

**MORE  
PRICKS  
THAN  
KICKS**



## **MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS**

**13.10.10 – 18.12.10**

The David Roberts Art Foundation is pleased to present *More Pricks Than Kicks*, an exhibition co-curated by DRAF's director Vincent Honoré and artist Patrizio Di Massimo. Exploring motifs such as the dissolution of language, the theatricalised body and the “breakdown” of an image, the project questions how a notion such as “exhaustion” can be formally enacted.

Language informs many of the works on view. Abused and manipulated to the point that it cannot even be conceived as an imperfect tool for communication, language is characterized by collapses, stammers, fragmentations, collages, ellipses, mixed idioms or unknown tropes. These peculiar manipulations forces language to its dissolution. The same is applied to the body. Choreographed, distorted and fragmented, this “anxious” body manifests the convulsive aspects of the human condition through the burlesque. Body and language can only be overtly theatricalised for them to reflect creativity, History, history of art, decay, religion, eroticism, etc. “The work of art for those who use it, is an activity of unframing, of rupturing sense, of baroque proliferation or extreme impoverishment which leads to a recreation and a reinvention of the subject itself.” (Felix Guattari in *Chaosmosis*)

Such (mis)treatments of language and body naturally lead to the breakdown of the image. Because the works “take by force a structure that was on the verge of asserting itself” (as Felix Guattari wrote on George Condo's paintings in an early text, 1990), they generate disquieting and often humorous images: incongruous, absurd, anachronistic, kitsch, regressive or hybrid works. It is through these methodical and rhizomatic manipulations, that the works eventually address a crisis of the standard representative modalities, and of creation itself.

*More Pricks Than Kicks* borrows its title from the first book published by Samuel Beckett. This collection of short proses, in particular their

witty and dry humour together with the formal qualities of Beckett's style (as analysed by Gilles Deleuze in his essay *The Exhausted*), confers its tone to the exhibition. *More Pricks Than Kicks* intends to create a platform to question creation in its more sinister quality, contemporary time in its less graspable entity. The works are not fixed proposals but active processes: exhausted since they are themselves necessary failed attempts to exhaust a form, a medium, a system, a notion. Their linked dynamic is formed by a methodical crisis that cultivates accidents, a crisis that accepts exhaustion as the paradoxical core of any creative dynamic.



### ♦ **BECKETT, Samuel**

Fundamentally, Samuel Beckett poses in his oeuvre (visual or published) the question of the possession of voice, at once proper and improper, which assumes the presence of the other in the self. Because the voice is at once mine and not mine simultaneously, it is in essence untenable, “always on the verge of collapse” (cf. Derrida), unframed, displaced, everywhere, nowhere, subjective but impersonal: drifted.

Drift as a deviation, diversion, displacement, as bewildered, distraught, bored, as a resignation, a stammer, as disillusioned humour of artists towards their art: another tradition that could pass through Satie, Duchamp, Picabia, Filliou, Cage, Nauman, Godard, Deleuze, etc. Retreat and sterility return as generative forms, as resistance to the image/re-presentation (considered as both accumulation or self-generation) to create a break that enables us to look beyond the image through its cracks. This is why the exhibition borrows its title from the first book published by Beckett. However, the exhibition is not aimed at referring to/illustrating/honouring Beckett.

### ♦ **BECOMING**

“Becoming is about movement, but it begins with an inhibition. At least some of the automatic circuits between regularised stimuli and habitual responses must be disconnected, as if a crowbar had been inserted into the interlocking network of the standardised actions and trajectories constituting the World As We Know It.” Brian Massumi, *A User’s guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, 1992.

### ♦ **CINEMA ZERO**

Initiated by Amy Granat in 2004 with the help of artists Olivier Mosset and Steven Parrino, *Cinema Zero* is a concept of nomadic events mixing screenings (of early 20th century experimental films as well as contemporary works) with performance, painting, sculpture, dance or sound. For *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Amy Granat will conceive a *Cinema Zero* evening, for the first time in London, involving in particular sound and a choreography recently developed with Flora Wiegmann.

