



FAST AND LOOSE (MY DEAD GALLERY): LONDON 1956-2006 LONDON

Indeed, Sternberg and Jenkner identify the flicker as film's radical moment. Black frames separate image cells. Fighting back, these imprint the brain with imagistic retinal afterburns that straddle the blank seconds between frames. Applied to representational images or to non-objective manipulations, these strobe-like moments allow for the cognition of single-frame images, albeit in connected streams. Hence, the curators' assertion of shared cognitive and perceptual properties between the frame of the single film cell and the frame of the singular canvas.

The phenomenological process of looking at static, painted surfaces is also scrutinized in *Pulse*. Monica Tap skillfully plays with painted representations of blurred landscapes captured from moving cars on cell-phone video sequences. Angela Leach updates 1960s Op Art strategies in a tongue-in-cheek way. Nicole Collins physically carves and scrapes encaustic surfaces into optically sumptuous propositions. Contemplative, each of these paintings requires time—as does film. This is the time of hyper-scrutiny, where optical information generates a fast-paced visual rove around the canvas. Consequently, an unnerving tension arises in many of the exhibition's juxtapositions of film and painting. Viewing temporal films calls for a type of time that is out of synch with the hyper-speed of looking at single paintings. Ultimately, *Pulse's* pairing of film and painting forces us to question two key assumptions: the immediacy of film as a time-based art form and the widely assumed static qualities of painting.

It is this mix of visual reading times that holds *Pulse* together. Yet, Sternberg and Jenkner's project presents an additional material conundrum. The films are presented on small, wall-mounted plasma screens between groupings of larger, well-lit paintings. Many of these films were originally produced for the warmer-colored bulbs of 16mm projection. They have been

transferred to DVD, losing much in the process. Here, they recede within the small, cool pixel-thickness of glass, whereas the paintings register as warm, textural, layered, topographic surfaces built up from their canvas and substrate planes.

Entering the gallery, I found the shifts of scale between large paintings and small, flickering monitors optically irritating. Regardless of its medium, each piece calls for its own unique viewing condition and time. In front of each work, a certain appropriate physical viewing space is required. One's cone of vision can rarely tolerate the peripheral, optical/retinal invasion of neighboring pieces. As a testament to the success of this curatorial adventure, however, something else happened, once I got acclimatized. The process of thoughtful looking made it possible to consider the films and paintings together, at the level of intellectual construction. It also pressured cultural assumptions about spatial readings of time-based films and time-based readings of spatial paintings.

—Peter Dykhuus

If a tree falls in the forest but nobody is around to hear it, does it make a sound? The Centre of Attention's exhibition *fast and loose (my dead gallery): London 1956-2006* [Fieldgate Gallery; October 13—November 5, 2006] seems to be asking this question with its survey of "radical, interesting, avant-garde spaces and endeavours in London in the last 50 years or so." More than a dozen galleries, magazines, and projects are celebrated in the warehouse-sized gallery. Aside from their underground ethic and emphasis on the artistic value of the curatorial space, they all share the fact that they failed, leaving little or no documentation behind. Hung on the wall next to a spread of magazines from The Women's Art Library/Make and a washing line loaded with *Signals'* regular and revelatory publication, the statements of the founders of Indica, 2B Butler's Wharf, and Arts Lab are treated with as much reverence as the artistic output of the artists they commissioned and collaborated with.

The curators write that these enterprises' failure is an injunction to fail again, and better. Indeed, it's easy to see the work and testimonials as inspiration, a DIY call to get out there and make your own. One could spend hours—as we did—reading the material that has been carefully archived here, alongside videos by the neonaturalists, John Hopkins, Sue Hall, and many others, and the remains of opening night performances by David Medala and Tina Keane. NeTWork 21 and Fantasy Factory's commitment to public broadcast and determination to provide access to the then-new, exciting medium of video still sizzle with novelty and a progressive attitude that belie the space's nostalgic atmosphere. Beyond the more immediate pleasure of discovering obscure facts and pioneering yet forgotten ideas, the exhibition succeeds in offering an apposite response to recent debates about institutional critique.

Last year, Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson curated *There is Always an Alternative* at the temporarycontem-

ABOVE, LEFT: installation view of *Pulse: Film and Painting After the Image*, left to right: **Frederic Worden**, *Here*, 2005, flat screen monitor, headphones, 16mm film transferred to DVD, 11 minutes, color, sound; **Angela Leach**, *Abstract Repeat Wave Large #3*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 78 x 78 inches (courtesy of the artists and Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Canada; photo: Stephen Fisher); RIGHT: installation view of *fast and loose (my dead gallery): London 1956-2006*, foreground: **NeTWork 21**, 1986, London pirate television (courtesy of the artists and The Centre of Attention, London)



