

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: FORM AS MEMORY:

HANS BELLMER, LIZ DESCHENES, SAM LEWITT, SCOTT LYALL,
EILEEN QUINLAN, RAHA RAISSNIA, JIMMY RASKIN, BLAKE RAYNE

Dates: February 4 – March 18, 2007

Reception: Sunday, February 4, 6:30 – 9 PM

Opening on Sunday, February 4, Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present *Form as Memory*, its first group exhibition of artists that have shown, will continue to show, or will soon have one-person exhibitions at the gallery.

The shelter at Hardt

The forest sinks off
And like buds, the leaves
Hang inward, to which
The valley floor below
Flowers up, far from mute
For Ulrich passed through
These parts, a great destiny
often broods over his footprint,
Ready, among the remains

— Friedrich Hölderlin (translated by Richard Sieburth)

In this fragment salvaged by Hölderlin himself and included in the 'Canticles of Night' that were the last poems he sent out for publication in 1803, the poet evokes the vivifying effect that a footprint, left by the distant passage of Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg¹, had on his native land.

If today there is a haunting murmur lingering on the horizon line of our cultural circumstances here in the late capitalist West, it might be best rendered intelligible by the simple phrase, *everything is possible!* By contrast to this apocalyptic notion, this exhibition proposes to focus on the formative role memory plays in the varied artistic practices brought together for the occasion. The meaning of memory implies a certain vertical integration of layers of time, or in our case, rather, the mutual contamination of different temporalities in the artwork.

In the films of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet, four of which have been screened at the gallery since its inception, distant blocks of time tend to be violently linked together, articulating a tense continuity out of decidedly discontinuous elements. In an attempt to translate this conception of time into vision, Dominique Païni aptly calls to mind the image of an archipelago. "An archipelago," he writes, "that is to say an organization of islands where the interstices between them make up a part of the whole. The sea and the earth, empty spaces and the full spaces, participate as much in the overall reality of the archipelago." This same image of the interstice

¹ Ulrich, Duke of Württemberg (1487 – 1550), was a storied warrior and fighter for the protestant cause.

might be brought to bear on Blake Rayne's recent paintings. In them his loyalty to the memory of a materialist paradigm collides with the discursive break activated by someone like Daniel Buren. The result is an unstable cohabitation of two incompatible regimes of the image within a single picture. By working on these separate conditions simultaneously, Rayne focuses on the gaps that constitute the medium, and in turn puts pressure on the fictional coherence of the sign, "painting", and on the image itself.

In the quadriptych, *Darkness Elsewhere*, Sam Lewitt stages a sequence of travelogue snapshots of a sublime island sunset taken at roughly one minute intervals. Six of these pictures are aligned into two columns on the first magazine-like page, with the time of day inscribed beneath each photograph. The second panel displays a mock advertisement for the consumer camera possibly used to snap the pictures. The camera's technical capabilities are listed in an orange circle positioned in the top right hand corner of the page. Moreover, YOUR LIGHT / YOUR COLORS / YOU'RE HERE & NOW, written in large capital letters, are the pronouncements surrounding the image of the camera. In the third panel, a commentary – titled *Darkness Elsewhere* – discusses a lunar eclipse in quasi-scientific terms as well as other cosmological phenomena relating to light and darkness. On the final sheet, another six-picture arrangement identical to the first page presents a similar snapshot repeated six times over. In post-post production mode, Lewitt darkens the image incrementally until total darkness is achieved and the sunset disappears. It is to be noted that in this last serialized image, an ambiguous moon-like shape emerges from the clouds.

The artist furthers here his precise examination of the problems of forms and surfaces of reading. The relation between image and text so ubiquitous to our times, and the manner in which linguistic and visual representations become impressed into the memory of their surfaces, are again central to the unfolding of the work.