## ◆ CHAN, Paul

Paul Chan's work develops in a vast range of media, from outdated animated "gif" images to sophisticated video installations, and includes drawing, writing, as well as a recent large-scale production of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans. The feeling of an imminent disastrous end that never occurs, but is a permanent threat, is eminent in his works. Chan convokes many references from popular and high culture that he combines with his political concerns.

In 2000, Paul Chan started the *Alternumerics* project: a series of customized fonts, in which each letter or digit has been replaced by fragments of texts inspired by various sources. The fonts can be downloaded for free on the artist's website.

*Oh Stexts* is a collection of texts written by Chan using some of the fonts belonging to the *Sade for Fonts Sake* series, a recent continuation of *Alternumerics*. These fonts have the ability to mutate any attempt to type on a keyboard into a Sadean fantasy; each one of them is based either on a character from Sade's novels or on actual persons, as diverse as tabloid icon Monica Lewinsky or poet Friedrich Hölderlin. Paul Chan exploits computer fonts to create monstrous poetic pieces that escape from his control; he goes one step further than the many experimental writing techniques developed along the 20th century. Thus, this quite basic technology, made to be easy-to-use and immediately efficient, is diverted to annihilate language, and at the same time, to expand its boundaries.

## ◆ CRYSTAL-IMAGE

A tension between singularity and standardization is echoed in the temporal irresolution of the works. An indecision that Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "crystal-image" defines the best. The crystal-image, which forms the cornerstone of Deleuze's time-image, is a shot that fuses the "pastness" of the recorded event with the "presentness" of its viewing.

The crystal-image is the indivisible unity of the virtual image and the actual image. The virtual image is subjective, in the past, and recollected. The virtual image as "pure recollection" exists outside of consciousness, in time. It is always somewhere in the temporal past, but still alive and ready to be "recalled" by an actual image. The actual image is objective, in the present, and perceived. The crystal-image

always lives at the limit of an indiscernible actual and virtual image. The crystal-image shapes time as a constant two-way mirror that splits the present into two heterogeneous directions, “one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. Time consists of this split, and it is ... time, that we see in the crystal” (Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

The works in the exhibition are “crystal-images”, fluctuating between actual and virtual, recording or dealing with conscious or involuntary memories, confusing mental and physical time. As George Condo declares: “Essentially what I am painting is the state in which the image-time of one reality is superimposed in a field to another simultaneous presence now becomes a new conjunctive hyper-reality or hybrid image showing the simultaneous presences.”

#### ♦ **CONDO, George**

Since the 1980's, George Condo cheerfully draws from the history of painting in a very personal manner, without any nostalgia, to produce what he once called “existential portraits”. From nude pin-ups to comic book superheroes, his paintings depict distorted characters that can have a disturbing effect, but also contain a deeply humorous dimension. His recent major work, *St. Jerome*, shows how diverse his sources of inspiration can be. “What I am thinking about is what I call a “theory of relative language in painting” which basically proposes the idea that a single painting can have multiple language properties acting simultaneously to create single entity.”

Nonetheless, he tirelessly returns to the same motifs with many variations. *St. Jerome*, with his whole body pierced by carrots – an instrument that Condo often uses - is one of the religious figures that he likes to torture on the canvas, as some kind of revenge on his Catholic childhood. Tragic and somewhat ridiculous at the same time, Condo's multi-layered art, a “static moment of chaos” saturated with degenerate figures, addresses the human condition in an early 21st century in which God as well as Superman appear to have fallen from their pedestals.

#### ♦ **CRISIS AND ACCIDENTS**

Silence and negativity belong to a tradition originating in post-symbolist 20th-century poetry, for which language served as a machine

for deconstruction. This conception of language as silence and failure has been particularly explored at the occasion of some famous writers' breakdowns (Gérard de Nerval, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, August Strindberg, Arthur Rimbaud, Georges Bataille...): errant paths that found their way through silence, drifts or repetition. This conception has been best theorized by Stéphane Mallarmé and, later, by Maurice Blanchot and Samuel Beckett.

