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MagMag



EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Coming to Terms

by Xenia Benivolski

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Carl Trahan: Doppelgänger (2008). Paint, plaster. Image courtesy the artist.

Coming to Terms

Featuring work by: Carl Trahan, Simon Glass, Nicoline van Harskamp, James Clar,
Haegue Yang, Thea Jones, Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay
Jackman Humanities Institute/Justina M. Barnicke Gallery
Toronto
To June 15, 2014

If there is something to take away from *Coming to Terms*, it is that an exhibition about finding intrinsic value in cultural difference can be cleverly punctuated by its unusual and thoughtful choice of exhibition space. Curated by independent Toronto- and Regina-based curator John G. Hampton, *Coming to Terms* is a nuanced and sensitive take on the subjectivity that accompanies language.

The exhibition traced thematically the trajectory of "International Art English" by Alex Rule and David Levine, an essay on international language use in the context of art writing commissioned by *Triple Canopy* in 2012, and arguably the most viral and viable piece of art writing that year online. As an exploration of multiplicity in languages, *Coming to Terms* challenges the hierarchical ideas presented in IAE with a more subtle look at the gaps between language; or what can be somewhat summarized as translation. Indeed, in the piece of writing accompanying this show, the curator states that the exhibition is structured around three overlapping themes: deconstructionist translation; hegemonic anglophonization and its effects; and intersemiotic translation.

Hampton continually references the focus translation as a starting point for the emergence of meanings that complicate and resolve language. Referencing intuition in translation cast an interesting light on the naturalistic, human forces that insert themselves into the academic realm, emphasizing the fact that accurate translation requires a genuine cultural understanding and a certain amount of empathic intuition. There is something touching about the inclusion of the term intuitive, an adjective that nods towards studio practices and art making. Although this is not the first document to make an analogy of artistic practice and linguistic translation, Hampton makes a curious reference to the use of this meta-process by foreign (or, rather not English-based) artists who look for the gaps in translation to create more space for free-range meaning and come to

terms with the differences.

An interesting departure point from one of the more prevalent works in the exhibition: On the Tower of Babel by Simon Glass is a text from the Bible, perhaps the most mistranslated document of all time, or, maybe, the document whose rampant paradoxical misinterpretation has been most consequential. Glass uses a questionable decision by a translator to insert the word *confusion* after the name Babel, launching into a spiraling study of biblical passages in the story of Babel in six installments on the walls of the Institute. Another highlight is Nicoline Van Harskamp's highly convincing video work *The New Latin* (2010), which depicts a public conversation between the artist and Alexandru Dima on the subject of "expressive power in contemporary cultural production". The two had memorized the discussion in Romanian phonetically and are performing as speakers in front of a seated crowd. The subject of the conversation, syntax and dialect, is as prevalent to the conversation as its medium.

Some of the other works such as Haegue Yang's *Three Kinds in Transition* (2008) video and Thea Jones's *Restitching III* (2010) elaborate on the intuitive, chain-reaction aspect of linguistic intricacy and its connection to practice. The fruitlessness of cultural expressions and linguistic forms highlights a wide and fruitful model of miscommunication emerging in the visual art field in conjunction with the globalization of the art market, where the medium is charmingly obtuse and, therefore, inherently political. To face this statement is to face the challenges we observe as makers of culture and the monolith presented to us by North American culture.

Benny Nemerofsky

Carl Trahan

Coming To Terms

Haegue Yang

James Clar

Justina M. Barnicke Gallery

Nicoline van Harskamp

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