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CIPRIAN MURESAN

by Holland Cotter

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Ciprian Muresan, born in 1977, is one of several remarkable young Romanian artists (Mircea Cantor and Serban Savu are others) who were on the verge of their teens at the time of the 1989 revolution, and adults during the period of confused politics and disappointed ideals that followed.

Unsurprisingly, utopianism appears in Mr. Muresan's art only in ambiguous forms. For the Nolan show he has unbound a printed volume of Adam Smith's 18th-century, pro-capitalist tract "Wealth of Nations" to insert one of his drawings among the pages. The drawing was inspired by a 1979 Russian sci-fi novel, "The Doomed City," in which a planet populated by earthlings from ideal-driven eras (1940s Germany, 1960s America) has sunk into a state of armed barbarism. He has placed similar drawings into novels by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, giving modern literature a Darwinian bottom line.

Modern art gets a reality check too. In a 2011 video we see robed monks in a scriptorium. They aren't transcribing religious texts, though. They're drawing copies of art book illustrations: an abstract painting by Malevich, a Mondrian grid, a photograph of Joseph Beuys. All three artists are famous for being utopians; their art has the status of holy writ. Needless to say, Mr. Muresan's approach to them is not reverential.

The monks, it turns out, aren't monks; they're Mr. Muresan's artist-friends. Most of the images they're copying are from a catalog of work by the American conceptualist Elaine Sturtevant, who has made a career of recreating art by other artists, specifically male superstars, with the intent of, among other things, puncturing myths of originality and genius. Mr. Muresan pushes her endeavor further with a video of artists making copies of printed reproductions of Ms. Sturtevant's recreations, which were themselves derived from printed reproductions of the originals.

Mr. Muresan engineers this meta-art pileup with a straight face and a light touch. In the end, though, he is not above genuine homage. A fluid draftsman, he recently produced 120 graphite drawings of Martin Kippenberger's 1994 installation "The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika,'" which envisioned the United States as a giant employment agency: a place of both opportunity and cut-throat competition.

Kippenberger, a protean and anarchic figure, died in 1997 and is a hero to many younger artists. Mr. Muresan, I would guess, is one. And he uses his 120 painstakingly executed drawings to create a video animation in which Kippenberger's grand, doubt-infused installation, and with it his spirit, flicker momentarily to life.

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