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ReConstitutions, DHC - Art, Montréal, 22 février - 25 mai 2008

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remiscent of abstract paintings such as Malevich’s Black Square, acknowledge the cinematic heritage of crafting scenes together by hand, as well as calling to mind its forerunners in early photographic history, such as contact printing with glass plates. 

The pair of reversed images titled Hoping the Light Will Save Us I (2008) celebrates photography’s ability to make the implausible – balancing a meteor rock on the back of your hand – entirely believable, through the use of stop action. In a parallel diptych, Hoping the Light Will Save Us II (2008), an extreme close-up pairing of inverted eyes stare blankly out into the room. In both sets of photographs, a sickly green glow illuminates the subject’s flesh, calling to mind the narrative convention in graphic novels of the hero’s transformation sequence. The light, proposed in the titles as a kind of salvation, inevitably comes with a price – superheroes must ultimately hide their powers and they rarely reveal their true selves without suffering the consequences.

Le grand jour takes square aim at the history, culture, and tenets of storytelling in film and photography, while offering commentary on the construction of the lived environment and the everyday. Filtered through the lens of an analytical rewrite, Grandmaison’s perceptions offer exciting promises of what lies ahead in his burgeoning career.

ReConstructions
DHC – Art, Montréal, 22 février – 25 mai 2008

Nos souvenirs sont souvent peuplés d’un mélange d’images fictives et d’images de la réalité. L’omniprésence des images médiatiques dans notre société du XXIe siècle assure à ces dernières une place de choix dans notre mémoire collective. Il n’est pas rare que l’on croise une personnalité dans la rue et qu’on la salue en pensant qu’il s’agit d’une vieille connaissance. Après un instant on réalise que notre unique lien avec cette personne est unidirectionnel et passe par l’intermédiaire du petit ou du grand écran. Par l’omniprésence de l’image, la mémoire individuelle et collective devient perméable. La récente exposition de John Zeppetelli à la fondation DHC- Art explore différentes facettes de cette médiatisation de la mémoire collective.

Intitulée ReConstructions, cette exposition réunit neuf œuvres d’artistes reconnus internationalement qui, ensemble, abordent l’idée de la reconstitution d’images déjà médiatisées sous de très nombreux angles. Il y a d’abord Here and Elsewhere, œuvre vidéo de Kerry Tribe qui présente en diptyque une entrevue à caractère philosophique avec une jeune fille précocè. Inspirée d’une série télévisuelle de Jean-Luc Godard et Anne-Marie Miéville de 1978, l’œuvre s’articule autour de la juxtaposition de deux images vidéo et de l’inclusion de plans panoramiques de villes européennes. L’espace unique de l’entretien est ainsi dédoublé et le temps s’y écoute dans une atmosphère poétique. Au sein de ReConstructions, cette œuvre ralentit la déambulation des visiteurs et engendre un questionnement sur l’origine de leurs convictions, qu’elles soient collectives ou non.

Aux étages inférieurs sont exposées différentes œuvres de l’artiste canadienne Nancy Davenport. Workers (leaving the factory, 2007) est une fresque vidéo qui relie des travailleurs européens et leurs souvenirs. La caméra effectue un long déplacement horizontal et saisit une multitude d’ouvriers qui semblent figés dans leur environnement de travail. Ces images, présentées dans une séquence ralentie, alternent avec une animation sommairement produite d’une fusée qui tourne autour d’une planète et que l’on dirait sortie de l’imaginaire du célèbre bdéiste Hergé. La fusée tourne en accéléré dans l’espace alors que le temps semble s’être arrêté sur Terre. Cette œuvre est inspirée de deux films, l’un des frères Lumière (Le voyage dans la lune, 1902), et l’autre de Georges Méliès (Le voyage au centre de la Terre, 1902), mais la singulièr combinaison des images agencées par Davenport crée une brèche temporelle énorme entre ces œuvres qui sont à l’origine du cinéma et les images des travailleurs. Elle expose ainsi les ramifications internationales du système économique actuel de la société occidentale.


Avec ReConstructions, Zeppetelli s’attaque à un sujet tout aussi riche que complexe. Il explore de façon intéressante le rôle des médias dans la construction simulatée de notre mémoire collective et des mémoires

Galerie René Blouin, 1 March – 12 April 2008

In Michelangelo Antonioni’s iconic 1966 film Blowup, a photographer thinks that he has captured the evidence of a murder. He obsessively makes enlargement after enlargement, hoping to piece together what might have transpired. The magnified image serves as a metaphor for perception and reality; things change as they viewed and reviewed.

With five new works presented at Galerie René Blouin, Pascal Grandmaison offers the viewer his own series of "blowups." The four pairings in the main gallery individually and collectively function as meditations on the sum of the parts of photography and cinema – lenses, views, flashes, and paper – and on the inherent complexities of references and signification. The dates figuring in the titles of Background I: 1912–2007 and Background II: 1912–2007 (2008) acknowledge Antonioni’s lifespans, the extreme close-ups of crumpled paper refer to his use of the dead time, a cinematic trope in which the viewer’s attention is drawn to the evidence of an action that occurred outside of the narrative space. It is this aftermath that creates dramatic tension, as the viewer must infer the event rather than watch it revealed.

