

ZURICH

"Fragile Monuments"

SUZIE Q PROJECTS, GALERIE BOB VAN ORSOUW

Bob van Orsouw invited Eva Scharrer to serve as guest curator for the second exhibition in his new project room, Suzie Q. The result was a small group show bringing together six artists currently living in Switzerland. "Fragile Monuments" assembled a range of skeptical positions regarding the grand public monument, a fitting sentiment in a small country with a long tradition of direct democracy and strategic understatement. But perhaps more importantly, these artists explore the notion of fragility in relation to modernism's heroic claims, particularly its championing of the self-reflexivity of artistic media. For instance, Davide Cascio returns again and again to Le Corbusier's Purist mandate of an "esprit nouveau." But rather than arriving at a conclusive critique of modernism, Cascio evaluates its maxims both from a historical standpoint and with regard to their lasting potential. The collages represented here were inspired by Yona Friedman's "architecture mobile," yet they also pointed to the artist's larger conceptual, installation-based approach: In *Black Polyhedra*, 2003, he makes use of the same rationalist point of departure he uses for his walk-in structures, showing us Joyce's *Ulysses* as a self-contained polyperspectival text. *Black Map*, 2007, uses monochrome black panels to cover a linenbacked map (only the word map is left peeking through) that shows the putative result when all the white space has vanished from a map because every last bit of the world has been marked on the page.

Hagar Schmidhalter created a lightweight wall object, *Royal Flush I*, 2008, by loosely gluing together pleated magazine pages and covering them with black acrylic and enamel paint, restoring daily information to the status of a magical if flimsy black box positioned between transmitter and receiver. Kilian Riithemann sawed out an arrow-shaped piece of the parquet flooring and placed it beside the aperture left behind like a lid, as if his intrusion (*Untitled*, 2008-2009) into the infrastructure of the exhibition might be reversible by simple means, like the shapes mapped out by the points of a bird's flight in his looped DVD *Untitled (Birds)*, 2008. With *The Usual Suspects (Kobayashi)*, 2009, the model of a breaking coffee cup, Aurélien Gamboni alludes to the epiphanic scene at the end of the eponymous 1995 film, in which all the plot strands are tied together. A similar strategy is at work in Basim Magdy's mixed-media drawings and collages: *The work What goes up must come down*, 2008, uses a centrally symmetrical composition to highlight the towerlike monument built on the spot where Yuri Gagarin, the first man in space, eventually crashed during a training flight with the Soviet Air Force. In the background, a luminous red ball signifying the rising sun ironically references a Utopian rhetoric of images that is everywhere dying out.

In Stefan Burger's film installation *Analoges Monument (Analog Monument)*, 2008, the headquarters of Agfa Film Works in Munich soundlessly collapses again and again during its demolition. The white dust gradually turns the faded 16-mm color film gray, and all one hears is the clattering projector and the whir of the film winding and unwinding from its rolls. A spotlight illuminates the antique machinery, above which a black-and-white umbrella is rotating, a promotional gimmick used by Ilford Photo, as if the work were advertising celluloid film itself for the last time, before its digital end. The photograph *Antiteatro (Antitheater)*, 2008, showing a Roman amphitheater in Pompeii, reprises the motif of the ruin once more: the loop that remains perfect even as it decays. In this new generation of artists from Switzerland, a feverishly self-reflexive consciousness both affirms and denies. Coming attractions and obituaries, design and demolition, are not mere opposites. There is a knowledge that resides in contradiction.

- Hans Rudolf Reust

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dry fuss.

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