Modern poetry has since often linked creativity to breakdown, silence, and sterility: "worklessness and disaster" (Maurice Blanchot), "the accursed share" (Georges Bataille), "the literature of the unword" (Samuel Beckett). A tradition of anxiety in which the movement, tension, and distance maintained between the self and the other I presides in the definition of the modern subject. A tradition in poetry that quickly became a valid artistic approach: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." (Samuel Beckett)

#### ♦ **CYTTER, Keren**

Keren Cytter writes novels and directs plays, but she is mostly known for her videos and films that portray characters entangled in complex relationships, simultaneously connected and alienated from one another. Inspired by direct experiences, observations and authors like Hitchcock, Polanski or Borges, her work maintains an immediate sense of spontaneity and unpredictability whereas it is carefully scripted and produced. She has been exploring the possibilities of narration and staging, crossing the borders of formats and genres, creating what Roberta Smith called a "medium in flux" where "scenes repeat, actors change character, the camera wobbles, music encroaches, voices and months are out of synchronisation."

In *Der Spiegel* ("the mirror"), four women are standing in an almost empty apartment, the main character is naked, the others -the choir- are barely dressed. The expressions of her stereotyped feelings and desires are interlaced with the actors' comments on the narrative system in which they are locked up, such as the subtitles, or the viewer of the video: the characters seem conscious of their artificial nature. Rather than the holder of a message of wisdom, the pitiless choir appears to be a "proud and frisky" mass, unremittingly mocking the naked woman and coldly discouraging her hopes. The few elements that could constitute a storyline are constantly interrupted, the fiction

is self-destroying in an endless loop that unfolds and winds up in space as much as in time.

#### ◆ **DAVID ROBERTS ART FOUNDATION**

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#### ◆ **DENNY, Simon**

Simon Denny's recent installations deal with the language of televisions as objects—where a set is as a piece of furnishing, an image producer, and the popular medium that shaped the networked society that the Internet now dominates. In his installation *Deep Sea Vaudeo* (2009) at Galerie Daniel Buchholz in Cologne, Denny proposed an evolution of televisions —from the cabinet-sized tube TV monsters of the surprisingly recent past to the ultra flat screens of today. Supplementing these with similar forms in “other media” – sculpture and painting – Denny used these contradicting media as supports for screen-display imagery of coral fish, once used after broadcasting had ended. In so doing, Denny humorously and precisely explores how images are perceived in an age where technological overproduction and media overkill are yesteryear's assumed norm.

In *Empty Vessel, 4*, Denny is using the front of a CRT television and a vitrine that evoke the changing shape and forms of television and monitors - which in a way is a current literal breakdown of the image. A sculpture that masquerades as a video, the object uses the video art/ screen-saver standard of a false aquarium space as given imagery to chronicle this breakdown.

#### ◆ **DI MASSIMO, Patrizio**

The works by Patrizio Di Massimo correspond to what Georges Bataille called “the unfolding of a work as its withdrawal”. His research has been articulated through different thematics such as the relationship between rhetoric and historiography, the heritage of the Italian



cultural systems, the use we make of icons or specific representation device today, analysed through the main question “who am I as the end of an historical process?”. Italy’s colonial occupation of Libya and Ethiopia has been a long-term research for Di Massimo, inspiring performances, videos, drawings, texts and ready made. *The Negus said: “Give me the lion, keep the stele!”* closes this 2 year cycle. The title comes from a sentence pronounced in 1969 by the Negus (King) of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, to the Duke of Aosta Amedeo, which alludes to the Lion of Judah and the Obelisk of Axum: two artefacts stolen by the Italians during the second Italo-Ethiopian war and then returned to the original possessors in 1969 and 2005. While the work has a highly political background, rooted in Italian imperialist history, and also in the current political climate, it also clearly points to a cross of iconographies that becomes the core and the subject matter of the series of 120 drawings.

With a special focus on the Return to Order, as a moment of breakdown between the avant-garde and the return to the classical, the work repeats, merges, spoils different styles or iconographies, pointing out that one of the most powerful ways to travel into history is to transform and digest its details instead of documenting them. The text piece with the same title, that will be proposed for *More Pricks Than Kicks* as a three voice reading performed in front of the drawings, has been worked as the deconstruction of an essay that, instead of being didactic towards the subject matters, enters into the theme of negotiation through the rhetorical figure of repetition.