Eileen Quinlan's photographic practice oscillates between physical acts of construction and destruction. In her ongoing *Smoke & Mirror* series, the increasingly abstract compositions intermingle material and immaterial elements. Broken pieces of mirror are often used to create hard-edged compositions that soon become perceptual mazes. Subtle color and light effects can originate from out of frame sources as much as they are the result of reflections from the strategic placement of the mirror fragments themselves. What is of particular interest here is that the work in general has the courage to embrace some of the modernist ideals of a bygone era, while it simultaneously speaks of its shattered dreams.

Two areas of investigation inspire Jimmy Raskin's multi-disciplinary work – comprised of performance-lectures, diagrammatic renderings, architectural models and illustrated characters. Raskin recounts events surrounding, on one hand, his corner-jump performance from 1989, and on the other, a tightrope walker from the prologue of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The autobiographical account pertains to Raskin's initial performance in which he repeatedly leapt into a corner. The videotaped sequence of jumps was synched to an audio recording of him reading a meditation on 'The Poet in general'. The latter investigation focuses on the fall of the tightrope walker – one of modern philosophy's first metaphors, as it appears in the prologue to *Zarathustra*. The two narratives are divergent tales, yet they share crucial aspects that prompt Raskin to perpetually re-tell and devise links between them, opening-up new perspectives. Firstly, both events are inaugural in nature – in each failure and vulnerability are confronted at the threshold of meaning. Secondly, The Poet is a primary subject that ties the events together. The role of The Poet is poised as a right of passage.

From the outset, there is an underlying tendency to diagnose Raskin's stringent devotion. Why does he linger in prologues, memorializing fallen metaphors? Why does he return to events surrounding his youthful performance in which his role as an art practitioner took an unexpected turn?

Scott Lyall's *pedagogical fidelity*, pf 4 is an imprint of more than 3,600 different shades of white to adhesive vinyl. These are symbolic colors only, stored by a computer's numeric memory, lacking visibility and fully separated from the materiality of painting. And as a store of numbers, they are separated from any principle of manifestation, defining color itself as alienated from every phenomenological encounter. Instead of painting, Lyall's formal procedure contracts the choice to print itself, its random spray of pale ink color, the block-cut surface, the print's adhesion. The internal principle is no more than a recollection of painted color, and the procedure is only an accession, an application, to color's subject. Displayed on the white walls of the contemporary art gallery, the subject of the imprint is undecidable, or else it shifts with viewing angles, between the white void of conceptualism and the documentation of abstract painting. "I think the print colors paper over the place of a painting", Lyall has said. "You get the *fleur de peau* of the image." A memory cleaves its zone of contact.

It might be productive to apprehend Raha Raissnia's dense, all over drawings and paintings from a perspective of writing. For the master of Islamic calligraphy, to recognize the shape of a single word often suffices to learn and recite by heart the calligraphic text at hand. This kind of foreign skill of the mind might have something to do with the mysterious temporality that, somewhat paradoxically, enables the artist to engage some of the towering achievements of abstract expressionism, as she weaves into being the assertive pictures she makes here and now.

Liz Deschenes' *Black & White* photographs are insistently grounded in the memory of the medium at the threshold of transformation from raw material into signifying object. In this series, both color images of photographed computer screens and gray photograms evocative of the "silver screen" maintain the proportions of various viewing formats, from cinemascope to HDTV. Through traditional darkroom practice, Deschenes develops, stops, and fixes images of photographic/filmic media at the moment when 'everything is still possible.' Paradoxically, the resultant monochromatic surfaces present a finite image of the state of limitless potentiality.

A radical rejection of the constituted world fuels Hans Bellmer's anti-naturalist drawings. Since he rarely drew from life, it was the memory of the point of protuberance in his object of desire – the female body in general – that served as the principle of organization in the anagrammatic building process of the image. For the drawing to be complete and considered successful, it was also necessary to allow what he termed his "physical unconscious" to contaminate the immaculate movement of his line.

In guise of a conclusion, I would like to suggest that even if Ulrich might not be remembered by all, it only takes his mention by the poet and a few verses to redirect the regular course of nature. But the poem still needs to be located and identified. I thank Sam Lewitt for that.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery at 212.995.1774 or info@miguelabreugallery.com.

Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM

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