

Door Slamming Festival

Mehringdamm 72

01.04.07 – 12.05.07

Curated by Dominic Eichler

'The good message about "trust what you see", is that this message is poisoned. Trust what you see and then wait, they'll take it away again, because there's a task in there, you are not at the end.'

–Wolfgang Schirmacherⁱ

Padding up the palatial sweep of the staircase to the spaces of Mehringdamm 72, one finds oneself in an environment which hovers between mute luxuriance and unassuming simplicity, the plush red carpet of the entrance at one end of the spectrum and the whitewashed concrete walls at the other. The works in Door Slamming Festival stretched out comfortably in this space, though they seemed, on first impressions, quite a motley collection.

Being diverse in concept, aesthetic and approach, and arrayed through several rooms of varying dimensions and degrees of neutrality, Door Slamming Festival lent itself to absorption through disjointed, rhizomic wandering rather than the consecutive contemplation which tends to be *de rigueur* in galleries. The variance and layout of the exhibition made it conducive to drawing lines of meaning between selected works, rather than attempting to reconcile the whole.

For me the thread began with Julian Göthe's *Applique I (Trés Important) & Applique II (Trés Important)*, reliefs constructed from metal, mirror and strip light which threateningly adorned each side of an archway like taciturn oracles, Busby Berkeley-esque ornaments for the edge of the void. They occupied the space liminally, moving at once towards a depurification of function in their relationship to interior design, and towards a purification of form as experiential entity. These structures instituted a principle of symmetry and recurrence which was present in many of the works in Door Slamming Festival. It seemed to reveal itself as a theme in a process akin to crystallisation, a focus pull revealing a shared language of twisted semblable.

It was reiterated in Donna Huddleston's *The Arrangement*, a sinister formalisation of femininity which kept one dainty heel in the camp of theatricality, the other in the delicate rendering of form. Huddleston's hinged triad of two-dimensional planes seemed suffused with emotion and connivance. It somehow suggested the graceful unfolding of an elegantly hatched plan, filtered down from art deco and reconstituted in gentle watercolours. Identical figures floated, frozen and fading, in the pictorial field, the relationships between them remaining enigmatic to the viewer.

The smiling, gymnastic characters of Enrico David's wall painting *Measure of Disagreement* attended to a cabinet displaying a macabre slippage of function in which a boot has been bisected, its heel replaced by a sizeable piece of shit. The boot, not only robbed of its primary function but now propped up by something it generally strives to avoid, finds its *Erkennbarkeit* ruptured as it becomes, to its former functionality, a literal shitheel. Its identity reconfigured into this thwarted,

closed loop, the boot is held up in esteem by the fused, symmetrical attendants whose composition mirrors the province of its new knowability.

Gerry Bibby's *After Hours: Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)* was also hung upon a framework of symmetry which, as it asserted itself, simultaneously became corrupted by a myriad of tiny, repeated excesses. It posited the insistent hedonism of capitalist consumption as an erosive force in the business of compromising the more substantial structures of human society, whilst still managing to pass itself off as a celebration.

Feelings of trepidation towards excess were also central to Sean Snyder's *Schema*, a video showing in the library which presented a loop of jump-cuts between snippets of television footage from around the globe. Though the segments were vastly different in content, they collectively conveyed a pervasive sense of mania and desperation as they sought to participate in a world overwhelmed by images and meaningless information. Watching this frenetic parade made it seem as though the television had been made the site of its own analysis, and was collapsing in on itself as a result.

Much more phlegmatic but equally persistent, Janet Burchill and Jennifer McCamley's *Total Economy* lurked sardonically at the periphery of the desk where the gallery's administrative tasks are undertaken. The painting's stark black and fluorescent red resonated with the decor such that it constituted a perfect formal complement to the site of transaction.

Discovering the details of Gareth Moore's *Uncertain Pilgrimages* became a microcosm of its title, the cigarette and single matchstick embedded in one leg of the chair luring one's attentions beneath its billiard-green upholstery to discover a modest cache of supplies – schnapps, twine and the like – suspended beneath it like a set of testicles, complementing the walking-stick handle which protruded from the seat at an acute angle like a pleasure apparatus for the broken-spirited.

Investigations grounded in materiality, and their relationship to human action, underpinned many of the pieces in Door Slamming Festival, a shared attribute which gathered weight in a satisfying way alongside the thematic of doubleness. It was, in many ways, an exhibition beside itself, the diversity of works something like a toolbox for reconfiguring the priorities of perception in a society where function itself is often reduced to a symbol.

Each instance of multiplicity embodied a shift in meaning, the termination of one mode of understanding engendering the birth of another. Change, collapse or ending, rather than signifying disaster, become a cause for celebration. The name 'Door Slamming Festival' itself is suggestive of the joyful undertaking of a repeated cessation, a revelry involving multiple, violent closures.

Helen Johnson

¹ From the transcript of 'What is a Paradigm?', a lecture delivered by Giorgio Agamben at the European Graduate School, August 2002