

"Reading Cinema, Finding Words: Art after Marcel Broodthaers"

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ABSTRACT

Despite a few lukewarm works (Anri Sala and Eric Baudelaire) Isaac Julien's *Fantôme Afrique* stood out, as did Miwa Yanagi's *Gloria Sc Leon, 2004*, where high school students awkwardly re-enacted scenes from John Cassavetes's *Gloria* and Luc Besson's *Leon: The Professional* on one screen, while the second showed the simultaneous busywork of the student production crew. Akram Zaatari's video *Tomorrow Everything Will be Alright, 2010*, seemed most popular with gallery-goers, showing a chat between two ex-lovers, but with the short, clipped dialogue usually found in text messages, on Twitter, or on Skype. The clever twist: It's all done on a manual typewriter, right down to the emoticons. Despite the playful and sometimes awkward feeling of eavesdropping on an earnest conversation with occasional sexy-talk, the novelty wore off quickly.

Strong photographic works included Ming Wong's exterior Polaroids of cinemas resembling establishing shots from the movies and TV, while Dayanita Singh's stark black-and-white photos of paper archives and their attendants in various bureaucratic and institutional basements in India stunned in terms of sheer volume. You could almost smell the bagged, bound and stacked paper. Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills, 1977-1980*, seemed a shoo-in, but it's always a pleasure to revisit as I feel like I've grown up with them. I first encountered her cinematic stereotypes, archetypes, ingenues, femmes fatales and vixens along with work by the recently dearly departed Arnaud Maggs as a teen at the Winnipeg Art Gallery back in the 1980s, and the work of both artists had a profound effect, activating a form of negotiation with the photographic image that continues to this day. Now, half-a-world-and-change away in Kyoto, it felt like visiting old friends.

FULL TEXT

VISUAL ART

"Reading Cinema, Finding Words: Art after Marcel Broodthaers"

An important figure in post-war art, Marcel Broodthaers was considered one of the founding fathers of Institutional Critique. His vast and sometimes difficult body of work attempted to erase barriers between poetry, film and sculpture, often by turning mediums against themselves. Overseen by a cluster of his film works, "Reading Cinema, Finding Words" at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto links Broodthaers to recent practices in video and installation art via 12 contemporary artists, many bearing his influence, some shoehorned in.

Dark rooms and projections with two-channel and split-screen strategies dominated, alongside near-obsolete technology like film projectors, slide carousels, manual typewriters, even books. Now that online avant-garde archives like [ubuweb.com](#) appear to function as part of an auratic endgame, it was refreshing to encounter a cluster of film projectors on plinths whirring away in the first room: Broodthaers's *Le Corbeau et le Renard, 1967*, flickering in tandem with cine-poetic hommages to Schwitters, Magritte, Mallarmé and Baudelaire, reels changed and threaded by museum staff.

Belgian artist Ana Torfs took a sly approach to the authority of narrative in the powerful *Du mentir-faux, 2000*. Two slide carousels projected cinemascope-sized photographs of a woman with striking features and short, unevenly-cut hair, alternating with texts detailing a woman subject to a series of interrogations. Between the harsh,

patronizing questions and a face conveying quiet distress, empathy and anger built with each accusation of "insubordination and heterodoxy." Drawn into the narrative, associations from a larger, shared cultural memory connected the two: A-ha! It's Joan of Arc. Maybe.

That's a modern-day woman in the picture...she appears to be playing Joan, if the images and text are directly related at all. Our heroine may be simply recalling something unpleasant from the week before, or grappling with a sinus headache. Using a culturally conditioned itch to fill in the blanks, the collusion between text and image manipulates, revealing a dependence on linear narrative.

It's this kind of play with storytelling, mimesis and diegesis that makes the exhibit enjoyable; for anyone familiar with Sidney Lumet's classic *A Dog Day Afternoon*, starring Al Pacino and the late, criminally underrated John Cazale, the botched bank heist-turned-black comedy was based on a true story. The question of whose true story is the focus of *The Third Memory*, 1999, a tidy two-channel video where Pierre Huyghe gives John Wojtowicz, the original man behind the fiasco, a platform to tell his side of the story. Wojtowicz addresses the viewer, prop shotgun in hand, while directing actors on a barebones studio set. Interweaving scenes from the movie and showing letters, newspaper and TV clips as supporting material, Huyghe reveals how easily someone's true story can be lifted, retold and then absorbed into popular culture, in this case by a larger economic and cultural force like Hollywood.

Despite a few lukewarm works (Anri Sala and Eric Baudelaire) Isaac Julien's *Fantôme Afrique* stood out, as did Miwa Yanagi's *Gloria Sc Leon*, 2004, where high school students awkwardly re-enacted scenes from John Cassavetes's *Gloria* and Luc Besson's *Leon: The Professional* on one screen, while the second showed the simultaneous busywork of the student production crew. Akram Zaatari's video *Tomorrow Everything Will be Alright*, 2010, seemed most popular with gallery-goers, showing a chat between two ex-lovers, but with the short, clipped dialogue usually found in text messages, on Twitter, or on Skype. The clever twist: It's all done on a manual typewriter, right down to the emoticons. Despite the playful and sometimes awkward feeling of eavesdropping on an earnest conversation with occasional sexy-talk, the novelty wore off quickly.

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Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster got relational in *Untitled (Cinematic)*, 2013, where books on cinema were stacked along the outer edge of a large green rug. The piles consisted of the same books-*Last Year at Marienbad*, *V for Vendetta*, *Hiroshima mon amour*, *Tarantino*, *Tarkovsky's Polaroids*, etc.-but each one was arranged in a different order. Looking like a venue for a reading or encounter group minus the beanbag chairs but with a gallery attendant stationed right next to it, I was unsure if we were allowed to interact with the books or if it was a deadpan, untouchable sculpture bearing the trace of a previous social exchange.

Representing Japan at the 2013 Venice Biennale, up-and-comer Koki Tanaka stole the show with deceptively simple video, performance and sculptural works tucked in odd corners of the gallery. As part of an ongoing video series where Tanaka documents groups of people collaborating on a single task-giving a haircut, throwing a clay pot or writing a song on piano his 2013 video *A Poem Written by Five Poets at Once (First Attempt)* (freely viewable online at <vimeo.com/kktnk>) is a fascinating hour where five writers meet around a table in a nondescript office space in Tokyo. As they work, little in the way of ego or argument disrupts the process; there's constant negotiation and deferral in the name of maintaining group harmony in order to complete the task at hand. An ongoing circular tracking shot intercut with close-ups adds-or implies-tension; we've all seen this voyeuristic effect

in potboilers and heist movies before-thugs planning "the job," blueprints on the table, etc.-but with the artist, cameramen and crew as part of the background, the mundane gravitas was compelling.

It provided a nice, quiet end to an overall balanced exhibition that succeeded in introducing Broodthaers's pioneering work and a diverse selection of strong international contemporary art to new audiences. |

Sidebar

"Reading Cinema, Finding Words: Art after Marcel Broodthaers" was exhibited at the National Museum of Modern Art Kyoto, Japan, from September 7 to October 27, 2013.

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DETAILS

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