

Content (with a capital C and underlined) was almost overwhelmingly visible in the curatorial vision and artworks in both Documenta and Münster Skulpture Projekte when I visited them in Germany this summer. Amongst issues of mass-migration, socio-economics, citizenship, xenophobia, colonialism and other major political issues of our times, there was a feeling that, at times, the subject overwhelmed the art. Works that dealt in a direct way to these issues I felt were often belittled, in spite of what I presume being a genuine attempt (on the part of the organisers and artists) to respond to the big issues of our time. This was seen most blatantly in Kassel in the works of Guillermo Galindo and Hiwa K, which to my mind threw up ethical issues of insensitive specialisation in their (mis)use of the refugee crisis.

I personally found strength in works that transcended, or sort other/subtler ways to deal with these issues and so managed to sidestep the dominance of Content. Personal highlights, amongst a lot of strong (and it must be said an unbelievably, but reassuring large amount of weak) works, were Pierre Huyghe, Michael Auder, Cerith Wyn Evans, Mika Rottenberg and Hito Steyerl in Münster; and Moyra Davey, Artur Żmijewski, Ruth Wolf-Rehfeldt, Roe Rosen and Pope.L at Documenta 14. To review either, let alone both, exhibitions in a few hundred words in any comprehensive way is impossible. A strength of the vastness of each of these shows is that they have capacity for each visitor to get something meaningful from the experience, be it connected to the overall tone and feel of the curatorial statement, or picked up in the undercurrents. My antenna was particularly alert for work that incorporated other artist's work.

I am interested (as an artist - *Transitory Paintings*, *Aphantasia* and *ReconFigure Paintings* - and curator - (*detail*) and *Re-Unpacking*) in extending the language of appropriation to incorporate different types of parasite as a metaphor for the use of other artist's work in newly authored works. The traditional stance of the parasite is something that takes, but does not give in return, such as the hookworm or Head Lice. When used analogously within appropriation, then I see a one-way relationship where the contemporary artist only takes and uses the other artist's work. However, there are parasites that are symbiotic with a host, and significantly causes no harm (Commensal) and in some cases of reciprocal benefit (Mutualist). In fact, recent scientific research suggests that not only are half of the Earth's species parasitic, with up to ten percent doomed to extinction within fifty years, potentially causing profound negative effects on our species and planet<sup>i</sup>. In short, parasites' impact can have a massive positive effect on their hosts and wider contexts.

It could be argued that Documenta itself has become a parasitic exhibition, extending out from its base in Kassel over recent editions to include other (sub)base cities such as Lagos, New Dehli, Kabul and Banff. Likewise, in Münster this year (arguably site specific) public sculptures have crept from their bases to the nearby city of Marl and vice versa. This can be seen as a generous position where the intellectual qualities and attention of these über exhibitions are shared with and likewise gain from the other cities involvement, creating something of mutual benefit. The current edition of Documenta appears to have taken this position further, sharing its budget, all of the artists and publicity with Athens. The title of the edition, *Learning From Athens*, hints at sentiments of scholarship and resources shared, but also could be read as condescending. Despite not visiting Athens it has been impossible

to ignore the charge from the media in general is that Documenta has in fact been taking from Athens in another, more one-way exchange, draining what financial and resources are available for the arts and artists in Greece towards the already well-resourced exhibition.

The realm of the parasitical authorship was also visible in a good number of the selected artists in both Documenta and Münster; almost visible as a trend, within countless other trends of these behemoth exhibitions. This review will now focus on just five artists from both exhibitions, who I believe feature different parasitic tendencies towards other artist's work, a way of sidestepping on my part in order to make sense from the vastness of each exhibition.

In Münster, Ei Arakawa showed seven large LED paintings in a meadow, a long walk beside the lake from the city. Each panel recreated a work by predominantly contemporary painters including Jutta Koether, Joan Mitchell and Amy Sillman. Accompanying the visual of each work is an avatar reading an electronic song that, as Nico Anklamiv points out "quite literally gives them a voice, while granting the digital copy an interpretative authority over itself and the corresponding original."<sup>ii</sup> The words spoken rolled into and within the encounter with the works; letting the eyes, ears and mind wander and be caught up with the labyrinth-esque musings. The interpretive quality may be given over to the words of Arakawa (via the avatar), but I was left feeling that I wanted to know a little more about the thought process of the artist; why was this location chosen, what prompted the words and perhaps most of all, why the choice of these seven paintings, by these seven artists? Oddly only one painting (and the only historical re-imagining) appears to have a conceptual or subject related connection to site or context. Courbet's piece is located in the landscape, so central to the experience of Arakawa's work, but also hinges on the meeting of people, class and interpretation equally important to the contemporary work. The meeting of the painting's title is, despite the perfection of the realism in the paintwork, a fictional meeting between the artist and his patron Alfred Bruyas. The location of Arakawa's version of *The Meeting* as the first of seven encountered, thus also enters into a fictive meeting between the viewer and the paintings, through the 'looking-glass' of Arakawa's digital visualisation and avatar read poetic electronic songs.

