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ERIC WESLEY

356 S. Mission Road,
Los Angeles

Ironically, perhaps, for such a wayward, unpredictable and contrarian artist, Eric Wesley has a fondness for numbers and systems. 'Some Work', his sardonically titled quasi-retrospective at 356 S. Mission Road, was arranged around a neat numeric structure. A map, printed on the back of the invitation card in lieu of a press release, provided a key.

One: the single integer constituted by a twisted steel beam, 11 metres long and suspended in horizontal equilibrium by a cable from the ceiling. As it torques, it almost imperceptibly transforms from an I-beam at one end into a U-channel at the other. The singular work, *I Beam U Channel* (2015), is on its way to becoming two. The gesture is typical of the Los Angeles-based artist. Wesley has said: 'I don't like to pick sides.'

Two: the large, round, stained-glass windows inserted high into opposite walls of the gallery space. That the brown, yellow, red and green shapes resemble cells under a microscope is probably not lost on the scientifically inclined artist. The work, *Inch-Alota* (2015), actually represents two cross-sections through a burrito, alluding to a project Wesley made in 2002 in which assistants constructed and fed an endless burrito through a hole in the wall of Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe, where it was devoured by gallery visitors. (The proposed retrospective format of 'Some Work' was kiboshed by the artist when, in every instance, he elected to make new versions of existing pieces.)

Three: the funny little white buggies that Wesley fabricated in 2010 to represent the x, y and z axes of a three-dimensional Cartesian matrix, and three corresponding abstract expressionist paintings in which x, y and z are translated into red, yellow and blue, the colours apparently representing aggression, fear and sadness. Sometimes, as here, Wesley's appropriation of scientific formulae seems wilfully obscure or even facile. His gift for puns, however, is profound; the white vehicles are titled *D'Cart X, Y and Z* (2010/2015).

In 2007, Wesley presented a cross-shaped Jacuzzi at Bortolami, New York, titled *Spaference Room* (2007). For this exhibition, he dismembered the installation and reconfigured it in four parts, each theoretically useable by the viewer. *Spa-Brary* (2007/2015) includes reading material (*In Touch Weekly*, *Picture Puzzles* and a patent for something called the 001Dxecutor), helpfully laminated for the bath. In *Spa-Versation* (2007/2015) a fiery gas heater throws furious hot air at the seated viewer's face.

Number five was represented by 5 *Plants of New Amsterdam* (2001/2015), a glass herbarium cultivating five tobacco plants which Wesley will harvest for his New Amsterdam Lights brand of cigarettes. Unlike the formally underwhelming spa sculptures, this glass tank – which

revealed the plants' roots and soil strata – transcended its origin as a witty conceptual gesture to become a compelling metaphorical object that rhymed evocatively with *Inch-Alota's* cross-sectioned burrito.

Six small models of men lying on wooden plinths depicted slumbering philosophers, three ancient (Aristotle, Plato and Confucius) and three modern (Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze). Wesley cast the ancients in bronze from altered moulds taken from their plastic, latter-day successors; the work was perhaps less about philosophy *per se* than the canonization of thought and thinkers ('New Realistic Figures' series, 2009–15). Wesley's sculpture *WTF (What The Fuck)* (2015) could be seen as an oblique corollary: since 2009 he has been casting the successive moulds of an object whose genesis is now lost in time. On display here was its seventh iteration; each time it is purchased, a new bronze cast of the existing outer mould is taken, and the exhibited form becomes larger and more indeterminate.

Perhaps the truer correlation is between *WTF (What The Fuck)* and the eighth work on Wesley's numerological system. For his finale, he turns eight on its side to make 8; a rented Infiniti sedan is parked outside the gallery, protected by a nearly imperceptible coat of clear automotive lacquer. In both works, invisibility makes space for thought, and signification. *Infinity Project (Black)* (2015) is an almost cosmic work, the title casting one's thoughts towards the gleaming forever, towards an endless perfection. Like most of Wesley's oeuvre, it is deeply – even painfully – ironic.

JONATHAN GRIFFIN



BETH STUART

Battat Contemporary, Montreal

The works in Beth Stuart's solo exhibition 'Warm.Worn.Uniform' successfully elided abstract painting, object sculpture and installation. The show was a modular arrangement functioning as scenic parts and set pieces for a play still being written by their author. The extraordinary tactility of paintings such as *Interior, (F.S.)* (2014) with their sensuous silly-putty-like resonance that the eye sank into with such alacrity, were effortlessly complemented by the adamant materiality of the arrayed sculptures.

The work sprang from an unfinished play currently being written by the artist titled *BLACKANDWHITEAND ALLOVER*, a fictional dialogue between three historical figures: Varvara Stepanova, an artist associated with the Constructivist movement who was also a noted clothes and textile designer; Ida Craddock, sexual mystic, free-thinker, and martyr for freedom; and Florine Stettheimer, US painter, designer, poet and unapologetic maverick (she often employed the unlikely ingredient of cellophane in her designs, a level of formal invention that segues with Stuart's own).