#### ◆ **FUJIWARA, Simon**

Simon Fujiwara’s father was an architect, and this obviously influenced his choice to study architecture before officially becoming an artist. Thus, architecture is not simply a professional skill that he has acquired, but a very personal subject. He uses it as an omnipresent material to give shape to his works, through installations, sculptural pieces, performances and writing. Even if Fujiwara’s work is deeply autobiographical, it is yet filled with fictitious and historical elements combined together in his repeated attempts to tell the impossible story of his origins. Fujiwara is perpetually dealing with contradiction: fiction is used to mirror reality: sexuality is seen as a way of escaping oppression but also a battlefield for authority and power.

*The Unwritten Erotic Saga of the Fujiwara Family 1975 - 2010* is composed of 18 volumes displayed as a tower. The only text on each page is a date and number since the lifting of Spain's censorship ban on erotica, which corresponds to Franco's death November 20, 1975. The Saga could be seen as a symbol of the artist's ongoing struggle to write *Welcome to the Hotel Munber* (since 2006), the fictive erotic story of his parents as they were running a hotel in Spain during the last years of Franco's dictatorship. It is the physical framework in which the novel could exist, as well as the affirmation of its impossibility: it could not have existed as a novel under Franco because of the censorship, it never happened in the real life of his parents, and then, today it can not even occur as a fiction.

The last page of Volume 18 ends on November 20, 2010, which coincides with the 200th anniversary of the Mexican revolution. Mexico, a former Spanish colony, is where Simon Fujiwara travelled to in his attempt to write the novel, as well as the place where *The Saga* was produced. The tower made out of the 18 volumes of the Saga is approximately 1.60 m high, the height of the artist's father, who is also the main protagonist of his novel in the fragments published until now. Thus, the books are not only a representation of the time passed since the liberation of Spain, but also a portrait of a father who was largely absent from his life.

#### ◆ **GRANAT, Amy**

Amy Granat mainly produces films and photographs, often displayed in three-dimensional environments recalling the notion of "expanded cinema". Her abstract films generally don't involve the use of a camera: they result from diverse destructive operations executed directly on the 16 mm filmstrip, such as scratching or pouring chemicals. Her creative process is interlocked with the deconstruction of her medium as well as its expansion. In the mute video *Felicia*, the body of a dancer is multiplied on the screen, reflected as if in a mirror, sometimes translucent like a ghost. Granat combined her interest in deconstruction of the gesture with her usual modifications of the filmstrip, at the same time making the body vanish and the materiality of the film appear.

### ◆ HOUSEAGO, Thomas

Thomas Houseago's works can be questioned as un-original, as a failure of the figure, as the failure of modernism, as failure of materials. They also bring an uncomfortable feeling of authoritarian art. Colonialism (of materials, traditions, art history) is not foreign to Houseago's practice. Although the legacy of early twentieth century sculptors is striking in his approach, he entertains an ambiguous relationship with modern masters like Picasso, Rodin, Giacometti or Brancusi. Neither trying to ignore nor to revere them, Houseago dismembers and reconfigures the forms of modernist sculpture and combines them with extraneous elements. For instance, drawing is not just a preparative task, it is also integrated in the sculpture itself, strongly affirming it as a continuous process.

Several battles are taking place in the core of his works: forced to coexist, the unachieved body parts, the heterogeneous materials, and the various treatments inflicted to them are fighting each other, but none is winning; it can particularly be seen in *Striding Figure*, as if, rather than a final result, the sculpture was only a precarious snapshot of this ongoing war. Whilst intimidating through its monumental size, it finally appears vulnerable, on the verge of falling apart. Houseago's sculptures can hardly be considered as a rupture with modernism, but they seem aware of being somehow outdated, as if they could not bear the weight of tradition innocently, conscious that their confrontation with it is doomed to fail.