Sadly, the vision of the artist's work appears made for the twilight hours, not the scorching August day I visited, where the paintings where the digital paintings were sun bleached so as to become near monochrome technical minimalism. This recalls the interpretation of the Art Historian, Michel Hilaire of the painted relationship between the Courbet and Bruyas in *The Meeting*. Hilaire writes, "Between the collector and his artist there is no real exchange of gaze. No effusiveness."<sup>iii</sup> Arakawa's work left me deflated in its execution, a sorry state to encounter an artwork in comparison with how you would normally encounter the works he appropriated; the parasitical in this instance is causing harm to the host paintings. However, the idea of the translation of the paintings into the digital billboards, with accompanying madcap commentary is something rich and hinting at the possibility of something remarkable; so in this instance the parasitical artist could be seen to adding to the host.

Moving back along the lake to the city I stumbled across the most immovable of public sculptures; a ubiquitous and vast Henry Moore bronze is located outside the LWL Museum in Münster. Parked beside it during a large chunk of 2017 is an articulated lorry seemingly

carrying a black crate to transport the Moore. By conceptual association the gesture by Cosima von Bronin and Tom Burr incorporates the Moore, or perhaps another similarly sized unknown artwork into the collaborative artists' own piece, *Benz Bonin Burr*. Perhaps my response is down to personal taste, but I felt swamped by this gesture. Bronin and Burr's (and if we are to take the title at its word, Benz') sculpture is somewhat incongruous on many counts; to the public square outside the museum, the public art of Moore and indeed the city, an unclamped shiny new Mercedes Benz lorry parked obtrusively in a public space seems at odds with everyday life.

Strangely, writing the preceding paragraph prompted positive thoughts towards the work, my grey cells scream at my hands, *is this not something art does well, to question, to prod?* Michel Serres states that "the parasite is an interrupter"<sup>iv</sup> and I stand by this work displaying parasitical tendencies in this regard. Specifically the gesture of the contemporary artist's drained the host (Moore) sculpture, which struggles to interrupt the interrupters (Bronin and Burr). However, I am not convinced this response is the artist's intention and I left the work underwhelmed despite the boldness of the gesture. As we know the devil's eye is in the detail; the crate does not feel real, it is a prop, something too aware of its status of art over function. The black paint is too fresh and contrived, the FRAGILE branding is more akin to museum signage or object than a transport crate, the crate is too small to house the Moore and to be frank, does not appear to be able to carry anything of its weight. The illusion of the gesture is betrayed by the staginess of the crate, the illusion is unbelievable, yet sucks the Moore, like a mosquito sucking the blood or mistletoe stunting the growth of its host tree.

A completely different approach was taken by Michael Smith, who allowed senior citizens to have half price tattoos created by numerous artists familiar to Münster's art visitors, including Lawrence Wiener, Mika Rottenberg and Wade Guyton. On one level this correlates with a younger generation's release from previously held social prejudices of sporting a tattoo, or touches upon the seemingly relentless surge in the popularity or spectacle/entertainment value of contemporary art to a mass audience. It also raises issues over authorship and ownership; do proud new owners of inked designs on their flesh display a piece of work by the tattooist, by Michael Smith or the artist who produced the design. I also responded well to this generous work, enjoying the idea of a meta-exhibition that Smith has let loose as potential; where multiple artworks are now scattered through the world, being revealed to an ever growing global audience. I sensed that this work engaged in a symbiotic relationship between artist and artists (and artist and audience); Smith being the instigator or overseer of an act, that once started extends beyond and outwards from him as author to something of mutual gain.

