Espace Sculpture

Aude Moreau : Refinement Vacuum

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Citer ce compte rendu
It is no secret that art often serves to embellish opulent ownership and by extension to obscure wealth producing production process that are far from beautiful. In her monumental installation *Tapis de sucre 3* (shown at Fonderie Darling, March 20 – June 1, 2008) the artist Aude Moreau inverts this logic of embellishment to reveal, rather than conceal, the links between an object of cultural prestige—a carpet—and an industrially mass produced product—refined sugar—that ubiquitous consumer staple with its economic glory days and sinister plantation history. In conflating the real and metaphorical spaces associated with these objects the installation generates an implicit social critique that is made operative from within the materiality of the aesthetic display. The approach hinges on a clever use of trompe-l’œil technique. Usually such a technique is based on producing an illusion through careful artistry, an illusion so well rendered that the delight in the display displaces the awareness of its material fabrication. In continuation with countering the logic of embellishment Moreau uses the trompe-l’œil so that the illusionary display returns the viewer to its physical constitution and confronts him/her with the disillusion of an underlying reality squarely at odds with the beauty of the initial object.

The illusionary object in question is a 24’ x 57’ x 6” carpet with a large white rectangular centre bordered by a red and black motif perimeter. The viewer is at first bedazzled by the fact that what appears to be a woven carpet is actually made of a stupendous quantity of sugar (2 1/2 tons) and red and black pigments, all of which have been meticulously laid out to produce this convincing trompe-l’œil. It is in the way that the sugar carpet is interwoven with its immediate surroundings that propels the installation from a merely clever exercise in adroit craftsmanship to a compelling work of art that challenges ordinary perceptions and conceptions. The sweeping horizontality of the carpet and the imposing verticality of the large Fonderie Darling gallery space make for a perfect fit here—arguably the most successful use of this locale to date—and this both on a formal and referential level. In its grandeur the carpet adds a touch of airy expanse to the early modern industrial architecture of the space, and in turn the Fonderie’s imposing walls and windows buttress the objet d’art’s stately repose. Yet, this decorative pleasantness still operates on the level of embellishment and the illusionary. The disillusion appears when the material component of the carpet—the refined sugar—is articulated with the industrial history and realities that the premises bear witness to, and which have everything to do with economics, markets and agricultural labour: realities that the carpet as a symbol of bourgeois well-being and power ultimately serves to conceal—but in its sugar coated trompe-l’œil form it is precisely this concealment that the installation thwarts and undoes. This crucial link is further underscored by two barely visible and almost spectral black on grey murals on the gallery’s east wall. The first
mural shows an image of a plantation worker cutting sugar in a field, while the second displays tractors delivering sugar cane to a processing plant dotted with large metal columns which strangely echo and bridge into the gallery's similar looking metal columns. Without overstating the conjunction, these pictorial additions enable Moreau to clearly lay bare the enmeshed relation between industrial sugar refinement production processes—with their implicit history of exploitation and inhumanity—and cultural refinement and exclusive comfort of which the carpet is a rife symbol. Without overstating the conjunction, these pictorial additions enable Moreau to clearly lay bare the enmeshed relation between industrial sugar refinement production processes—with their implicit history of exploitation and inhumanity—and cultural refinement and exclusive comfort of which the carpet is a rife symbol. 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