



Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Neither Either Nor Or

May 31 – August 3 2008

Press conference: Friday, May 30 2008, 11 am

With works by

Ignasi Aballí
Sven Augustijnen
Enrico David
John Wood & Paul Harrison
David Lamelas
Renzo Martens
Gail Pickering
Emily Wardill

An exhibition by

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart

Curator

Katrin Mundt

Supported by

Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart
Ministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kunst Baden-Württemberg
Hugo Boss Kunstsponsoring
Hypo Kulturstiftung
Helmut Nanz Stiftung für Kunst und Kunsterziehung
Vlaamse Gemeenschap

Introduction

From May 31 to August 3, 2008, Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart is presenting the international group exhibition **Neither Either Nor Or**. The exhibition brings together a collection of works by nine artists, ranging in form from video, film and slide installation to photography and performance. The link between the works is due to common structural features rather than a particular issue: all address questions of readability, borderline cases of understanding and the understandable in a radical way.

The works make deliberate use of complex, in some cases contradictory codes and references that produce an overabundance of possible interpretations, thus preventing us from cutting to the “core” of meaning. Others focus on forms of disappearance, forgetting, disguise, and transformation.

Language as an instrument, with which we produce and decode meaning, organise and systematically categorise our experiences, and as a medium of an “other” meaning – nonsense, paradox, deception –, plays a key role here: word and gesture appear as infinitely flexible generators of order and diversion.

David Lamelas’s *Reading Film*, for example, is based on a text about the paradoxes of interhuman behaviour. To begin with we read the filmed text, that is then read out to us. The film, that is text and reading at once, thus involves us in a game with the conventions of “reading” media codes, questioning the role of the viewer as an autonomous interpreter.

Sven Augustijnen’s video *L’école des pickpockets* documents two professional pickpockets giving an amateur practical instruction in their trade. It remains unclear whether this “school of pickpockets” actually exists, considering that public ignorance of its tricks and strategies guarantees a pickpocket’s success. **Wood & Harrison’s** performance-based work *Board* also plays with a form of deception. By manipulating a moving wall, the room becomes flexible and begins to morph with the artists’ movements.

As such, the exhibition fundamentally reflects the relationship of language and action to space, the dialogue between the space of the art work and the space of the viewer. The works constantly create a sense of uncertainty as to what we see, how we see it, and where we stand. By constantly forcing the viewer to adopt a new position, they assume an almost performative dimension. The reflective distance from where inside/outside, true/false, neither/nor, and either/or appear to be alternatives dissipates.

Works in the exhibition

Ignasi Aballí

*1958, lives and works in Barcelona

Llistats, 1997-2007

10 digital prints

Ignasi Aballí's "Lists" are based on found text material that he cuts out of newspapers, compiles in lists organised by topic, and finally exhibits in the form of series of large-format digital prints. Emotionally charged key concepts from our everyday discourses are isolated from their media context, re-combined, and thus formed into abstract indexes of conceptual variances and accumulations. What may initially appear to be an attempt to classify and inherently critique our media-pervaded everyday experience, soon raises questions. What were the criteria for the selection and arrangement here? What is the cognitive value of a system whose intrinsic principles are unknown to us? Aballí's columns of numbers and terms generate meaning from the pure quantity of "information", i.e. from the relations that the various elements necessarily enter into with each other, both in and between the separate lists. They form clusters of graphical signs, in which meanings continue to echo while they are becoming detached from them. As such, they become amenable to a different logic, in which formal methods such as repetition and duplication, omission and similarity create a formal condensation.

Sven Augustijnen

*1970, lives and works in Brussels

L'école des pickpockets, 54 Min., 2000 (loop)

Video installation

In *L'École des pickpockets* (The school of pickpockets) Augustijnen documents a practice that usually takes place out of the public eye: He observes two professional pickpockets teaching their craft to an unidentified amateur. Despite their obvious professionalism and skill, the viewer inevitably begins to doubt the role and identity of the two pickpockets: Why should they explain their secret art to the public in this way, given that its success relies on its concealment? This paradox remains unresolved, thus thwarting any attempt by the viewer to distance himself: He recognises himself as a potential victim, while at the same time – at least in theory – being made capable of being a perpetrator. In an ambivalent act of empowerment, Augustijnen turns his viewers into accomplices. The artist – a con man?

