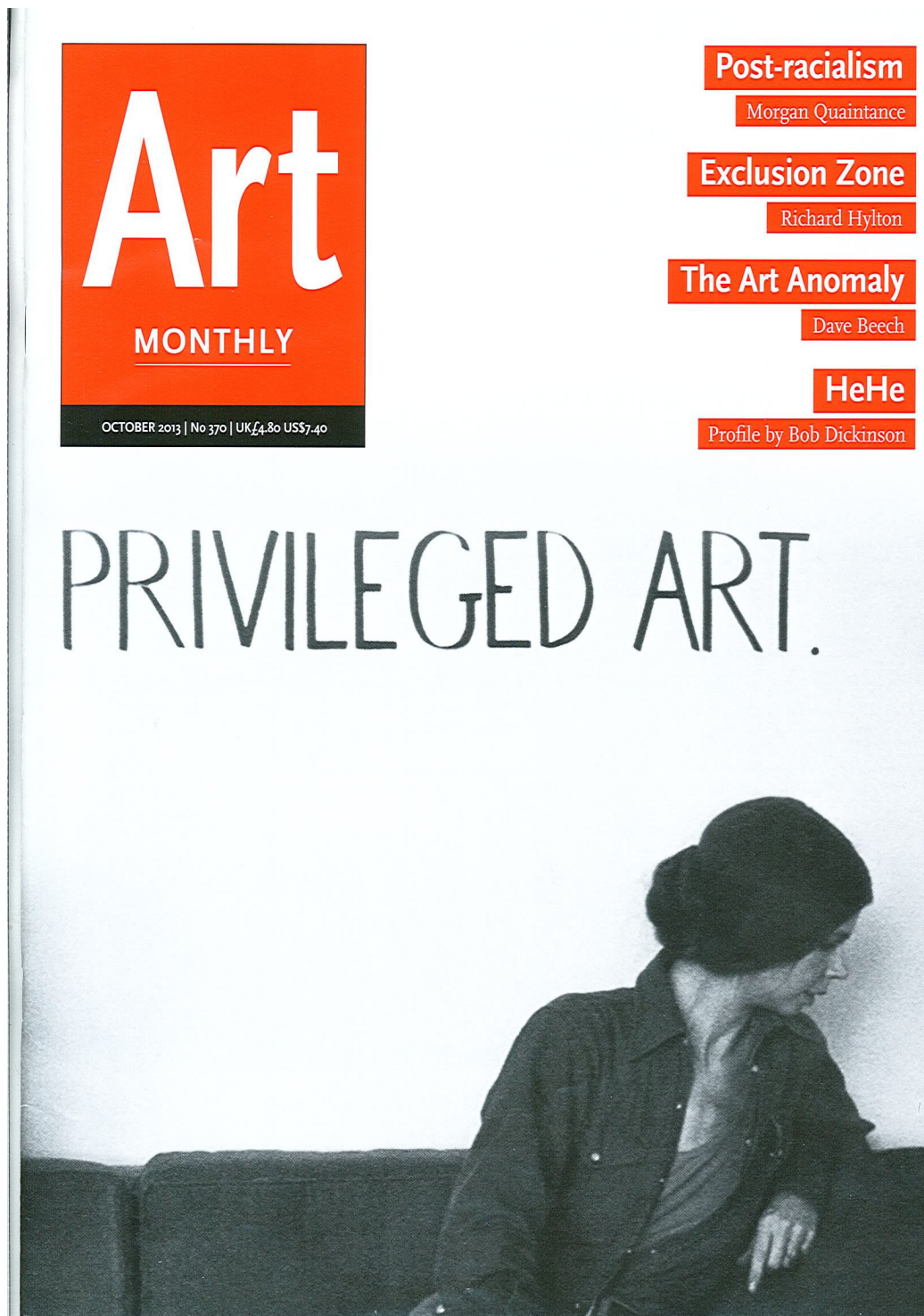


CONTINENTAL DRIFT

Konzeptkunst in Kanada: Die 1960er und 70er Jahre

19.04.-08.09.2013

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Examining the conditions of the present-day worker, Marianne Flotron's multi-channel film *WORK*, 2011, depicts a therapeutic intervention in a Dutch corporate setting. Using techniques from the Theatre of the Oppressed and guided by its director, participants search their souls, uncovering their true feelings about their living and working conditions. The resulting sections of footage are presented across four screens installed in a room isolated from the main gallery space. Following a residency in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Aileen Doran is currently devising ways to synthesise her experience. Her photographic and text-based contributions to the exhibition's publication focus on the poverty and inequalities of workers in the region's garment factories, outlining the precarity of globalised labour. Doran's new works have gathered momentum, combining digital stills, audio and dual-language textile banners which locate a more hopeful pop-optimism in the relentlessly industrious process.