In a small space adjacent to the main room, Grandmaison’s piece titled Increasingly Empty Forms (1928–1999, 2008), composed of twelve digital chromogenic prints mounted on Plexiglas, alludes to the life and work of another filmmaker, Stanley Kubrick. Like Antonioni’s films, Kubrick’s work bears hallmarks of his signature extreme close-ups generating dramatic tension. For his part, Grandmaison uses the close-ups of Kubrick’s biography to stress that images can’t tell the whole story. They do, however, exert their hold on the viewer by teasing out arresting moments for contemplation that become impossible to shake out of the imagination.

Nancy Davenport, Workers (leaving the factory), 2007. Installation DVD à écrans multiples, 4 min 32 sec
Made in Tehran – Six Women’s Views
Cicero Galerie for Political Photography, Berlin, Germany

The interest in the exhibition Made in Tehran: Six Women’s Views was immense. This is not surprising with photography by artists who call themselves “the children of the [Islamic] Revolution.” They are the next generation, after Shirin Neshat, and work in Iran, articulating urban life as they know and live it – in photo series. I was struck by their youth when I met three of the women in Berlin, and I wondered what makes their art so strikingly mature.

I asked Mehranéh Atashi how she was able to enter a traditional masculine powerhouse, the Zourkhaneh, where Persian heroes and clerics are venerated, combined with physical workouts and Sufi dances, for ecstatic experience. “I persisted, even after repeated rejections, until I got permission,” she said. “We have to fight hard to achieve our goals.” Clearly, persistence to claim a feminine space in a patriarchal society drives these women’s art. But so does the desire to attract Western viewers and collectors. Their exhibition history outside Iran is impressive; not so at home. Atashi brought to the Zourkhaneh a large framed mirror beside her analogue camera and photographed the men’s reflections, and with them their own. The resulting Bodyless: Selfportraits (2005) are an attempt to break what Pierre Bourdieu called the habitus, those embodied rituals by which a given culture sustains belief in its own obviousness, its ideology. The men, interestingly, allowed entry only after the artist explained that she would not photograph them, but their mirror image. Once she was wrapped in a long black scarf, nothing stood in her way. “The headscarf worn in public by Iranian women should not be understood as a separation device,” argued the German-based Iranian scholar Katarina Amirpour during a panel discussion at Cicero Galerie, nor is the chador a symbol of oppression. This black dress, worn by the dancer in Shadi Ghadarian’s eight digital photos ctrl+alt+delete (2005), is delightfully adorned with computer screen icons. The icons change in each photograph, becoming a dancing partner in one, where they are held in tight embrace, and building a ladder in the next. Their artistic usage is an iconic attempt to emphasize the artist’s online connectedness. Equally, they function as ideograms, rhetorical substitutions for a female voice, muted here, but clearly heard and understood. Michael Wamposzyc, who visited Tehran last summer, said that online exposure is very important since few exhibition venues are open to non-traditional art; however, access to YouTube is blocked. Importantly, Ghadarian manages the first Iranian website for photography www.fanoosphoto.com.

Photography is currently the preferred medium by artists in Iran. Ghazaléh Hedaya’t’s Ppeeshole (2006) photographs critique the activity of the Islamic watch committee, omnipresent in cities, ready to blame and punish when the public feminine dress code and other laws are challenged. Perhaps to avoid their wrath, Hedaya’t photographed her own passport – fingerprint, script, parts of her scarf-wrapped face, and her apartments’ interior – to make us see just as the spy would see with one eye pressed to the keyhole. With a 35 mm camera, she created engaging black-and-white close-ups that blur subject and object and are of a size related to the radius seen by the spy.

Similarly, Hamlia Vakili uses pictures of herself, but they are secondary to a process of digital montage. Untitled (2006) combines her passport photo and other body fragments placed against an old, crumbling stone wall that is loaded with symbolic potential.

In a genealogical pursuit, Gohar Dashhi rephotographed family photos taken in the 1960s and 1970s, and presented them in the Khanevadegi Ziyarat series (relating to family and pilgrimage, 2006). They provide glimpses into a pre-revolutionary Iran, its customs and dress, unknown to the artist. Remarkable in the older photographs is the fingerprint, script, parts of her scarf. “We have to fight hard to achieve our goals.” Clearly, persistence to claim a feminine space in a patriarchal society drives these women’s art. But so does the desire to attract Western viewers and collectors. Their exhibition history outside Iran is impressive; not so at home. Atashi brought to the Zourkhaneh a large framed mirror beside her analogue camera and photographed the men’s reflections, and with them their own. The resulting Bodyless: Selfportraits (2005) are an attempt to break what Pierre Bourdieu called the habitus, those embodied rituals by which a given culture sustains belief in its own obviousness, its ideology. The men, interestingly, allowed entry only after the artist explained that she would not photograph them, but their mirror image. Once she was wrapped in a long black scarf, nothing stood in her way. “The headscarf worn in public by Iranian women should not be understood as a separation device,” argued the German-based Iranian scholar Katarina Amirpour during a panel discussion at Cicero Galerie, nor is the chador a symbol of oppression. This black dress, worn by the dancer in Shadi Ghadarian’s eight digital photos ctrl+alt+delete (2005), is delightfully adorned with computer screen icons. The icons change in each photograph, becoming a dancing partner in one, where they are held in tight embrace, and building a ladder in the next. Their artistic usage is an iconic attempt to emphasize the artist’s online connectedness. Equally, they function as ideograms, rhetorical substitutions for a female voice, muted here, but clearly heard and understood. Michael Wamposzyc, who visited Tehran last summer, said that online exposure is very important since few exhibition venues are open to non-traditional art; however, access to YouTube is blocked. Importantly, Ghadarian manages the first Iranian website for photography www.fanoosphoto.com.

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