The fulcrum point of the installation was *Proposal for a Viewing Apparatus (Mother Ginger)* (2014), made from carved wooden stands supporting a pair of blown glass globes containing dried macaroni. The work was a metaphorical and monstrously big optical instrument that was a sort of optical toy, ophthalmoscope or spectroscope of the unknowable. All the objects exhibited here, including the spaces in-between objects and paintings, evoked dialogue and encouraged active investigation on the viewer's part. Retaining their own exotic personae in a proprietary way, they led the viewer to weigh the works not only in relation to one another but also in relation to one's own body, memory and most wayward imaginative propensities. Somewhere between the boudoir and the theatrical stage space, Stuart stood her ground, staked her claim.

The conceptual dovetailing between paintings and objects was as daunting as it was indelible. Stuart encouraged her viewers

1
Eric Wesley
I Beam U Channel, 2015,
installation view

2
Beth Stuart, from left: *Interior (V.S.)*, *Interior, (F.S.)* and *Interior, (I.C.)*, 2014, lime plaster, pigment and encaustic on porcelain, each 100 × 58 cm

3
Ariel Schlesinger, *Untitled (Pair)*, 2010, glass cup, paper cup, sparkling water, 13 × 7 cm



2

to assume the role of a doubting Thomas – referring to the to the Biblical story of the apostle Thomas, who refused to believe in the resurrection until he could examine first-hand the wounds Jesus Christ had suffered on the Cross. Similarly, Stuart places on her viewers the onus for experiential verification. We are asked to consider conceptual linkages and their possibility for embodied dialogue: the massive multi-coloured paintings seemed like hybrids of paint and fabric and resembled vast breathing tablets that spoke to and signalled like semaphores.

A brilliantly subversive work of visual theatre in which the 'set pieces' that constitute the 'scenery' evoke the history of Modernism as if it was a work of Restoration comedy – or Jacobean tragedy. This maverick artist – equally deft in writing, painting, ceramics, textiles, and sculptural installations – is also an imaginative, revisionist historian of Modernism whose still-evolving body of work is singular, strange and compelling.

JAMES D. CAMPBELL

WILFREDO PRIETO AND ARIEL SCHLESINGER

Center for Contemporary Art,
Tel Aviv

The collaboration between the Berlin-based Israeli artist Ariel Schlesinger and the Cuban-born Wilfredo Prieto seems natural. In their post-minimal conceptual practices, both artists transform everyday objects through minor gestures and interventions. While some are authored individually, most of the works in this show, almost all newly commissioned, were developed collaboratively. The works – some almost hidden in the cavernous space of the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv – seem like the debris of daily existence, but come to life in curious ways.

Humour is an animating force: *Ascension* (2014), for example, consists of used teabags, glued upside-down to the ceiling of the entrance, threatening to fall onto the head of the invigilator



3

sitting behind the reception desk. In the next room, a used can of chopped tomatoes, produced by a well-known brand of Israeli processed foods, lies on the floor. Suddenly, it starts to roll around the room. This piece seems to refer so directly to a contemporary Israeli reality that it is surprising to find out it was created by Prieto. Titled *Drone* (2014), it parodies the use of armed drones by the Israeli military. The unseeing tomato tin, hitting the walls while trying helplessly to find its way, reflects the blindness of the machinic drones, programmed from afar, as well as that of their use, which is deliberately hidden from the public eye. As in Prieto's most famous work, *Apolitical* (2001–08), in which he reproduced all the flags of the states designated by the UN in shades of grey, the artist cleverly turns something emblematic of a nation against itself. Blindness and secrecy are also evident in *Safe Box* (2014), in which a safe is tucked into a cardboard box, disguising itself as an object of little or no value.

The same game of hide and seek is also present in works by Schlesinger: a glass filled with water is placed within a paper cup, which is torn at the edge to reveal the translucent container beneath – an optical illusion that makes it appear as though the water is standing on its own (*Untitled [Pair]*, 2010). Less illusory is a roll of duct tape that has been coiled inside its cardboard holder (*Enjoy Your Problems*, 2014). A black umbrella is also turned inside out, seemingly broken by a strong wind. Its handle is bent backwards, keeping the shape of the umbrella intact as if an attempt has been made to make it functional again.

Schlesinger often refers to his works as prototypes – objects built quickly to communicate an idea. But his prototypes are made from mass-produced objects through an act that he refers to as 'reverse engineering', by means of which he explores the hidden possibilities of ready-made devices. Most of the time, these 'possibilities' produce impossibilities – the duct tape rolled inside out can't be used and the umbrella will no longer function as a shelter from the rain. Martin Heidegger's distinction between objects that are seen as devices, ready for use, as opposed to objects that are – or have become – useless and can therefore be examined for what they are, comes to mind. For Heidegger, art can provoke the transformation between these two perceptive states, which is why even simple gestures can have great aesthetic value. One of the most delicate on show here was *Copy/Paste* (2014), in which Schlesinger has carved out an A4-sized piece of paint and plaster from a wall on the ground floor and pasted it onto a wall on the second floor, and vice versa. The work is reminiscent of Elmgreen & Dragset's *The Named Series* (2012), which consists of various wall paintings taken from prominent museums and galleries around the world. However, Schlesinger's act is much more minimal, light-hearted and personal, uncovering the wall as a wall, rather than reflecting on its function.

Prieto and Schlesinger chose to title the exhibition 'Hiding Wood in Trees' to hint that art is all around us and all we need to do is look. Their clever works may disguise themselves as part of the mundane, but they effortlessly transcend it.

KEREN GOLDBERG