

ARTFORUM

Ciprian Mureșan, Galeria Plan B

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"If we wanna understand the Humans, we gotta see them at their lowest. The Evil--as they call it--that's what we study today." This line is the protagonist's pessimistic view of humanity that opens Ciprian Muresan's video *Dog Luv*, 2009, which premiered at the Romanian Pavilion in the Venice Biennale last year. Based on a script by Saviana Stanescu, *Dog Luv* was presented at Plan B alongside *Untitled* (Tom Chamberlain), 2009, a video that teases out the titular English artist's painting practice. Muresan's solo exhibition was the first in the gallery's new location within an old brush factory--a compound that brings together five galleries and twenty art, design, and performance studios. The artist's own studio is downstairs, as are those of three other gallery artists; Chamberlain had installed a group of paintings in the artist-run space Laika next door. This cooperative setup has filled an urgent need. Romania still lacks cultural infrastructure; rather than wait for the authorities to act, a core group of artists independently collaborated to take over several floors of the factory. At Plan B, the pairing of *Dog Luv*, which deals both with the fragile teacher/student relationship and with human character more broadly, and *Untitled*, which finds the artist working as lone warrior, made perfect sense as a self-critique from within the collective. Stanescu's dramatic text about humanity's horrific appetite for torture, interrogation, and execution is played out in *Dog Luv* by five beautifully handcrafted puppets of dogs. Maddog, the leader and teacher of the pack, encourages his students to recite the names of various forms of torture practiced throughout history. They do so willingly, rapidly firing off a list that includes stoning, crucifixion, genocide, and waterboarding. He goes on to specify that "the backwards spelling of DOG as GOD is not completely arbitrary." But it does not take long before his disciples have turned upon him and the play becomes one about the act of torture rather than its theory.

Dog Luv was presented to the left of the space, and to balance its dark intent, Mureşan seems to have looked to the angel on his right shoulder to find Tom Chamberlain. An accomplished painter, Chamberlain works by laying down thousands of repeated, patterned brushstrokes using diluted pigments. The content of each canvas is indefinable and the iridescent surfaces seem evanescent. In production, only the glistening of the wet paint hints at the shapes being formed before each section has time to dry. Mureşan's video follows the same development of one painting and was screened in almost real time over three consecutive days.

The shimmering white of Chamberlain's painting-in-progress on the right thus sat in stark contrast to the dark costumes, backdrop, and content of *Dog Luv* on the left. In the middle, *Skull Study after Holbein*, 2009, a pencil drawing of the anamorphic skull Hans Holbein included in *The Ambassadors*, 1533, may have been Mureşan's attempt to create a tensile connection between the two videos. The subject's visual ambiguity is an obvious symbol of mortality, but it also reflects the distortion of Chamberlain's paintings when viewed in reproduction. The trope somehow bridged the gap between two very different stories of humankind, one of a conspiracy that leads to hatred and violence, the other of the individual who aspires alone.