

ArtReview

Ciprian Mureşan

by Siona Wilson

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DISCURSIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Discursive Arrangements, or Stubbornly Persistent Illusions
Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, New York
14 July – 13 August

Klaus von Nichtssagend's summer group exhibition, *Discursive Arrangements, or Stubbornly Persistent Illusions*, is a formally engaging show – if you can get past the mouthful of a title. Unfortunately, the accompanying press release is no reprieve. Pointing instead to the perils of overambitious writing, its three paragraphs skip quickly from Einstein to St Catherine of Siena, from psychoanalysis to Gertrude Stein, vaguely detailing the relationship between 'illusion', used here to deconstruct distinctions between past, present and future, and 'discursive arrangement', broadly defined as 'associations and references drawn from strands of disparate elements'. This could really mean anything, and there is a nagging sense that the term 'discursive' – a slippery one – was used rather erroneously for decoration as opposed to in any exactly critical way. This seems somewhat perverse, in that everyone from Lacan to Foucault deconstructed the term's implicit language-based power relations. Strange then that there is little of that here.

It would have been better to stop reading and start looking, because it's the idea of looking that takes centre stage. More specifically, images are repurposed as formal and aesthetic devices. The showstopper is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most critical and arguably discursive of the bunch. Walking through a long entrance passage, one encounters Sophie-Therese Trenka-Dalton's installation *The Royal Lion Hunt* (2009). Travelling to the British Museum in 2009, Trenka-Dalton photographed a large Iraqi relief originally located in Mosul. It depicts a bearded hunter travelling by chariot and surrounded by lions. Pulling back a bow and arrow, the hunter is captured in dramatic motion as he takes aim at the pride. Trenka-Dalton heightened the contrast, then sent PDFs of the relief to the gallery, where they now cover an entire wall. An unobtrusive gold medal hangs at eye level above the huntsman's head. It features a palm tree and Arabic lettering. These medals were given to Iraqis faithful to

Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. Coded with traditional symbols of power – lions and palm trees – Trenka-Dalton's installation deconstructs the ways in which historical signifiers of nationhood and sovereignty persist through time and retain contemporary relevance, despite their colonial appropriation.

Other works almost entirely obscure their source material, such as Allyson Vieira's *Desktop (Cave Paintings)* (2009), a watercolour of the Exposé function on the artist's Mac, which lays out, in a web of little thumbnails, various cave paintings blurred by her watery marks. Meanwhile, Mathew Cerletty's painting *Winkie's* (2010) reduces an Ikea catalogue image into Pop art abstraction, with scant evidence of its original picture. Ryan Mrozowski's *Untitled (XIII)* (2011) frames a book page reproducing Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913). Lit from behind by a bare lightbulb, the reverse image bleeds through so that one image nearly cancels out the other. Other works play with this cancelling to lesser effect, or not at all. But on the whole, writing aside, *Discursive Arrangements* offers some skilful alterations, as images are appropriated, layered and obscured beyond recognition.

DAVID EVERITT HOWE

CIPRIAN MUREŞAN

Ciprian Mureşan
David Nolan Gallery, New York
7 July – 2 September

In Romanian artist Ciprian Mureşan's first US solo exhibition, I caught myself thinking about E.H. Gombrich's 1960 art history classic *Art and Illusion*, an unfashionable book that could very well have appeared in the show alongside other volumes featured in the artist's pedagogically themed films and sculptural works. Addressing the question of style and mimesis, Gombrich recounts a little-known German artist's memory from the 1820s about a group of fellow art students – friends – out sketching in Tivoli. Each

one was bent in youthful earnestness upon the faithful and objective rendering of the landscape. But when comparing their finished sketches, they discovered that, rather than displaying the objectivity of straightforward imitation, the works revealed immediately apparent individual styles, readable like each of their personalities.

The five artists featured in Mureşan's short film *Untitled (Monks)* (all works 2011) seem to succeed where their German predecessors did not. Playing the part of novices in a scriptorium, they are also engaged in a task of mimesis with pencil and paper. But rather than a scene from nature, these artists are drawing pages – image and text both – from Western art books, featuring artists such as Piet Mondrian, Joseph Beuys and Susan Hiller. The ironic negation of the modernist investment in the authentic mark, although a well-worn aspect of postmodern art, is addressed here anew through a post-Communist lens.

Mureşan came of age in the wake of the 1989 revolution, an adolescent at the time of the Ceausescus' violent demise. His brand of *ostalgie* – a German term meaning nostalgia for the Communist East – is filtered through the wry humour of postmodern trickster Martin Kippenberger. Indeed the most intriguing work in Mureşan's exhibition also serves as a touching homage to the late German artist. *Untitled (Kippenberger)* is a hypnotic ten-second animation featuring 120 unique graphite drawings of Kippenberger's 1994 installation *The Happy End*



Sophie-Therese Trenka-Delton
 (see *Discursive Arrangements*)
The Royal Lion Hunt, 2009,
 black-and-white digital print,
 adhered to wall, gold coin-chain
 hanging element, interior wall
 decal, vintage postcard (offices,
 dimensions variable. Courtesy the
 artist and Klaus von Nichtsagenda
 Gallery, New York.

of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'. The individualised style of each drawing, although clearly traced from a reproduction, becomes a rhythmic shimmering in tones of white and grey.

As with the facsimiles produced in *Untitled (Monks)*, the individual drawings used to make this time-lapse film are also displayed in the exhibition. But the fact that they do not appear on the checklist suggests that they are more like artefacts, remainders from the final works.

Style has become a vehicle for political reflection here. This is not the authentic autographic mark that surprised the nineteenth-century German students (an issue that must have seemed newly relevant to Gombrich with the meteoric rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s). Instead, Mureşan knowingly aligns mimesis with the capitalist ideology of individuality. His drawing style is a demonstration in mannered facility that declares the emptiness of the individual mark. The drawn artefacts from the aforementioned films, as well as those used in the sculptural work *The Doomed City* and the film *The Invisible Hand*, look like exercises from a 'how to' drawing textbook. This only serves to highlight Mureşan's ironic reflection on capitalist modernisation as training in imitation for former Communist artists, *ostalgie* notwithstanding.

SIONA WILSON



Ciprian Mureşan
The Wizard, 2011; round vending
 machine and rubber balls,
 169 x 71 x 71 cm.