Toril Johannessen's *Words and Years*, 2010, employs capital's hard-edged data aesthetic to meticulously map the fluctuating use of key words such as 'hope' and 'reality' across a range of journals and publications since the late 1800s. Similarly, Hito Steyerl's *Red Alert*, 2007, deconstructs codified vocabularies and reproducibility in an era of global terror. With a future-orientated trajectory and a strong theoretical grounding in Marxist critique, Colin Darke's *The Year of the Revolution – Remove as Appropriate (or hand over to the barbarians)*, 2011, consists of 200 copies of Rosa Luxemburg's book *The Accumulation of Capital* published in 1913. Viewed in multiplicity, the collective books become abstract, which, on a sculptural level, has infinite appeal.

Presenting at the first of two scheduled seminars, Shuddhabrata Sengupta of Raqs Media Collective spoke pensively about 'time' as an omnipresent power and driving force of labour, which served to situate the group's practice across spatial and temporal dimensions. Raqs Media Collective's *The First Telegram from the Last International*, 2013, is a time capsule interred within the gallery's disused fireplace, to be opened on 26 August, 2113 – exactly 200 years since the start of the Dublin Lockout. This act of 'putting away a box of time' warranted some reflection on assembly-line production targets, 'time theft' as a corporate crime and the erosion of distinctions between work and leisure through technological commodification, while also functioning to reaffirm the very purpose of this exhibition.

In marking history, the process of commemoration aims to understand why something is worth celebrating and to 'seize the time to make it memorable'. Occurring at a point of convergence between disparate histories, the timeliness of this exhibition also indicates an acute awareness of context. Providing a temporary 'distraction' from a troubled militant past, and the effects of mass unemployment felt in the region since the decline of manufacturing industries, the UK City of Culture 2013 programme proclaims 'A New Story for Derry-Londonderry'. As a counter to such slogan-orientated, authoritative claims, 'Momentous Times' suggests conversely that 'there are no clear answers on how to proceed'. In responding to the Lockout centenary, this exhibition, along with concurrent programmes in other venues north and south of the border, reactivates a focused discussion on the inherent themes of labour for a contemporary audience. Once subjects reserved for the political left, the forms and conditions of labour (like political corruption and the state of the banks) have become mainstream conversation points. With precarity defining a post-industrial western workforce under

a macroeconomic jobless growth strategy, and mass protests by industrial workers in Asia and the Middle East highlighting the dubious role of western multinationals in these scenarios, it is hard to identify a set of issues more pertinent or worthy of exploration and representation in the visual arts. ■

JOANNE LAWS is an arts writer based in the west of Ireland.

## Continental Drift – Conceptual Art in Canada: The 1960s and 70s Part II

Badischer Kunstverein Karlsruhe 28 June to

8 September

'Continental Drift' reviews a significant body of Conceptual Art produced by over a hundred artists who were making work in Canada from roughly the mid 1960s through the end of the 1970s. Canadian nationals, émigrés and visitors to the country are all accounted for in this large show, which raises the question why, given such a plethora of work, it has been so overlooked, especially considering the number of revisions of Conceptual Art in exhibition-making since the early 1990s. While the US and western Europe have usually been the focus of its development, with New York around 1967 seen as its nucleus, this show demonstrates how Conceptual Art simultaneously flourished in localised forms up and down regions of Canada, distinguishing its own take on the then burgeoning art practice.

Yet operating from the periphery is precisely fitting with Badischer Kunstverein's ongoing recovery of forgotten art histories. It also has an uncanny knack for making museum-grade shows; one could imagine an exhibition of this magnitude on an even larger scale. However, it is testament to the ability of this regional kunstverein to perform a task usually assigned to major institutions. This isn't purely David taking on Goliath though; the relationship between the centre and the margins correlates with an aspect of Conceptual Art that attempted to decentralise art from the capitals. So it is only appropriate that this work finds a European host on the outskirts too.