### ◆ HUWS, Bethan

Bethan Huws has been working across different mediums such as installations, drawings, sculptures, performances and films. She is possibly best known for her series of *Word Vitrines*, begun in 1999: office display boards on which she affixes discursive snippets, or decontextualised words. Structures of language and mechanisms are key to her practice, echoed by the work of Marcel Duchamp, on which she has been conducting an extensive research. "The bowl, the truth, the Holy Grail, the human soul... is language, our principal source of inspiration."

*Origin and Source* is the result of 2 years of silence and research (1993-95), showing Huws reconsidering her approach. Without a preestablished plan, she read, she wrote, and from this research produced six volumes of reflections and studies. First shown in 1997,

the work is an exploration of the theoretical and critical foundations of Huws' practice. Not originally created to be shown as an art work, "this compressed text, as wrote Han-Rudolf Reust, demands a new, specific form of perception, somewhere between reading and seeing, between rigorous logic and free association, between directness and reiteration, between focussing on a single comprehensive piece of writing or on its innumerable components."

*Etant Donnés* refers directly to Marcel Duchamp's famous last work (1946-1966), reproducing and recontextualising part of it: the raised arm of the lying figure, which holds up an old-fashioned "bec Auer" lamp. It points to the linguistic analysis of Duchamp's work at the core of Huws's video *Fountain*, in which she reflects on Duchamp's work through a series of idiomatic French expression. As she had explained: "In *Fountain* I present my research work in a straightforward way: I talk to the audience directly about *Etant Donnés* and the nine corresponding idioms I believe to have found there." The 8th idiom reads: "Tomber sur un bec de gaz. Word-to-word : to fall on a "Bec Auer" gas lamp. Which means: to encounter an important difficulty."

#### ♦ LANGUAGE OF EXHAUSTION

In his essay *L'Épuisé* (The Exhausted), Gilles Deleuze approaches Samuel Beckett's œuvre through his TV plays. According to Deleuze, Beckett achieved his particular style (a voice as a language beyond language, tired of words) by using three different, at times simultaneous, strategies. The first strategy (Language I) uses an "atomized, disjunctive, cut off, hacked up language, in which enumeration replaces propositions, and combinatory relations replace syntactic relations: a language of names". The exhaustion happens through a proliferation of names, in assemblages and combinations.

The second strategy (Language II) "is no longer that of names, but that of voices, which no longer move forward through combinable particles, but through intermingling flows. The voices are the waves or the flows which guide and distribute linguistic corpuscles". This form of exhaustion is located: "between two terms, between two voices or variations of voice, in the flux, already attained well before one knows that the series is exhausted, well before one learns that there is no more possibility". Language II suggests that words/images themselves are finally set aside in profit of the gaps between words or images. Words

and images are used not for themselves, but to create gaps that will in turn create a voice close to silence, as its inner structure disappears in an apparent unarticulated flow.

The third and last strategy (Language III) “no longer relates to language to enumerable and combinable objects, nor to emitting voices, but to the immanent limits which do not stop displacing themselves, hiatuses, holes, or lacerations which one would not take into account, attributing them to simple fatigue, if they didn’t suddenly grow in a manner to gain something which comes from outside or elsewhere”. Such an image is generated by drifts, accidents and breaks of the image itself. The image is not any more a fixed object but an active process. Its dynamic is formed by its methodical crisis, which cultivates accidents, so those become more important than what is generating them. These images are unreadable, stripped of their differentiating veneer to reveal a more fundamental, less graspable, anxious image beneath.

#### ♦ **MELLORS, Nathaniel**

Nathaniel Mellors creates absurdist films involving characters stuck in inextricable situations: for instance, one is the victim of both physical torture and uncontrollable time-travelling (*The Time Surgeon*, 2007), others are wedged in the guts of a giant (*Giantbum*, 2008), and all are facing the power of language as it invades their reality. Mellors’ exuberant work encompasses many references, such as cult TV series or movies (*The Prisoner*, *Rambo*) or disenchanting literature (Beckett, Orwell). “Increasingly, the visual aspect of my work seems to be fashioned or improvised within a primarily linguistic arena – this liberates my approach to the visuals, it opens up a lot of possibilities. I love absurdism and satire and I am fascinated by a range of effects that words have.” Through cultural references and epic narratives, language is Mellors’ main interest, in the way it concentrates issues regarding authority and control.