L'Histoire belge, 2007

Series of 10 offset lithographs

The material that the artist collected and specially produced for *L'Histoire belge* (Belgian history), one text and two photographs in each case, describes selected chapters from Belgian history, from mediaeval times to the present. Despite the wealth of information and its serious presentation in the style of cultural heritage exhibits, these episodes always remain improbable: The official historiography of state formations, successions to the throne, colonial expansions and historical agreements combines with stories of family disputes,

unsolved deaths and secret negotiations. As such, historical fact stands alongside little documented curiosities and speculative hypotheses, gelling into recognisable patterns or displaying unexpected parallels. Down the centuries, everything seems to be conspired with everything else – including historical fact with coincidence. Even the photos are practically useless as factual evidence of the stories. On the contrary, their double appearance leads to a multiplication of angles on the stories themselves.

Enrico David

*1966, lives and works in London

Fait divers, 2007

10-part series of b&w photographs

The *fait divers*, a short item of news about a true but incredible story, spotlights a break-away from the everyday logic of news that is interested in provable facts. Enrico David's work of the same name links the objectivity of black-and-white photography with elements of the surreal. We see photos that seem to document a theatre production. In truth, they are photos taken on the stage of the Institute of Contemporary Art in London and represent a fictitious play in which an adult couple are having their legal status converted to that of mother and adopted daughter before an attorney. On the one hand, the photos testify to the event-like nature of what is taking place on stage but, on the other hand, cannot make the supposed event (the conversion of the couple) credible, nor allow us to understand the ambiguity of the staged staging. In order to fill in the gaps created by bringing together these different layers of fiction we must acquiesce in the dramatic convention of a "willing suspension of disbelief", the annulment of general assumptions as to what is realistically possible.

Shitty Tantrum, 2006/2007

6 gouaches on paper (from a series of 22)

The *Shitty Tantrum* series plays with the codes and conventions of theatre and the theatrical. Consisting of gouaches – a technique used among other things in stage painting – it is consciously set at the intersection between art and design. The series comprises scenes from fictitious plays, posters, stage set and costume designs, but also primordial scenes of traumatic "exhibition": moments of self-renunciation and pretence, paranoia and loss of control. Viewed against the foil of the strictly codified speech and action of drama and the seamless illusion of theatre, in light of its "inferior" execution, the grotesquely exaggerated figures and moments of linguistic madness, *Shitty Tantrum* reveals itself to be an imitation of theatre, its radicalised double. The psychological subtext suggests links to motifs of the "human comedy" as a portrait of social manners as much as a criticism of the confessional society.

David Lamelas

* 1946, lives in Los Angeles, Brussels and Berlin

Reading Film from „Knots“ by R. D. Laing, 15', 1970 (loop)
16mm film installation

David Lamelas's work is based on the text *Knots* by British psychoanalyst R. D. Laing concerning the paradoxes of human communication and interaction. Laing translates the logical "knots" displayed by these behaviours into poetically condensed language games. Lamelas uses the film viewers to test various forms of reading. To begin with we read a filmed text fragment from *Knots*, and then we see and hear a woman reading the same texts out loud. In this way, we read a text, hear a voice reading, "read" a film, that is, at the same time, a text and a reading, and "read" our perception of these processes, their duration, and our memory of them. By means of this infinite nesting of different media formats and levels of perception, the exhibition space in turn becomes a "knot" in which the linearity of our reading becomes entangled in linguistic paradoxes and our private readings intertwine with each other in a common physical place.