No doubt due to the sheer amount of work collected, the exhibition was divided and shown in two consecutive parts, and arranged thematically rather than, as in previous incarnations in Canada, being divided geographically. Part two, which was installed when I visited, was split into sections – Language, Site,

Carole Condé and  
Karl Beveridge  
...It's Still Privileged Art  
1976 artists' book cover



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'Continental Drift'  
installation view

Geography; Between Studio & Business and Body Politics – the first and largest of which was carried over both instalments as a way to introduce and map out the expanse of Canada, its urban centres and the vast terrains and vistas in between. It begins appropriately enough with *Canada in Parentheses*, 1969/99, by Bill Vazan in collaboration with Ian Wallace, who between them enclosed the country within gigantic brackets drawn in the sand on the east and west coastlines. It is easy to forget how big a country Canada is, and this piece likewise considers it as an afterthought. A number of artists chart their dislocation as responses to being remote.

Roy Kiyooka's photo-narrative road trip *Long Beach to Peggy's Cove*, 1971, highlights the ease with which conceptualism sat with the everyday experience. There is a naturalness and charm to the way landscape was used conceptually. Several films simply document short journeys, while photo series depict cross-country excursions and *dérives* around city streets. In Françoise Sullivan's *Promenade entre le Musée d'art contemporain et le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal*, 1970, the artist documented a walk she made between two cultural institutions; one old, one new. While this could be seen as critique, it also showed Sullivan's quiet rediscovery of her city.

Although the categorisations used for the show guided one through its density, the work classified under Body Politics felt slightly hindered; rooted too much within a broader context of its time, despite containing strong works by Lisa Steele and Martha Wilson which strayed from the show's otherwise governing

sensibility. Intermediately, though, the pieces in *Between Studio and Business* extrapolated other themes that chimed topically with contemporary practices informed by ephemeral technologies available for self-publishing and promotion. Likewise the prevalent use of new – at the time – media not previously employed as art resonates with a value that, say, the internet has for artists nowadays in disseminating images and ideas. While conceptual artists rejected the individuality of the autonomous artist and art object, it is possible to see the influence on a younger generation of artists who appropriate business models, easily reproduce media and utilise methods of distribution in some of the work included in this show. This was most evident in material attributed to numerous entrepreneurial, homespun collectives and magazines such as *Art Metropole*, *Archive Privileges* and *FILE Magazine* by General Idea. Likewise, postcards often recur as a popular medium suited to curated, distributable exhibitions, such as 'Image Bank Postcard Show', 1971.

In the corresponding reading material, Jayne Wark identifies that in Canada, conceptualism's relationship to capitalism was less in opposition than has been perceived in more prevalent readings of Conceptual Art. Rather than reject it as a political structure, several Canadian artists worked within it, such as N.E. Thing Co, a registered business founded by 'co-presidents' Iain and Ingrid Baxter, who famously designated things – ranging from views of Canada to works by Ellsworth Kelly – as aesthetically claimed or rejected (Reviews AM369). Setting up these quasi-businesses, companies, agencies and organisations, as well as indulging in the material that accompanied such endeavours, obviously appealed no end to artists in the show, as evident in the numerous letterheads, business cards, rubber stamps and branded objects. One vitrine contained a wonderful collection of paraphernalia and cutlery for an ice cream parlour called EYE SCREAM started by N.E. Thing Co in 1977. While the dematerialisation of the art object and redistribution of artistic practice (from individual to collective) appear as counter-capitalistic gestures, as Lucy Lippard recognised in N.E. Thing Co, some artists actually liked the form of corporate strategies and structures.

That is not to say that art produced in Canada was docile, apolitical and lacking in criticality. Image Bank's *Off the Air Coverage of the Peanut Campaign* from 1974 is a video collage of television footage documenting the political campaign of artist Vincent Trasov who, dressed as Mr Peanut – an iconic logo for a US snack-food company – ran for mayor in Vancouver. This offensive mainly consisted of the anthropomorphised peanut, complete with top

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hat, monocle, cane and spats, tap-dancing through the streets of the Canadian city. Satirising political campaigning ('Mr Peanut doesn't speak because politicians have nothing to say') through the viral dissemination of a popular and recognisable image, such as Mr Peanut's popularity that Trasov gained over 2,000 votes, enough to cover the cost of the nomination. If politics can be art, why not have an artist as mayor?

