

FLASH REVIEWS

BANI ABIDI GREEN CARDAMOM - LONDON



BANI ABIDI, *Pari Wania*, 7.42pm, 22nd August 2008, Ramadan, Karachi, 2009. Duratrans lightboxes, 51 x 76 cm. Courtesy the artist and Green Cardamom, London.

Bani Abidi's first London solo show, straightforwardly titled "Karachi," presents two distinct series of works. "Intercommunication Devices" consists of a group of digital drawings depicting front-gate intercoms in the wealthy Defence Housing Authority enclave of Karachi. The adopted media successfully captures the coldness of the electronic devices and their ambiguous status of barriers between public and private dimension disguised as communication tools. Extrapolated from their

original context and repropounded in sales-catalogue fashion, their state-of-the-art technical details raises critical questions of social nature as well as being a testimony of the need of engineering people to come up with curious variations of what is fundamentally a very basic object. The six lightboxes of "Karachi Series 1" further examine the fine line between public and private by featuring ordinary people (belonging to the non-Muslim minority) involved in domestic activities in the deserted streets of the city. By staging their life in an outdoor environment, they silently claim equal status in a country where acceptance is regrettably still a long way to come. Blessed by a beautiful sunset, which the artist could catch only by shooting in a very limited amount of time, these pictures are an amazing mix of technical proficiency and emotional force. They confirm Abidi as a strong candidate to stand the test of time once the dust generated by the recent hype for subcontinental art settles.

Michele Robecchi

ALEX KATZ TIMOTHY TAYLOR - LONDON



ALEX KATZ, *Zofia*, 2009. Oil on board, 30 x 23 cm. Courtesy Timothy Taylor, London. © Alex Katz.

Alex Katz's signature style is plainly evident in this exhibition of recent works. Large, flat portraits of family members are shown alongside a painting of bright green maple leaves that wind inoffensively across the canvas. The atmosphere is still and the figures frozen and staring, as disconnected from the viewer as from the minimalist backdrops that surround them. The characters in Katz's world appear dazed, almost drugged, and this condition leaks out from the canvases, giving the space

a somewhat tranquilized ambience.

Despite the presence of Katz's close family members, the paintings remain oddly unemotional. Ada, Katz's wife who has served as the painter's muse for almost 50 years, is featured twice, first alone and then alongside her son Vincent and daughter-in-law Vivien. Ada's features are noble, her age only revealed in the gray wisps that appear in her hair. As with all of Katz's portraits, wrinkles, lines and other facial quirks are obliterated, with everyone bearing improbably flawless complexions. Ada is depicted in profile, with her positioning in the solo portrait replicated almost exactly in the family group, placing her with her back to her children. This distance is also emphasized in the cold title "Three People," as if Katz has no connection to them at all. It is this coolness that gives the work its fascination, with the viewer left to ponder the emotional worlds hidden behind the implacable expressions.

Eliza Williams

EIJA-LIISA AHTILA PARASOL UNIT - LONDON



EIJA-LIISA AHTILA, *WHERE IS WHERE?*, 2008. 6-channel projected high definition installation with 8-channel sound, 53 mins 43 sec. Courtesy Marian Goodman, New York/Paris. Photo: Marja-Leena Hukkanen. © 2008 Crystal Eye - Kristallisilmä Oy.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila creates installations that confound our expectations of cinema and narrative. *WHERE IS WHERE?* (2008), shown in the UK for the first time at Parasol Unit, draws on Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, which documents the murder of a young French boy during the Algerian War by his two Algerian friends. In Ahtila's piece, the story is reconfigured through the eyes of a contemporary European poet, who is trying to understand the boys' actions through

surreal interactions with a spiritual guide and Death himself. The piece is non-linear and displayed over several screens, with the viewer compelled to physically twist and turn in an attempt not to miss anything. Somewhat ironically then, despite these experiments, the work only becomes truly compelling at the point when it becomes more conventional, in a set of interviews with the boys where the children's stark reason for the murder is devastatingly revealed. Upstairs at Parasol are two further installations, also exploring themes of death, faith and survival. One is another split screen piece, telling the story of a woman's sadness at the death of her dog. The other is simpler: a single-screen, documentary-style film of fishermen in West Africa who are defiantly battling the raging waves of the ocean, in an attempt to get out to sea. *Fisherman/Études No. 1* (2007) may lack the refinement of Ahtila's other films, yet is engrossing, with its repetitive scenes speaking urgently of hope and belief against all odds.

Eliza Williams

MARIETA CHIRULESCU MICKY SCHUBERT - BERLIN



MARIETA CHIRULESCU, *Installation view at Micky Schubert, Berlin*, 2010. Courtesy the artist and Micky Schubert, Berlin.

There is some of the incestuousness of the later Christopher Wool in Marieta Chirulescu's paintings and photographs. Paint becomes photograph becomes paint; the edges of a photographic frame double as the geometric divisions of formalistic abstract painting. As in Wool, color is an exception and black and white the rule because it is the basic condition of photography: the casual imprint of light.

February, 08th (2010) is a white painting in which muted traces of

primary color emerge. The surface is scraped flat to expose every minor glitch of the handling. Along one edge, a copy of a photographic swatch strip has been glued, a sign to playfully convert the paint field into an image. For Chirulescu, the materiality of painting is synonymous with opacity, and she uses white to edit and define the gray apertures of rolled on paint and grainy photocopies. The photograph *Untitled* (2010) appears to show two halves of a sash window, or consecutive frames from a reel of backlit transparencies. A small monochrome painting, *Jeans* (2010), shows how Chirulescu is able to make a perfunctory covering of transparent blue oil paint resemble photographic aggregate.

She defines paint as a screen we can see beyond, like a panel of blue stained glass modestly, but stubbornly, revealing nothing but its own potential transparency.

Mark Prince