*The 7 Ages of Britain Teaser* is a video piece originally produced as an introduction to the last episode in the BBC documentary series of the same name. Mellors used a mask made from the face of the presenter David Dimbleby as a symbol of the power of television throughout the 20th century: at first coveted by two strange time-travellers as a precious tool to control modern society, it accidentally falls and ends up in the murky waters of the Thames.

## ♦ MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS

Beckett's first published book, *More Pricks Than Kicks* (1934), is a collection of short stories focused on the character Belacqua: a tragicomic anti-hero, known for his laziness, whose despairing adventures and disenchanted mood swings are described with a fierce humour. It expands his very first novel, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women* (1932), in which he introduced Belacqua as some kind of self-portrait. Beckett's early works were highly influenced by James Joyce, particularly in the way he used to include many intertextual references in his writing (one of them being Dante's *Commedia*, from which Belacqua was loosely inspired). After World War II his writing evolved towards a much more uncluttered style.

*More Pricks Than Kicks* was banned in Ireland because of its suggestive title, cheekily derived from the Acts of the Apostles: when Saul was persecuting the Christians, Jesus appeared to him and used this common proverb: "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" - like an ox tired of obeying the farmer, Saul was being rebellious and consequently suffered even more.

## ♦ PROUVOST, Laure

Laure Prouvost makes videos, installations, audio pieces, paintings and performances. In her works, Prouvost cultivates imperfection, stays carefully away from any aesthetic seduction and deliberately addresses the viewer. Her videos are the result of brutal cutting operations and a dynamic montage alternating shots with no apparent link between them. They contain elements of narrative, but these are thoroughly dismantled so that any expectation for a linear story is deceived. "Strands of parody, poetry and flimsy deception are closely entwined in Prouvost's canon of work, through which satire, irony, whimsy and fantasy seamlessly operate." (Roy Exley)

For *More Pricks Than Kicks*, Laure Prouvost presents *From The Sky*, a performance in which the story seemingly falls short and has no definite conclusion. Prouvost will recount an event that occurred a few weeks ago within a room slightly smaller than the one you are standing in. Remnants of the performance will become part of a new installation at the gallery.

#### ◆ **ROCCASALVA, Pietro**

Even if he creates a wide variety of works, ultimately, Pietro Roccasalva's artistic practice revolves around painting. He elaborates what he himself calls "situazione d'opera" (work situations), described as a group of "objects, furnishings, audiovisuals, actions, tableaux vivants, etc. that cohabit with other paintings and decline all the phases of painterly creation." Thus, the same image can circulate from a painting to a tableau vivant, then an installation or a digital print, in a continuous process that will come back to painting, making of each work the means of the others and an end in itself, without distinction. Each transitory state points at its conditions of production, its own artificiality, and emphasizes the ongoing corruption of the image. These procedures have to do with remembrance as much as with oblivion, since at each step, something needs to be erased.

This notion of erasure also appears in the work *Che cosa sono le nuvole* ("What the clouds are"), an ongoing project started two years ago. On several occasions, Roccasalva chose to exhibit a piece that materialises what is actually a refusal to participate in the exhibition: a marble plate in the shape of an A4 paper sheet, on which the details of the exhibition are engraved. Each one of these plates, reminding of a headstone, is meant to make Roccasalva's presence almost invisible: among the list of artists exhibited in the show, only his name hasn't been filled with ink. When the artist will have produced ten plates, they will be presented as a unique piece.



## **MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS**

13.10.2010 - 18.12.2010

An exhibition with Paul Chan, George Condo, Keren Cytter, Simon Denny, Patrizio Di Massimo, Simon Fujiwara, Amy Granat/Cinema Zero, Thomas Houseago, Bethan Huws, Nathaniel Mellors, Laure Prouvost, Pietro Roccasalva, curated by Vincent Honoré and Patrizio Di Massimo in collaboration with Sandra Pusterhofer, Assistant Curator, Annabel Rioux, Curatorial Intern and Guy Patton, Installation Manager.

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