This spread of art across the globe seen in Smith's work, is in sharp contrast with the intimate encounter with the paintings and installation of drawings by David Schutter in the Neu Gallerie in Kassel. The subtle grey paintings are hung next to two different early Renaissance Tempura panel depictions of Saint Anthony Abbot by Giovanni Guidi and Pietro Gerini. At first the relationship of these works to Schutter's monochromes appear both arbitrary and particular. A clue comes from paying close attention to Schutter's brushstrokes, where almost undetectable marks start to hint at the body parts in the other paintings. A thickly veiled and disguised relationship, heightened by the different surface size and shapes. The text panel confirms the connection, whilst also revealing that it is not

these two paintings that Schutter has made specific reference to, but instead two works by Parentino of the same story of Anthony Abbot giving alms to the poor, whilst 'shunning the gold'. The works Schutter studied for days in order to equip his with the memory to make his works are on permanent display hundreds of miles away in Rome, in the Galleria Doria Pamphilj. The results of this research is seen on mass in the long line of drawings seen elsewhere, which permeates the memory as I returned to the paintings after viewing the whole building.

The loan of the Guidi and the Gerini, both hinders the specificity of Schutter's process and readings of his work, and enable the, perhaps, parasitic relationship of the contemporary painter to the historical works to be conceptually linked. Dieter Roelstraete points out in the documenta 14 reader that "If gray is a color that refuses to take sides, so to speak, all the more important becomes attached to the "originals" Schutter models his memories after, more often than not images charged with brooding political meaning."<sup>v</sup> Grey is used by Schutter not just as a colour, but the only colour. This allows the canvases to take on a reading of a blanketing or (near) negation of subject, but also a refusal to take sides. This could place the artist in the realm of an outsider perhaps, but is also a classic tactic of the parasite, to try to be anonymous, to carry out their work invisibly and without drawing attention to itself. Schutter's work then allows the minimal power of what is left, from his work and time spent paying attention, on the canvases to be quietly monumental, the more time the viewer spends with them.

From everything I encountered in Germany this summer it is without question the paintings by R. H. Quaytman that have been cogitating in my mind the most in the weeks that have followed my visit. The latest, so called, chapter in the artist's oeuvre of exhibition-responsive installations is a carefully composed arrangement of plywood panels populated with images created from silkscreen prints, painted representations of reality and pure pattern. For her piece, *1777, Chapter 29, Part 2* in the Neue Galerie Kassel, Quaytman has built upon her interest in Paul Klee's *Angeles Novus*, famously once owned by Walter Benjamin.

Serres puts forward a stance that a parasite "gets power less because he occupies the center than because he fills the environment."<sup>vi</sup> If we take this thought in relation to Quaytman's use of Klee (and by association Benjamin) in her work, then I believe we get to the majestic heart of the artist's parasitical gesture. The contemporary artist has started with the iconic legend of *Angelus Novus*, but has then looked to the periphery of identified knowledge of the work. A previously little known fact is that Klee mounted his piece on top of a reproduction of a painting by Cranach, something wonderfully brought out into the light in some of Quaytman's sumptuous panels. By pushing further and to the edges of what could be done by responding to the work by Klee, Quaytman has allowed a sense of equal learning and 'gain' to occur to both artists, creating a 'third space'. The contemporary artist has (re)searched more fully to create a room full of multiple new works that feel free, insightful and intelligent. Quaytman has in a way removed the potential obstacle of the iconic nature of *Angelus Novus* to create something rich, new and able to stand on its own, whilst also allowing her work to say something new about Klee's work, (and perhaps Benjamin, and even Cranach). I believe this work to be insightful and philosophical, and firmly entrenched in a mutualist relationship with its artistic host. The installation of works by Quaytman became for me the abiding memory of an artwork from the exhibitions, the

one that lives on, the one I continue to be learning from, in the most useful way, as I continue my parasitic consumption of art.

---

<sup>i</sup> See <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/9/e1602422.full> (accessed 09/09/2017)

<sup>ii</sup> König, K, Peters, B & Wagner, M, eds. *Skulpture Projekte Münster 2017*, (Leipzig, Spector Books, 2017), p128

<sup>iii</sup> Michel Hilaire 'The Courbet-Bruyas Solution', in *Gustav Courbet*, Küster, U, ed. (Ostfildern, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2014), p37

<sup>iv</sup> Serres, M, *The Parasite*, (London, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p111

<sup>v</sup> Latimer, Q & Szymczyk, A, eds. *Documenta 14: Daybook*, (London, Prestel Verlag, 2017), p 11<sup>th</sup> May (please note the page numbers are dates in this book).

<sup>vi</sup> Serres, M, *The Parasite*, (London, University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p 95