Renzo Martens

* 1973, lives and works in Amsterdam, Brussels and Kinshasa

Untitled, 2007, 12' (loop)
Video installation

Untitled is a fragment of a feature-length film to be released this autumn based on Martens' journeys to Congo, where he conducts an emancipation project involving the local population. Focusing on the global marketing of images of human poverty, that bring least benefit to those depicted as victims, Martens instructs a number of Congolese photographers in how to produce and market pictures of the poverty of their fellow-countrymen themselves. By focusing on his own presence as both observer and active participant in what we see, he seemingly violates the ethical standards of reporting on the suffering of other people, thus confronting us with the contradictions of our looking: Is the observer who only appears credible and impartial if he refrains from any personal involvement in the pictures not in truth the one who denies his own self in terms of being different? (How) can we approach other people without having questioned our own position towards them beforehand? And at what point does the observer cross the line where he seeks the other person's gaze (be it in front of the camera or in front of the screen) simply in order to mirror himself in it?

Gail Pickering

Lives and works in London

Zulu (Speaking in Radical Tongues), 2005/2008
Props including audio recording of the performance on May 30, 2008

Gail Pickering's sculptural tableaux vivants, films and performances explore and revive social and political events by staging fictional actions in real sites or ephemerally built theatrical sets. *Zulu (Speaking in Radical Tongues)* is a sculpture activated through performance. The three-dimensional letters of "Zulu" resemble a discarded advertising hoarding or props from a film set. During the performance, "Zulu", both as sign and stage, is hijacked by a performer

channelling dialogue and physical gestures borrowed from the diaries and manifestos of 1960s/70s urban guerilla groups, communes and their cinematic counterparts. Presented as a seamless monologue that is interrupted by the performer's choreographed movements, the work invites the audience to reflect on the portrayal of these ideologies and events through the process of historical distance.

Each performance of the work is recorded onto analogue audiotape, the reel-to-reel player is part of the installation for the duration of the exhibition. This residue of the performance – reminiscent of the communiqués these groups would have produced at the time – becomes an intimate one-on-one experience as the audience's only access is through headphones.

Emily Wardill

* 1977, lives and works in London

Sick Serena and Dregs and Wreck and Wreck, 2007, 10' (loop)
16mm film installation

Emily Wardill's film starts with pictures of allegorical representations on historical church windows, that are subsequently translated into episodes of tableaux vivants and short performative scenes. In pseudo-historical costumes and a seemingly makeshift set, five actors recite texts that are as poetic as they are grotesque. Through a fragmented narrative of love, betrayal and revenge and idiosyncratic references to pop culture, art history and social theory, Wardill reflects on the tools by which we generate and communicate meaning: allegory as an educational medium in a largely illiterate medieval culture, melodrama as popular "packaging" for radical social critique, as in the films of R. W. Fassbinder, or the writings of 19th century art and social theorist John Ruskin. Like the coloured splinters of glass of the church windows, images and associations piece together seamlessly. Their meaning, however, melts away in the overabundance of possible interpretations.

John Wood & Paul Harrison

* 1966, lives and works in Birmingham (Paul Harrison)

* 1969, lives and works in Shropshire and Bristol (John Wood)

Board, 1993, 3' (loop)
Video installation

Wood & Harrison's works are choreographed experiments with bodies and everyday objects, the physical resistances, tensions, and discharges that they generate when they meet. The sets of their performances, that usually do not last longer than three minutes, are generally plain white cubes, in which the artists perform on their own with a limited number of props. *Board* is also set in such a space, at the same time turning it into an object of manipulation: In a fluid sequence of synchronous movements, that are equally reminiscent of slapstick and Yvonne Rainer's dance performances, Wood & Harrison manipulate the physical arrangement of their set: The board becomes a movable wall that divides the visible space, folding it, giving it depth or taking its depth away, making the figures in it visible or invisible. It morphs and forms with the artists' movements and thus imperceptibly undermines the physical and ideological foundation of the white cube of the exhibition room in which the work is shown.

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May 31 – August 3, 2008

Press conference

Friday, May 30, 2008, 11 am

Opening

Friday, May 30, 2008, 7 pm

Performance

Gail Pickering, *Zulu (Speaking in Radical Tongues)*

Friday, May 30, 2008, 8 pm

Exhibition tour with the artists

Saturday, May 31, 2008, 1 pm

Free guided tours

Every sunday, 3 pm

Opening hours

Tue, Thur-Sun: 11 am – 6 pm

Wed: 11 am – 8 pm

Entrance fee

5/3 EUR

Press images and texts

www.wkv-stuttgart.de/presse

Press contact

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