

Liam Gillick

À bientôt, j'espère...

24 May – 28 June

À bientôt, j'espère... presents an array of archetypal abstract works by Liam Gillick alongside a revisiting of his work relating to the French film collective Groupe Medvedkine (1967–1974)

Since the 1990s, Gillick's abstract work has drawn upon the visual language of renovation, recuperation and re-occupation. He absorbs the aesthetics of neo-liberalism, which restage the remnants and surfaces of modernism as in the production of false ceilings, cladding systems and walls dividers. For Gillick, car production and kitchen design remain the two shadows cast when the aesthetics of advanced technology mask the failure of the modernist project and have been at the centre of a number of key works and exhibitions, including the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2009.

Alongside this is a focus upon the rise of the contemporary artist as a compromised figure, emerging alongside the collapse in traditional mass production in the Global North and the displacement of production away from the sites of consumption. Gillick's general approach does not attempt resolve the contradictions between his search for contemporary forms of abstraction and his critical texts, films and exhibition structures that often expose its implicated ideological underpinnings.

The title of this exhibition is borrowed from Chris Marker and Mario Marret's 1967 film, also known as *Be Seeing You* in English. Shot during a strike at the Rhodiacéta nylon and polyester factory in Besançon, France, the filmmakers documented the workers as they spoke of the situation, their conditions and their complaints. In the same year, Marker had formed the film collective SLON – Société pour le Lancement des Oeuvres Nouvelles (Society for Launching New Works). Following comments from the participants in *Be Seeing You* that the film did not effectively reflect the complexity of

their daily lives, the Medvedkine Group was founded in order to engage more directly with workers and involve them in the co-production and re-staging of their own stories and struggles.

In 2007 Liam Gillick presented an exhibition at The Lab Belmar in Lakewood near Denver, Colorado. Titled *Weekend in So Show*, the exhibition set the stage for a discursive exhibition structure produced with a group of young artists and students from the area. A screening of the Group Medvedkine film *Week-end à Sochaux* (1972) was the prompt for discussion about cultural engagement. The film is a development from the SLON-era productions. It involved participation of workers and activists and rather than a standard documentary includes various staged moments and performances that heighten and expose the relationships of production at the Peugeot factory at Sochaux in Eastern France through re-enactments and satirical performance. In contrast to the SLON films, *Week-end à Sochaux* clearly marks the arrival of activist theatrics in a modern form. At The Lab, the film was shown on a number of monitors installed side by side on the wall and running out of sync to allow visitors to get a sense of the whole film at the same time.

At the end of the process, a plain large-format book was produced and left behind in the center of simple plywood staging alongside large wall texts. The book spoke. In strong French-accented English, voiced by artist Pierre Bismuth, it invited visitors to "Open the book" to "Read the book" to "Come on – open the book". The only way to stop the incessant pleading was to open the book. Inside the front cover a text was laid out in a plain sans-serif typeface. The written language was not immediately recognisable until read out loud by an English language speaker, revealing it to be phonetic French adapted for a North American accent. Reading the text, the visitor would find

themselves performing the role of one of the worker-activist-performers from *Week-end à Sochaux*, mocking the entreaties and offers from the factory boss to potential workers:

Ah pro-shay. Ah pro-shay. Lah shahnts duh vot rah vee
(Come close! Come close! The chance of your life)

Voo cher-shay do trav-eye. Juh voos on ah port. Kell trav-eye?
(You are looking for work? I'll bring you some. What work?)

Voos allay con stweer v'wah-chur door-toe-mo-beel. Poe Joe!
(You are going to build automobiles! Peugeot!)

For *À bientôt, j'espère...*, the front page from the book is presented as a series of wall texts alongside sculptural works. One of the main points of discussion in Denver was the constant deployment of culture as a response to stagnation and misery. Nearly twenty years later, the promise of art as an alternative form of life and resolution to societies of narcissism and boredom remains elusive. But as Gillick has argued in his book *Industry and Intelligence*, that might well be contemporary art's endlessly evasive potential.

List of Works

Clockwise from desk:

1. *Diversity Channelled*, 2018
powder-coated aluminium
32 x 90 x 8 cm
2. *Liquidation in the snow*, 2010
powder-coated aluminium, Plexiglas
two elements, each 50 x 50 x 10 cm
3. *The chance of your life*, 2025
matte black vinyl on wall, three elements
200 x 200 cm each
4. *Leeched Screen*, 2014
powder-coated aluminium, Plexiglas
304.8 x 213.5 x 31.5 cm
5. *Weekend in So Show*, 2025
hardback book, text, audio
42 x 30.5 x 2 cm opened
6. *Grouped Decided*, 2008
painted aluminium, Plexiglas
150 x 300 x 30 cm
7. *Distinct Elevation*, 2017
powder-coated aluminium, Plexiglas
200 x 280 x 140 cm
8. *Acceptance Screen*, 2014
powder-coated aluminium, Plexiglas
200 x 100 x 7.5 cm
9. *Negotiated Collapse*, 2010
powder-coated aluminium, Plexiglas
230 x 50 x 20 cm