Givon Gallery

ETH(N)ICS

14.12.13 - 8.11.13

*“There is an infinite amount of hope in the universe ... but not for us.”*

Franz Kafka

Here are four videos from three contemporary Israeli artists. One cannot say they belong to a school but one can discern a chain of echoes - concerns of topic and of technique - across them.

All three artists are themselves principal performer in their works (one, admittedly, in a somewhat restricting - perhaps the point! - life size and baroque knitted ensemble) and the performers have a kind of studied anti-performance quality (amateurish would imply too much consistency) – now throw away, now genuinely and disturbingly intense.

In two (Shvil, Hisrschfeld) language is key, but here language is no tool for communication but a fractured and wounded thing composed of scraps, typos, misspellings and misunderstandings, the cheap language of second rate genre fiction and popular music, of advertising and commerce, of mangled auto- translation.

In all works the body is central - in Yefman, distributed between a landscape of biomorphic knitted forms with the sounds of kisses, coughing, burps, farts, squeals and screams and in the monstrous central figure endowed with a surfeit of eyes, breast-like appendages, tentacles and testicles. Additionally things *drip* *and spray*, conjuring the bodily effusions of snot, shit, piss and blood.

In Shvil the body is likewise foregrounded and exaggerated: over-endowed, distorted, concealed or revealed in – mark! - Areas of bodily anxiety – the crotch, the breasts, the face and the arse.

In Hirschfeld the matter is simple, technically if not ethically or interpretatively. The whole body is painted black and here is found the most anxiety inducing work of the four. The black figure, which cannot but recall minstrel black face but which also channels some sort of minor god of misrule, cavorts in an Austrian ski resort (there is a Borat like moment as other skiers line up in a group shot, apparently without thought or pause) and in the Trumpeldor Cemetery where this sprite literally dances on graves to film music rendered the triter by wear. This is difficult work. It is difficult work to like. It is difficult work to interpret.

Two small things act as possible pathways to the slimmest of possibilities of redemption. One is the crudeness of the camera on a stick device in the Trumpeldor piece. It renders the central figure somehow vulnerable, even, perhaps, in a moment of confusion, touching. The other is the seconds of dead silence as the black figure skis against distant trees. This is very beautiful (and I refuse to believe not deliberately so).

That deployment of strategic silence is a feature shared by all three artists. In each there is that moment, a sense of pointing beyond the morass – a slim possibility of grace, but no more. In other respects the use of sound follows the rule of brokenness observed elsewhere – tackiness, caricature, abrupt cuts, spasms, dyings.

Elsewhere this work has been described as political. I don’t know about that for that would imply a discursive coherence that all four works lack. Anxiety, yes, and insofar as this might characterise feeling about the current state of play politically, maybe *political anxiety*. It is interesting that a central image in each work is that of an implicit departure from the norm. Each central figure is an “other” – transgender, ethnically different, bodily distorted /disabled. In a society from its foundation to this moment defined by the keenest of senses of “the other” this is perhaps a deep example of the famous storm petrel role of the artist.

Text by Michael Szpakowski.

Michael Szpakowski is an artist, composer & writer based in the UK.  He has written extensively on new media arts and is a joint editor of the online video resource DVblog.