

vittorio santoro

la chambre de Marlow – Artist's statement

Reciprocal Scrutiny (bordereau), 2009

The work featured in the project room «La chambre» of the Xippas Gallery in Paris is an installation comprising neon and photographic elements. The words "reciprocal" and "scrutiny", manifested in neon tubing, hang side-by-side on one of the four walls of the almost square project space. "Scrutiny" reads as if horizontally mirrored. On the opposite wall to the neon expressions, a framed, rather black image has been set at the same height and in such a way as to suggest a direct dialectical relationship. On closer inspection, the framed image reveals itself to be an overdeveloped silver gelatine print on Baryte paper. The photograph is a re-photographed image of the well-known "bordereau" on a wooden plate that was used to incriminate Alfred Dreyfus in 1894. This hand-written document listed technical information concerning French artillery of the time. The words on the "bordereau" are only faintly visible and therefore indecipherable. The inky photograph now effectively functions as a black, square mirror to the neon words, facing.

For this occasion, I have chosen to call the project room La chambre de Marlow, in reference to the main narrator in Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad. It is not my intention for the work to deal directly with or offer relevant comment on either "L'Affaire Dreyfus" or on the well-known novella by Conrad. Intuitively, the constellation of some given historical facts and their manipulation, the political and social ramifications, the symbolic journey and the ambiguity of description, the spiritual confrontation, the identity exploration together with a satire on greed and ignorance, man's potential for duplicity, as well the awareness of the difficulty of making experience intelligible. Furthermore, I was interested to confront the "purity" of a solely geometrical visual image, like the black square, to the "contamination" of it by language. These are some of the stimuli that might have converged and influenced the conception of this pièce.

I like to think that the different elements of the work will serve as triggers and incite the viewer to form connections between the different literary, political, historical and perceptual sources. And, furthermore, encourage a rigorous parlay between one's own subjectivity and an "impassable" art object. This interplay between abstract data, geometric and linguistic forms, historical facts and fictional information can be negotiated and interpreted in any number of ways. I would enjoy that the piece would dilate like a web of associations, interferences and allusions.

The centre of the project space remains empty and my interest is to explore what, in this vacuum, might now be possible.

Vittorio Santoro
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