
Nice To Meet You

With:

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Agenda

1. Simon Denny: New Management
 2. João Maria Gusmão + Pedro Paiva: Papagaio
 3. Vern Blosum
 4. Jeff Koons: A Retrospective
 5. Ed Atkins at Serpentine
 6. 13 Most Wanted Men: Andy Warhol and the 1964 New York World's Fair
 7. Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art, 1948-1988
 8. Carl Andre: Sculpture as Place, 1958-2010
 9. Franz West: Where is my Eight?
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Books

1. Sigmar Polke: Alibis
 2. Christopher Williams: The Production Line of Happiness
 3. THE PARTICLES (of White Naugahyde)
 4. Art Basel: Year 44
 5. Franz Erhard Walther: The Body Decides
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add some more to the pile: in one of his memorable lectures, Tirdad Zolghadr taught me (in turn quoting Boris Groys) that when works of art aren't provided with a text, they seem to have been delivered into the world unprotected, lost and unclad: "Images without text are embarrassing, like a naked person in a public space". At the very least they need a wall label, some sort of textual bikini. Critical art texts are not necessarily meant purely for the reader; rather, they are primarily there to avoid the embarrassment of discursive nudity. In the case of Gusmão + Paiva, the work is often dressed heavily enough with text to survive a trip to Antarctica. Moving forward, the list of names above reminded me of an intriguing lexical analysis of restaurant menus, featured recently in a literary magazine. One of the menus read: "Tender day boat scallops, lightly cajuned, pan seared with pancetta, caramelized leeks, sweet roasted red peppers, mint and pickled lentil medley, drizzled with a fava bean puree and organic pea shoots".

That's thirteen different components; at least seven ingredients, not counting seasonings, are being used, and some ten different techniques employed. The mishmash of buzzwords and techniques, things trying so hard to be sophisticated, makes what is probably a delicious dish sound completely unappetizing, as if thrown together at random. And yet, as in a perfectly crafted poem, the string of words somehow manages to illuminate the human condition and ambition - the desire to reach for the stars - in a few deft strokes. Brilliant. Gusmão and Paiva's shows are a little bit like that: the major exhibition that opened in June at Hangar Bicocca in Milan is a substantial proof. The show, title "Papagaio" and curated by Vicente Todolí, presents an impressive number of works made by the two artists over the last ten years. Most are silent 16 mm films less than three minutes long, but there's also three Camera Obscura installations and even a small cinema. It's an overdose of (grainy) moving images and an orgy of film projectors, with all their whirring and clicking. Of course, a 260-page catalogue accompanies the show (I have to say that it is an utterly beautiful and truly inspiring book. And I shouldn't say that, because it's published by the same company that publishes this magazine. But that's the way it is).

The video works in the show are often as simple (and weirdly mesmerizing) as a two minute long piece of footage of three frying eggs (superimposed in triple exposure). That is, as simple as the tender day boat scallops of the wordy menu "au naturel". But in the catalogue (where each work made by the Portuguese duo is commented upon, interpreted or simply accompanied by the words of the artists themselves and of a solid number of critics and curators), the eggs in the video are "lightly cajuned" by the evocation of Pyrrho of Elis and Victor Hugo. It drives us to ask ourselves: is textual clothing fundamental to art? Or rather should we all walk around proudly and beautifully naked (like the protagonist of Gusmão + Paiva's *Getting into bed*)? Of course, this is one of the many dilemmas of contemporary art, which places in front of us two contradictory and equally dissatisfactory alternatives: Gusmão and Paiva know this (they are so devoted to the concept of dilemmas that in 2012 they developed a whole exhibition around the concept of "trilemma", introducing a third, phantom proposition to the visitor's mind). Therefore, it is not by chance that one of the most persuasive arguments in favor of wordlessness comes from their latest (and extremely wordy) catalogue.

