

FLASH ART, May/June, 2003
Extra at the Swiss Institute Curator Marc-Olivier Wahler at the "Extra" exhibition.

Curated by Marc-Olivier Wahler, this ambitious show at the Swiss Institute -featuring works by Virginie Barré, Olivier Blanckart, Stéphane Dafflon, Wim Delvoye, Daniel Firman, Fischli & Weiss, Sylvie Fleury, Gianni Motti, Bruno Peinado, Stéphane Sautour, and Roman Signer launches a new series of inquiries about the elasticity of reality and the parallel universes of which it is compromised. It finds common ground with recent developments in quantum physics yet refuses to be didactic, thematic, or illustrative. Setting itself against the distant, introverted, and utopian mega-art of stars like Matthew Barney and Mariko Mori, "Extra" seeks spectacular moments embedded in the everyday.

F and TGS: How does this show relate to recent scientific theories without being intimidating?

MOW: One very interesting new development in quantum physics is an explicit and scientific explanation of how nothing is outside of reality. It's been proven on the quantum level that there is only one total reality, though there are many different universes which simultaneously compose it. All are linked and affect one another. The show is an essay on the elasticity of the real. The art of the '90s had to do with the in-between-but to be radical and apply this rule of physics you can state that reality is everywhere and you can stretch it to an infinite extent. Even the virtual is part of reality. Fiction is part of reality - all is ruled by one reality. I'm not interested in pushing reality because it's not breakable. What is interesting is the things you're living with, and the concept of furtivity, reality you can't see, like the Stealth bomber, which is invisible to radar.

How does that relate to artwork?

Art is invisible, and yet when you see it is super-spectacular. It's not breaking boundaries, that's a romantic notion from the '60s of artists going on the road and looking for new spaces. Like artists having transcendental vision -- another outmoded notion. The mission of art is to point at invisible things and make us realize that reality has an inner or parallel universe. Good art is one that multiplies the parallel universes. Art doesn't have anything to do with what you see, [except] as clues. It gives you clues about parallel universes. Matthew Barney represents the great exoticism of art like what you want from the movies - another world. But it's not what we need these days.

For a show, which comes first, the work, or the theory?

I never pick a theme and then try to find work that supports it. I always start a group show with two or three works that fit together and they arrive and then the theory comes afterward. I know my obsessions, and the show takes form as the theory does. I don't have to make myself return to my obsessions. I never make a show illustrate a theory - why bother - You can write a book instead. The best group shows I've seen are by artists because they don't have to illustrate a theme. They go by feelings. You should feel a link between artworks, the show explains itself, an artwork has a density, it creates its own gravity, and a show is exactly the same. An artwork that illustrates an idea is a write-off. I'm surprised people don't have the same demand of a group show.

-Frantiska and Tim Gilman-Sevcik



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