2004 Summer Exhibition

Gallerists selected by Cay Sophie Rabinowitz

June 30 - July 31, 2004

Since 1996, apexart has worked with writers and gallerists to present its Summer Exhibition. Although the format has changed slightly over the years, the aim is to take advantage of the unexpected. For our 2004 Summer Exhibition, apexart invited Cay Sophie Rabinowitz to select two gallerists to each invite two artists whom they do not represent. Ms. Rabinowitz selected Brian Butler - who selected Efrat Shvily and Liliana Moro - and Henry Urbach - who selected Paul de Guzman and Wade Guyton.

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apexart’s exhibitions and programs are supported by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, The Kettering Family Foundation, the Peter Norton Family Foundation, Atria Group Inc., and with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts, a State agency.

This brochure is supported in part by The Elisabeth Firestone Graham Foundation.

2004 0204

cover: Paul de Guzman, View From Elmtz Side ... 2004
djppch: altered architecture book, plywood cover, 11 1/2 x 8 7/8 x 2"
choose artists who might nurture their reexamination of their professional practice. I suggested art works which would resist the trend towards simplifying the exchange of ideas. I also wanted to discourage the easy translation of a theme into a selection criterion. The result seems to be a group of works with a unified appearance, but with radically distinctive concerns. Each is elusive about its identity — an antidote to the commodification of an idea.

Wade Guyton appropriates modernist and minimalist shapes and products which he then reiterates, reconfigures, rescales, or redesigns. In the gallery these sculptures, made in wood, steel, or aluminum, are presented as if to be completely new. Though even in its most unlikely configuration a Breuer chair may always contain the memory of its significance, in the exhibition it appears too absurd to be endorsed by any company or installed in any home. This enigmatic steel drawing, made from an apparently rejected source, balances haphazardly on the edge of another formal object frequently used by Guyton, the isosceles triangle, and communicates with his work U Sculture, resting more comfortably on an opposite side. A literal translation of Guyton’s appropriation would wrongly limit the critical potential of his project, which thrives on being unresolved — especially about how to make a place where sculpture can convey meaning.

Paul de Guzman inserts himself into the canonical works of contemporary design and criticism by cutting sections from architecture books and anthologies which have become authorities on meaning and interpretation. While many a theory in the books appropriated and altered by de Guzman may in fact be disputable, the artist does not seem to be enacting his apparently irent attack on the books’ published content. As much as one might expect the book-object’s design to be linked to ideas professed within its once legible pages, it seems that a work’s design is subject to the artist’s whim and has little to do with the source material’s subject. A release from the impulse to interpret visual artistic practice through the automatic appeal to a few books of philosophy or architecture, Study for Weni Ber find Blaunitz ware... and Proposed Double Layout for T. P. seems a declaration of de Guzman’s right to be an artist and not merely an interpreter of theoines in books.

The dichotomy inherent in Paul de Guzman’s oeuvre is more complex than any literal translation of dissection into a meaningful gesture. The result can be likened to the complex logic of Efai Shvily’s photographs, described by Ariella Azoulay as being distinct from any photograph on the wall. A photograph usually is “dangling between two modes — between what’s depicted on the photographic paper and traces of the photographic act, between the two-dimensional image and the chaos of reality out of which it was forged, between being a silent picture on the wall and being (the traces of) a scrap of the world teeming with life.” Upon closer examination, Shvily’s images of buildings that look like architectural models do not communicate definitively. A repeated gaze, an analysis of the conditions surrounding each encounter, a serious study of the history of the occupied territories — even such genuine and conscious considerations of the work’s intention will end in a lack of resolution. No meaning can be predicated upon this photograph’s information; no translation can be enacted on its symbolic presentation. In Shvily’s work Untitled, I-92-1, the place is occupied yet barren, devoid of human spirit. Rows of half-built poured concrete foundations and box structures on a hillside in Untitled, A-94-2, seem both in process and interrupted, both invested with hope for a new beginning and abandoned as a hopeless cause, both a utopia in the making and one long since failed.

Likewise Liliana Moro’s Un Mondo senza testa (A World Without a Head) appears to be a stage set for ideal communication, but as an autonomous situation in the exhibition space, it confounds. The work’s uncanny power lies not merely in the inconstant materials and scale of the chairs, table, and paper guillotine, nor in the sound of cheering crowds surrounding an otherwise mute (or as yet unexpressed) configuration. More importantly, it originates in the work’s confounding of the viewer’s activity. Moro demands that the spectator become an active participant but decidedly only feigns to deliver an understanding.

Each of the works in this show somehow interrupts convention, leaving unfilled the expectation that form can be decisively linked to meaning. At first glance, these works seem formally rigid, minimal, reduced, and controlled. This makes them even more interesting as a group of works for communicating the failure of art to communicate. It becomes a celebration of the poetic, and of the possibility to look right but be wrong. Wade Guyton’s installation strategy makes a mess of our understanding the minimalist forms he has borrowed. In Shvily’s disturbingly quiet scenes of extreme violation there remains no division between what the work is about and how it communicates. De Guzman intimates that his engagement is an interruption of published ideas, but then demands that his cutting be otherwise evaluated. As the crowd cheers and viewers take a seat at one of the discordant chairs surrounding Liliana Moro’s elongated coffee table, it seems implausible that the paper guillotine has been borrowed from a children’s book. Given the complicity of most spectators, in exhibitions and in the world, it seems justifiable to interrupt, just once, the expectation that all will present itself as planned.

Cay Sophie Rabinoivitz ©2004

"Ariella Azoulay, "Photography as a Barrier to the Ephemeral Genesis" in New Horizons in Israel and the Occupied Territories, Rotterdam, WITTE DE WITH Center for Contemporary Art, 2003, p. 83.