Among the *faux* bureaucratic venturing there is a wistful appeal for the fictitious, such as in Paul Woodrow's poster for the *Bureau of Imaginary Exchange*, 1976, which advertises a travel agency offering holidays to be had in your own mind. The overwhelming volume of material in the exhibition sometimes leads one to question the legitimacy of some of these activities and to speculate how far they were actually realised. However, that is the appeal of the remote in this respect; through its covert, critical distance from the centre, complexity and myth are attained in the slipstream and, rather than be subsumed by dominant discourses, help question its authority. ■

SAIM DEMIRCAN is curator at Kunstsverein München, Munich.

## The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things

Nottingham Contemporary 27 April to 30 June

Impressive in its heterogeneity and depth of research, Mark Leckey's dazzling show of a hundred or so items includes downloaded YouTube videos, artists' HD films, contemporary and historical drawings, paintings, photographs and illustrations, manufactured appliances and enlarged manuscript images. This is an energised cabinet of curiosities grouped by morphologies like virtual bodies, monsters, sound machines and monumentalised vehicles that invariably comprise fragments. Like a voodoo archaeology we reach integrality only by piecing together dispartes. The vehicle monuments include a Richard Prince car hood sculpture, a Nissan clay concept model and crystalised engines by Roger Hiorns. Another grouping on animal intelligence is dominated by a 10-metre-high Felix the Cat inflatable watching over a red wax honeycomb sculpture by Tomas Libertiny, a Malian Boli, or power object, and a psychotic cat drawing of Louis Wain's.

We might wonder why there is this convergence of

*wunderkammer* shows that includes Rosemarie Trockel's 'A Cosmos' at the Serpentine Gallery, Massimiliano Gioni's 'The Encyclopedic Palace' in Venice (for which Cindy Sherman recycled Trockel's selections as part of her own *wunderkammer* contribution) and Ralph Rugoff's 'The Alternative Guide to the Universe' at the Hayward (see Features, Editorial and Reviews AM368). Ahead of these was Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's 'brain' as a conceptual hub for Documenta 13. One reason might be the new prominence of English-speaking philosophers of matter, like Graham Harman and Jane Bennett, whose work is reasonably accessible and who welcome art practice as a model for ontological thinking.

Leckey's installation differs from all of the above by including a number of industrially made items alongside contemporary artworks. In a way that mimics a design or natural history museum, he sets up tableaux of objects in front of vibrantly coloured walls or enlarged reproductions of old master paintings (notably Piero di Cosimo's *The Forest Fire*, c1505). Shown in a recessed chroma-key green bay, as if from Frankenstein's IKEA, are body parts like Jim Shaw's *Dream Object (Digestive tract sculpture)*, 2007, its intestines arrayed like radiator bars, and Toyen's painting *Phantom Object*, 1937, showing an eyeball in a barren landscape. Between them are three heads: William Blake's death mask, a medieval stone gargoyle and a *Dr Who* Cyberman helmet. On the floor rest Robert Gober's *Man Coming out of a Woman*, 1993-94, and Herman Makkink's *Rocking Machine*, 1969-70, the giant penis sculpture used to lethal ends in *A Clockwork Orange*.

The uncanniness of such things distracts from Leckey's intent to demonstrate the way that cybernetics understands the circulation of ideas and images. The show visualises themes from Leckey's performance lecture *The Long Tail* (Reviews AM324) where he explains the persistence of overlooked minor ideas (the tail) in relation to successful ones (the head). Cybernetics, Leckey explains, reveals that the feedback loop of communication systems increases as it modifies information flows with each recurring cycle. Ideas originating in the social margins can expand their constituency and agency across the internet by becoming seeds of larger units like torrent files. Here is Leckey's redemptive move that imagines a knowledge Utopia without, however, reflection on who this knowledge protects and privileges. Moreover, the internet's neutrality and network promiscuity allow all perversions and enthusiasms to flourish, whether neo-Nazi collectives or organic farmers.