

# Art in America

Ciprian Muresan

by Brian Boucher

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Ciprian Muresan, *Untitled (Monks)*, 2011, video, approx. 12 minutes.

Utopians often have a hard time of it in Ciprian Muresan's work. The Romanian artist's hilarious photograph *Leap into the Void—after 3 Seconds* (2004) mimics Yves Klein's classic image of the artist in a swan dive from a rooftop. Muresan's abject version shows a similar street, a man's body sprawled on the pavement—the aftermath of a moment of glorious flight. For his recent show at David Nolan, his first New York solo, Muresan (b. 1977) continued sending up utopian artists, though perhaps treating them more gently, while also introducing themes of translation and transmission of knowledge and ideologies.

Greeting the visitor was *The Doomed City* (all works from the last two years), consisting of a chair and desk on which rest several classic novels by the likes of Joyce, Dostoyevsky and Woolf. Into each book, which viewers could peruse, Muresan bound two of his own pencil drawings illustrating the 1975 Russian sci-fi novel *The Doomed City*, by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Thus, he disrupts the literature of the past with his contemporary interpretations of a futuristic novel.

On a monitor nearby, Muresan's 9-minute video *The Invisible Hand* demonstrated his process, showing him as he bound one of his drawings into a tract by economist Adam Smith, coiner of the titular expression, which has been used by economists ever since to describe the supposedly self-regulating nature of the marketplace. Since the text appears in a Romanian translation and is borrowed from the library at the University of Cluj—the video shows Muresan leaving the library with it—one couldn't help but think of the way market economies have been uneasily grafted onto formerly socialist nations. To create *Untitled (Monks)*, consisting of a 12-minute video and 19 drawings, Muresan pressed several artist friends into service to play robed monks in a monastery, dutifully hand-copying books, as actual monks did in order to preserve and transmit knowledge and religious doctrine. Rather than bibles, though, Muresan's artist-scribes duplicate books on Beuys, Mondrian, Malevich, Duchamp and Sturtevant. The video shows them at their worktables, toiling away; a vitrine displayed the simple pencil drawings, with illustrations and text alike painstakingly reproduced. The piece slyly suggests art is a religion and art texts scripture. At the same time, as

he does in *The Doomed City*, Mure, san pays tribute to the humble book—sensual, long-lived, malleable—in the age of the Kindle.

While Beuys, Mondrian and Malevich each were driven by utopian aspirations, Muressan's inclusion of Sturtevant, who created precise simulations of others' works long before appropriation came into vogue, and of Duchamp, who made all such idea art possible, shifts the tone. At once homage and tender satire, this work targets not only the true believers but the skeptics too—not only the famous, and not only the boys.