



Comrades of Time, Comrades of Time at Cell Project Space



Comrades of Time, Comrades of Time, Installation view courtesy of Cell Project Space. Comrades of Time, Comrades of Time, Installation view courtesy of Cell Project Space.

If Modernism was, in a Greenbergian sense, a mode of calling attention to the conditions and limitation, then contemporary artworks—adopting modern formats—seem to champion what David Joselit calls 'transitivity', that is, works that are referring to information outside themselves. In other words, the specificity of formalism does not lie in the intrinsic value of visual art, but rather, beside it. Exhibitions such as *Comrades of Time, Comrades of Time* curated by Tobias Czudej at Cell Project Space, London attests a renewed confidence in formalism whilst acknowledging the material transformative ability of the work once it enters a network. The exhibition is the second response to Boris Groys's article *Comrades of Time* (2009), a text that triggers a reflection on contemporary art, specifically time-based art, and our present time, considered as a site from which modernist projects are revisited. Above all, the text feeds a debate on the supposedly primacy of moving images within the exhibition space over traditional art forms in their ability to register wasted time defined as a time that can not be accumulated to lead to an endpoint. With its selection of traditional media from ten international, American and European artists from different generations, the London show is an attempt to question the artists' tactics within the same *Zeitgeist*, and the relation of installation-based art to time and network.

Amusingly, the quote excerpts from an interview with Martin Kippenberger by Jutta Koether that opens David Joselit's essay *Painting Beside Itself* (2009) is of relevance to the analysis of the London show. "Simply to hang a painting on the wall and say that it's art is dreadful. The whole network is important! Even Spaghettini...When you say art, then everything possible belongs to it". Certainly, this awareness has increased with the omnipresence of the digital network, that enables the production, dispersal and reception of the produced artworks.

Although the works exhibited in *Comrades of Time*, *Comrades of Time* appears to sit passively, accumulating time as the hours passes, there is a sense of impermanence about them. They bear a resemblance with 'transitive paintings' that "demonstrate that once an object enters a network, it can never be fully stilled, but only subject to different material states and speeds of circulation" (Joselit, 2009, p.132). Indeed, Bryan Dooley's *Y-Mountain #3* (2013), comprising of a steel exercise bar and a print with hat and mountains motif, is reacting 'to the failures of the last iteration of the work, never complete or fully resolved'. The flesh-coloured silicon painting casts partly melted by Nikolas Gambaroff seems to accommodate a passage from one state to the next, from what was previously an original painting to its manipulated copies sitting on the edges of a low-cost wooden table poised in the middle of the first gallery space. In the back room, Wade Guyton's print *Angled* (2013) relates to the mutability of digital information.

Other works manifest through different tactics a sense of deferral, as if the experience of the work could not be fully achieved. Some of piece are made ungraspable by the simple fact of referring to transitory substances of water as observed in Magali Reus's *Parking (Jogs)* (2013) and Bas van den Hurk *Untitled* (2013). In the former, the ungraspable alludes to being in between states. The waiting room chairs reinforced the artist's interest in 'temporary moment of transience and deferral, before completion or arrival'. By leaving his work seemingly unintentional, van den Hurk attempts to postpone his oeuvre constantly using the idea of a longing as a primordial state of mind. With Marlie Mul's audio piece *Munching, Crunching* (2013) we are confronted with a pure aimless, repetitive background noise of a person masticating an apple that seems to be caught in an eternal repetition. Rhetoric of modern painting (the monochrome, the allover), present in Paul Cowan's *BCUASEE THE SKY IS BULE* (2013) and his scented yellow wall-based monochrome, serves to speak of a distance between the material and the self. Appearing beside themselves, the outsourced paintings invite the viewers to defer his engagement with the works, if not to disengage completely.

Similarly to the act of looking at moving images transferred into gallery space, the act of contemplation of those rather traditional artworks is one of a cool contemplation, defined as "the permanent repetition of the gesture of looking, an awareness of the lack of time necessary to make an informed judgement through comprehensive contemplation" (Groys, 2009). To a certain extend, this awareness hints at our divided attention and the temporal disconnection that characterizes the digital time, as being a time either here or there. A time that does not flow, but flicks as much as the digital networks disperse the artworks, delaying the moment of their completion. For Groys, that is precisely, the nature of our time : "a time of indecision, of delay – a boring time".

By Julia Marchand