

MODERN PAINTERS

The International Contemporary Art Magazine

February 2008
artinfo.com

HILARIOUS!

Michael Haneke's
shot-for-shot
remake of *Funny Games*

HEARTWARMING!

The empathetic
cinema of
Albert Maysles

HANDMADE!

Four artists
discuss the politics
of craft

THE ECSTATIC
ART AND LIFE OF

DOROTHY IANNONE

USA \$9.95 CAN \$12.50 UK £5.99



0 74470 04160 3

and organic images that can be found in tool-and-die manufacturing or on a walk through the woods. Organized by John Elderfield, this well-selected retrospective not only made a strong case for Puryear's significance, but also stood as a testimonial for the continued pertinence of a more subjective formalistic art practice, one that does not need to channel consumerism to establish its cultural voice. Indeed, his approach stands as a healthy counterpoint to that of such artists as Jeff Koons, Jason Rhoades, and Rachel Harrison.

Puryear's work also exemplifies how art can be political without being preachy or solipsistic. Take, for example, a work like *A Distant Place* (2005), a sculpture that evokes the acute political and ecumenical rift over conflicts in the Middle East. Inspired by the remarkable burl at the work's core, Puryear built a sculpture that reads as part fantasy birdhouse and part holy pilgrimage site, a conflation of incongruous images of innocence and fanaticism. The burl, an aberration in tree growth notable for its strength, is positioned as a natural wedge between a small architectural structure and its foundation. The structure in turn serves as a foundation for a minaret. Puryear's house of faith challenges the viewer to emulate in life its soaring reach, as it modeled a harmonious ideal grafted from dissonant sources.

Puryear's aspiration as an artist is not modest. He aims to uphold a fading idealism with reserved surety. The integration of natural and man-made structures that underlies his practice affirms human experience and engages assessments of aesthetic and social values. Form is a language, and Puryear's adherence to this paradigm reveals his fluency, one that has been honed over the artist's 40 years in the studio working from one sculpture to the next.

—JENNIFER R. GROSS

URS FISCHER

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE

Urs Fischer's sculptures modify the surface and structure of familiar elements and objects: wax, bread, gallery walls, mirrors, glue, fruit. Cast-offs are presented as broken chairs, dripping candles, dancing cigarettes, a fabled edible children's house. Materials draw their meaning from half-baked and contradictory ideas. Fischer's works question themselves yet go on with a shrug and a laugh.



URS FISCHER, *YOU*, 2007. INSTALLATION VIEW, GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, NEW YORK. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, NEW YORK.

At their most successful, his pieces take on a nihilistic but potentially critical aspect. That's what meaning one might derive from a hole in an art fair booth. But what good does it do to joke about the art business in that context? A critique is even worse. In his most recent outing, at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, a shrunken entrance led to a mammoth hole dug into the floor.

The formal success of the hole foregrounded the overwhelming effect of its, er, ah, creation; any humor was buried by the scale. The question "How much money did this cost?" quickly ceded to a sense of relief that someone had finally made this work. It's off the "art idea checklist," so to speak. I had the exact same feeling last year in Miami on seeing Adam McEwen's text-message paintings: well, at least we got that out of the way. At the opening, Fischer's hole was easily filled with the usual crowd of party hipsters (and the occasional art critic) drinking free beer. Even his newest—and maybe boldest—work was no match for the sinkhole of the artworld.

—H. H.

KARIN SCHNEIDER

ORCHARD

William Greaves's 1968 experimental film, *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One*, was made by following a set of instructions: keep one camera on the actors, one on the crew (including Greaves), and one on the simultaneous goings-on in Central

Park, where the film was shot. Beyond these guidelines, Greaves provided little direction, allowing for the resultant film to be directed by the crew and parkgoers as much as (if not more than) by the director himself.

A similar system was developed by Karin Schneider for her show "Image Coming Soon." Amy Granat, Eileen Quinlan, Melanie Gilligan, Sarina Basta, and Judi Werthein each provided contributions that were integrated into a display unit consisting of paintings made by Schneider and a structure made of two-by-fours and Plexiglas, which revealed all technical

resisting pat encapsulations—indeed, the show is too open ended to review in a comprehensive way. —MATT KEEGAN

ISAAC JULIEN

METRO PICTURES

Isaac Julien's new *Western Union: Small Boats* is the final part in a trilogy of film installations that includes *True North* (2004) and *Fantôme Afrique* (2005). While Julien's work is usually depicted as a critical engagement with issues of black identity and representation, these three pieces map a poetic historiography in which a cross-cultural encounter



ISAAC JULIEN, *WESTERN UNION: SMALL BOATS*, 2007. INSTALLATION VIEW, METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND METRO PICTURES, NEW YORK.

apparatuses, such as 16 mm film projectors, a slide projector, a laptop, and all their various cords.

A projection of light set up in the gallery by Schneider shone across the street, implicating the gallery's Lower East Side neighborhood with its throw. The interventionist spirit was heightened by the display at a nearby sneaker store of Werthein's "Brinco" shoes, which are designed to aid in crossing the US border from Mexico. These site-specific extensions further contextualize Orchard, an artist-run space that Schneider has helped develop and run over the past three years, in terms of its ever-shifting surroundings.

In addition to the aforementioned fixed works, Schneider invited other artists and writers to stage a performance or reading of their choice within the exhibition; like Greaves, she chose her players, emphasized the site, and then receded into the background. The fixed elements acquired new meaning depending on how the space was activated on any given day. Schneider successfully created a format that perpetually revealed its various takes, rewrites, and edits while

disrupts prior knowledge of real and imagined worlds. *Western Union* tracks the dangerous voyage would-be immigrants make from North Africa to Sicily. Precisely edited and scored across five screens (three of them adjoining, with two separate ones in neighboring rooms), Julien's 30-minute film presents impeccable images of chalky white cliffs, a rowboat bobbing on the Mediterranean, figures thrashing underwater, the lavish interior of Palermo's Palazzo Gangi, and bodies writhing up and down stone steps.

Although the film has a metaphoric narrative thread loosely tying everything together, the work derives its structure from a series of fragmented and stylized tableaux—so stylized, in fact, that certain moments approximate a fashion shoot, lending what is a gritty, harrowing, and sometimes fatal journey a slightly incongruous quality of slick sensuality. But if economic resources are distributed unevenly within and across societies, so too is the luxury to aspire. In this sense, beauty in Julien's work serves as a complicated signifier for desire's projected dreams.

—ALAN GILBERT