porary Gallery in London. The exhibition proposed a history of alternative art practices from the early nineties that, in the words of the curators, "resist, undermine or otherwise oppose the closures, absences and exclusions in dominant art discourse and practice." Since then, *Art Monthly* has published a series of discussions and articles wherein writers Lisa Le Feuvre, Peter Suchin, Jakob Jakobsen, and Dave Beech have argued about the possibility of an outside and the potential for critique within art institutions. Beech asserted that "if institutionalisation once lurked ominously in the distance for the avant-garde radical, today it is instantaneous, ubiquitous and unexceptional." Le Feuvre rebutted that art had never been—nor could it be—autonomous from the institution and that "a counter position underlines the power and success of the state by providing a harmless outlet for radical ideas." The debate continues, but one senses that the radically oppositional stances featured in *fast and loose (my dead gallery): London 1956-2006* have lost much of their currency in the cultural and socio-economic context of contemporary London. As the optimism of the London Free School gives way to BANK's cynicism, the exhibition's chronology implies a criticality of diminishing returns. In this context, Beech and Hutchinson's insistence on the omnipresence of an alternative no longer seems even admirable or naive. It is just inapplicable to the conditions of art production, clouding, as Le Feuvre complains, the possibility of discussing "a more specific idea of the terms under which a reduction of critical content takes place."

However, while there may not always be a place for an alternative, a counter institution that does more than consolidate power, past institutions' failures are always by definition alternatives to the existence of those of the present. Such temporal alternatives are instructive in that their otherness is complete, no longer operating in relation to current power structures. As such, they can impregnate the future with ideas of what was and might be again. Indeed, it is this retroactive futurism that gives the statements on display in *fast and loose (my dead gallery): London 1956-2006* their surprisingly contemporary impact. It's as utopian blueprints rather than archival documents that the dead galleries in this graveyard can rise and play the zombie golf once staged by BANK's founders. In answer to the zen koan about the tree, then, The Centre of Attention's show suggests that, regardless of the sound the tree might make, it is certain to rot and decompose into bacteria that will feed the ground for years to come. Alternatives may not exist in space, but they can in time.

—Pil and Galia Kollektiv

ANDREW HEWISH LONDON

Andrew Hewish's exhibition *The Insubstantial Pageant* playfully elucidates the artist's thought process (Nolias Gallery; October 4—17, 2006). In this ironic parade, he inserts objects and architecture into large and colorful theatrical settings that mix time, place, and geography. Hewish has culled these from contexts whose symbolic meanings continue to resonate. As such, he positions himself as the director of a pictorial play of civilization; he uses objects, buildings, and monuments the way others would use actors. In about half of the works on view, he enlists a painted scenery as the backdrop against which objects act out surrealist dramas—much like a theater set. The remaining works present individual objects or monuments floating in space.

For *Antoinette's Ruff*, 2006, a watercolor, gouache, and ink work on paper, Hewish excerpted the titular collar from Jean-Étienne Liotard's 1762 drawing of Marie Antoinette, and suspended it in a white void. He refers to the subjects of his drawings as "insistent objects," a term that, used in the theater to describe significant props, is in keeping with the overall theatricality of his work. In Hewish's version, the ruff becomes a concentrated and purified image of an upright, dark pink, fluted and circular form floating in white space. Centered on the sheet like an unlikely slice of rose-colored pineapple, the collar is also rotated up from Liotard's rendition. Here, the ruff simultaneously condenses, abstracts, and mobilizes the historical event—not without humor, Marie Antoinette's collar stands in for her impending beheading.

Hewish often uses Marie Antoinette as a symbol of the futility of life's pleasures and of the certainty of death. The regent built a playhouse on the grounds of Versailles. There, she could play at being a peasant. Hewish depicts this building in *Antoinette Enlightens the West*, 2006. A composed landscape, this watercolor also features a blazing sky. A bright red disembodied arm occupies center stage. Holding a torch, it is seemingly extracted from the Statue of Liberty. To its left lies the

ghostly blue façade of a building that is currently used as an entertainment arcade in Budapest's Városliget Park. The artist clearly enjoys orchestrating monuments as actors to present farcical parades as historical dioramas.

Before finding its way onto the Statue of Liberty—whose official title is *Liberty Enlightening the World*—this arm belonged to an unsuccessful monumental sculptural project entitled *Egypt Bringing Light to Asia*. The façade of the entertainment arcade was originally designed for the Hungarian Parliament building. Like peasant dwellings turned into Marie Antoinette's aristocratic playground, use and misuse do reconfigure ideals and the meaning of monuments, suggesting that existential unpredictability impacts people, regimes, objects, and spaces alike. The Hungarian architect did not know that he was designing an entertainment arcade. Nor did Marie Antoinette foresee that she would become iconic chiefly for having been executed. Hewish simultaneously traces and furthers this history of resignification by casting his performers and composing complex and allusive pictorial dramas.

Hewish appropriated the exhibition's title and motif from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He quotes from the speech in which Prospero concludes with sadness that the beautiful world he has created for himself is empty because it is an illusion detached from anything of real value. Prospero, the magician, is a metaphor for the artist. Art is an illusion woven by the hand spinning fantasies. The artist creates a new fictional world, albeit inevitably fading and fleeting. By acknowledging the inherent futility of any artistic attempt to create fixed meaning, Hewish, like Shakespeare, endows his works with the power to transcend this dilemma even as they depict it.

—Deanna Sirlin

ABOVE: Andrew Hewish, *Antoinette's Ruff*, 2006, watercolor, gouache and ink, 23 x 33 inches [courtesy of the artist and Nolias Gallery, London]



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