Let me explain: one of the pair's most iconic videos (and one of their most powerful and entrancing works) depicts a blind man in slow-motion biting a papaya with its skin (the textual bikini here is pretty essential: *Solar the Blindman Eating a Papaya*). In its simplicity, a beautiful piece indeed, and almost painful to watch. In the catalogue though, the work is accompanied by a fictional dialogue between a wine taster and a blind man. Their conversation ends with the first saying: "Some wines possess floral bouquets, others have fruity bouquets which remind me of pineapple or quince, others of toast and honey. Sometimes you find complex flavors that can range from vanilla and caramel to coconut, walnut, tobacco and truffles. And depending on the acidity and body of the wine, they can also be light as spring or broader, rich, strong and generous". To which the blind man replies: "But this is just stupid! How can you see so many meanings concealed in the composition of the wine when you drink it? Things are what they are, things just exist. Wine that might be toast would not be wine. Thank God wine is just wine, a stone is just a stone, and a papaya nothing but a papaya". Enough said? (Text by Nicola Ricciardi)

3. Vern Blosum

KUNSTHALLE BERN
Helvetiaplatz 1, CH 3005 Bern
kunsthalle-bern.ch

As most exhibitions do, this one starts with a story. At first glance, it's easy to think that Vern Blosum's exhibition at Kunsthalle Bern, curated by Lionel Bouvier, is not an uncommon one. In the archaeological dig of the past it seems for each new young artist, there's a re-discovered counterpart; the resurrection of figure forgotten by history, who for all intensive purposes may be forgotten just as quickly again. When you read a bit deeper, Blosum's story comes with its fair share of intrigue, deception, and subversion - a young artist decides to play the game of the then-nascent movement of pop art and finds brief success. Leo Castelli sells the work, not knowing Blosum's true identity. After mounting skepticism, Alfred H. Barr (a figure, who like most in art history, seem so foreign to our current landscape that they are almost a fiction themselves) begins a quasi-witch hunt, which led him to eventually find that there was no birth record in Blosum's "birth state" of Colorado. The discovery of his lack of identity led to the physical (and perhaps equally ideological) removal of his painting from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Unlike most exhibitions, Blosum's does not stop where narrative does. One could of course focus on the facts: the 45 paintings produced in his brief career that spanned from 1961 - 1964 and how they were contemporaneously positioned alongside Warhol. There's the history of all those he duped, recorded in text and exhibitions. One could wonder why he stopped, and what it his he's doing now. One could also position him as part of a tangential history of fictional artists invented by both artists and writers, though this would defeat his own motivations. Instead, in Blosum's case it is most interesting to focus on these motivations themselves, the circumstance of a young artist coping with the fact that what he values is fading in favor of their antitheses. In the progress-driven mindset of art-making, it's almost second-nature to dismiss a reactionary gesture as a conservative one, but Vern's demonstrates a keen awareness of the nascent changes that brought us to where we are today - de-skilling, a new scale of production, and the birth of an art market as we now know it.

It doesn't seem to be a coincidence that the first works were enlarged pages from botanical books, as all of all Blosum's works, whether in text or image point to the ephemeral, the fleeting. A ticking clock on a parking meter, a knowledge of a nearing end. They find affinities in the work of Baldessari, but despite their familiar strategies and aesthetic success, they are charged with a certain acidity. This does not read as cynicism, but instead as a tongue-in-cheek prophecy. It's often ambiguous whether he's suggesting his own end, or the inevitable end of the drag his paintings wear, an awareness that the landscape he witnessed forming was unsustainable. Enigmatic works such as *Planned Obsolescence*, which displays a cartoonish pigeon with its title underneath, act as a knowing smirk, suggesting that this distinction is for him to know and for us, to never find out.

The exhibition in Bern, which gathers the majority of his small oeuvre (30 of approximately 45 paintings are presented), poses an additional set of prompts. First, by presenting them in context with their narrative, it asks us to consider these works as being equally truthful as they are fictitious, they're paintings like any others. You could say that pop continued full speed without him but the second point this exhibition forces us to consider is that they're as contemporary as they are historic. With this presentation, as well as recent ones at Essex Street in New York and Tomworks in Los Angeles, their story is still being built today. With this, it's hard to say if Vern's prophecy was left unfulfilled. While Vern may have stopped and come to an end, with two paintings of a stop sign no less, it's only a question of when what the 60s set in motion will too. (Text by Alex Philip Fitzgerald)



2 João Maria Gusmão + Pedro Paiva, *Falling Trees*, 2014. Produced by Fondazione HangarBicocca, Milan. Courtesy: the artists, Fondazione HangarBicocca, Milan and Galeria Fortes Vilaça, São Paulo; Galeria Graça Brandão, Lisboa; Sies + Hölke, Düsseldorf; ZERO..., Milan



3 Vern Blosum, *STOP*, 1964 and *Out of Order*, 1962