. A selection of 50 photographs, specially printed for the event, is on show. The exhibition will be accompanied by a text by Eva Fabbris.

Worlds on Exhibition(1)

The task of a real live animal in a zoo is mainly that of representing itself. “Period rooms”, which are so much a part of museums in the USA, are reconstructions (almost always made with authentic materials) that offer the visitor an experience of lifestyles that vary widely in terms of space and time. Wax museums offer the experience of meeting celebrities. House museums allow us to identify with other people’s personal lives. Dioramas replace landscapes indoors.

All are paradoxes. These days there are museums around the world devoted to just about anything — to the police, to counterfeiting, to education, to war. Only people who accept and love such paradoxes can take pleasure from the fact that, as well as being institutions inspired by enlightenment ideals, devoted to the collection (and influence) of artistic, scientific and historical knowledge, museums can be a demonstrative and celebratory system devoted to the most diverse popular themes.

In Daniel Faust’s view, what the Louvre and the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne have in common is their artificiality. Both represent, collect, embalm, arrange and put on display. There is no moralism in this vision of his. There is participation, fondness, humour, and perhaps even melancholy (viewed as a slightly painful sense of the passing of time). Museums — perhaps all museums — have been the subject of a vast array of photographs by Faust ever since 1980. Like the slightly irritating idea that a Latin lover views a woman as all women, Faust collects museums. One after another, one subject after another, in no pre-established logical order or

category, Faust has slipped into the rooms of museums, both known and unknown, on every continent, visiting and illustrating collections and displays devoted to the most classic as well as to the most unlikely subjects.

He never photographs complete views, for he does not aim to convey the “method” of museums. Like the devil, Faust concentrates on the detail.

Among Daniel Faust’s past publications, it comes as no surprise to find a series of photographs from the Forrest J. Ackerman house in Hollywood Hills, the largest collection of special effects props for fantasy and horror films, accompanied by texts by Mike Kelley. This mix of delirium with obscure and popular culture is undoubtedly a source of his particular taste for trash, slightly spoiled or abortive, which reveals the stuff of which dreams (and theatrical backdrops) are made.

The very close-up, subjective view that Faust adopts in museums goes beyond the enchantment of paradox; he chooses a detail that a visitor might have noticed as just incomprehensible, ridiculous, inappropriate, inconsistent or excessive — or beautiful, but for “other” reasons.

This is something that rather makes the stage collapse, but without the acrimony of someone who finds the museum obsolete. Something that mostly brings out the artificiality, and that claims to be able to represent a single part of the world, however infinitesimal it may be. Something that makes the individual’s eye more authoritative than that claim.

Faust’s museum is a sequence shot of fallible representations of the world. And the series of one shot per museum becomes a vast collection put on display. The images in the exhibition appear in chronological order, thus putting the focus on the subject (Faust himself) and on his travel experiences, his choices, and the years of his life of which the viewer sees only his visits to museums. Even so, this chronological order is neutral with regard to the very diverse degrees of institutional and scientific authoritativeness of the various collections portrayed.

Parataxis takes hold, one museum after another, and another, and another. This juxtaposition is a way of saying that all things have the same value, and it is this that reveals the importance of the whole, the horizon on which everything unfolds... in other words, the sequence shot. Like the anonymous, unknown ‘guide’ in Sokurov’s *Russian Ark*, Faust wanders without a trace of omniscience from room to room, showing us different ways of representing the world.

Eva Fabbris

Translated from Italian by Simon Turner

(1) The title is taken from Herbert J. (1997), *Paris 1937: Worlds on Exhibition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, which examines six exhibitions and new museum displays put on in Paris in the second half of 1937 and in early 1938. The displays are shown as devices for nationalistic representation during the rise of totalitarianism and the approach of the Second World War. Herbert shows how exhibitions were capable of expressing themselves through non-explicit mechanisms. In the introduction he states: “one display after another resorted to the positing of some species or other of gods capable of overseeing it all, both the world and the representation of it” (p. 7)

(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)