

The Moment You Realise You Are Lost

Johann König Gallery, Berlin

Curated by Adam Carr

Artists: Stella Capes, Tomas Chaffe, Gintaras Didžiapetris, Blue Firth, Alfred Johansen, Benoît Maire, Dan Rees / Catherine Griffiths, Mandla Reuter, Hannah Rickards, Yann Sérandour, Tris Vonna-Michell

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Conceptual art is alive and well, and Adam Carr knows it. The intrepid young curator is making waves—at least petite, billowing ripples—in the art world. He seems to draw fine art out of thin air, producing delicate exhibitions as refreshing in their modesty as they are in elegance. It was at the Kadist Art Foundation in Paris that Carr previously melded together art works into finely balanced suites for meditation on Time with the group show *Some Time Waiting*. Before that, his interest in the experience of anticipation and duration was evident in more directed exhibitions, such as a show he curated aboard the Trans-Siberian Express and another comprised only of works on Post-It notes.

The latest manifestation of Carr's sensitive eye and subtle taste, *The Moment You Realise You Are Lost*, was on view at Johann König Gallery in Berlin this summer. Works by 12 relatively unknown artists, mostly from England, France and Germany, formed a collection of pensive moments congealed into form. They addressed ideas about transience potentiality with grace and reason. Together they formed a rich and layered meditation on the temporary and the immaterial, with recurring motifs of failure or the unattainable, chance, and blindness braided into the exhibition, itself elegantly held together in a minimal, square room.

Many of the works explored failure of a sort, such as Benoît Maire's *Forecast of October 22* (2007), a photograph of a performance during which the artist 'enacted' blindness with his eyes open while crossing a street with a cane. Not being able to attain or communicate blindness is a form of 'failure' similar to that seen in Alfred Johansen's work, *Untitled* (1966). A Danish conceptual artist working in the 1960s and 1970s who renounced art years ago, Johansen has since vanished off the face of the earth. *Untitled* are two photographs taken during a performance he conducted in the dark, hence the images are indiscernible, almost entirely black. Dan Rees and Catherine Griffiths's work, *Home for Lost Ideas* (ongoing since 2006), culls the failed as well. As the title suggests, this work places under glass some 'ideas', or their visual or textual expression, for works by various artists that have never been realized.

Failure is simply one side of the coin of chance. Of interest here is not the melancholy of failure but rather the concept of potential and the turn of fate—and the instant when they are made manifest. It is the moment when probability is determined, in Yann Sérandour's case, quite literally. *Pile ou Face [Heads or Tails]* (2007), is a €1 coin discretely placed on the gallery floor, tails side up. Had it landed heads, the original work of art intended for this show would have been exhibited. What it was we shall never know. Another display of the mysterious by Sérandour is *L'Espace, lui-même [The Space Itself]* (2007), a large grey poster that resembles a photograph of TV snow. It is in fact an enlarged reproduction of a small section of the cover of a newspaper made by Yves Klein on November 27th, 1960. On that day, Klein included in his newspaper an odd little space with no recognizable image or text; what he called "a representation of the space itself." Half a century later, musing on the tiny abstraction and the happenings of that particular day in 1960, I can't help but appreciate the economy of means with which this work and the exhibition as a whole explore the subject of Time. There is not a single video work included in this exhibition, yet almost every one succinctly references the past, a specific one: the history of its own creation.

These are what I call Metaworks: art that is "metaphysical" because one way or another it calls to light the process of its production, or questions of authorship in art today. Such works might also dissect the circumstances of their exhibition, of encountering an artwork, and through it, new thoughts. For example, the most immediate work in the show is also the most easily passed over.

A modest light switch was placed by the entrance. It is Mandla Reuter's *Time Has Ceased Space Has Vanished* (2006) and when turned on by a daring viewer, it activates the overhead lighting for what he has calculated to be 90% of the time required to view the exhibition. When the lights went off while I was across the room, I couldn't help smiling at the dilemma of continuing in the muted daylight streaming in through the hallway, or walking back to the light switch. Another parasitic artist in this show is Tomas Chaffe, who is represented by three works which function as accoutrements to works by other artists. He designed a bench and arranged the CD player for Gintaras Didžiapetris' *Konceptas* (2006), a sound installation and booklet of a project Didžiapetris did in Lithuania (itself exploring the fleetingness of thought through recorded interviews with inhabitants of a small village called Konceptas). Chaffe made a similar bench for Blue Firth's *Resource (2)* (2007), a work consisting of a collection of books on the occult and paranormal, focusing specifically on the invisible and attempting to convey ideas rather than forms. He even went so far as to design the simple visitor's brochure to the exhibition, calling the work *Presentation of This*. Chaffe piggy-backs on other works and uses design to test the limits of authorship and foreground contextualizing elements that support artwork and are intended to recede unquestioned into the background.

Other artists in this show, Stella Capes, Hannah Rickards, and Tris Vonna-Michell also included interesting works riffing on the themes of failure and potential, blindness and the invisible, the metaphysical and dematerialized. What all the works shared was an interest in the fleeting. Each is successful at seizing the Moment without succumbing to the simplification of a stopwatch.

-Chen Tamir