

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS

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REENACTMENT
A RETRO-NECRO
POLITICS

EVIL
BLACK METAL AS
CRYPTO LOGO JIHAD

ANXIETY
DAVID ROSETZKY'S
LIFESTYLE SUBLIME

AMBIANCE
MOVING-IMAGE
SOUNDSCAPE





MATT KEEGAN
NEW YORK

The work on view in Matt Keegan's one-person show *Any Day Now* is flat—silkscreens, photographs, paper-thin incisions in the surface layer of drywall, cut and layered or mounted and freestanding images [D'Amelio Terras; September 6—29, 2007]. It is flat in other ways, too. The phrases and words he chooses for his text works are those that have lost the roundness of meaning. His photographs—two, three or multiple shots of the same subject—are literal; they can only be described by describing what they depict.

All this flatness is about itself, or more precisely, about the deception of flatness. A deadpan presentation of everyday worn-down stuff, the exhibition constitutes a critique of the images and words we take for granted. His paper-thin works offer, in fact, a textured reading of our meaning-making and of the tools we wield in this enterprise.

At different places in the gallery, the letters M, E, N, repeat, inscribed in typeset on the walls in horizontal lines that form overlapping trapezoidal shapes. The generic noun "men" jumps from the pattern only to dissolve into a field of lines as the letters jumble and the cuts become less distinct. A deflated word re-forms, invisible and everywhere, and once-dormant connotations strain against its three-letter simplicity.

An eight-foot-tall accordion-like structure made from crudely cut, studded sheetrock spans the gallery's two central pillars. Here, the popular greeting "Good To See You" is cut out at eye level, each enlarged letter taking up a fold. As the viewer passes, the phrase unfolds rhythmically, echoing the musical way it is often delivered. Known as the socially savvy salutation—avoiding forgotten names and blurring the particulars of earlier meetings—this empty, boneless sentiment is here an actual screen.

These and other text-based works featuring similarly innocuous phrases flaunt their plainness and point to



PRAGUE BIENNALE 3
PRAGUE

language's inability to describe even the most basic stuff of life. "You and Me" appears out of a blizzard of overlapping typefaces in a series of monochrome silkscreens, unmoored and lost.

Keegan's untitled series of snapshot photocollages echoes his cuts in the gallery's surfaces. Each depicts a man casually seated in a chair, but Keegan has sliced into the picture's surface, removed his body, and filled the silhouette with random accumulations of image fragments. In one work, many legs fill the void: layered one atop the other, they kick in unison.

Keegan emphasizes the thingness of pictures as he gives physical form to overused words—to take issue with their descriptive capacity. He emphasizes the image's literal thinness by cutting and rearranging the material itself. In this, he points to the lack in portraiture. Angled in a gallery corner is the oversize cutout image of another young man seated in a chair. His irregular shape is mounted and precariously, but perfectly, balanced against the wall and floor by his elbows and the toe of a hush puppy. The man's face is excised and replaced by a to-size repetition of the cutout, a reiterative move that renders his features an indistinguishable blot.

At its best, Keegan's work has a slight presence that echoes the two-dimensionality of its content. This lack of fullness implies that something is missing—a feeling of absence that runs through the works in *Any Day Now*. The words and images that populate our everyday and attempt to define us come up short. With this show, he makes these plain things plainer, revealing that they are the most peculiar of all.

—Erin Shirreff

Subtitled *Glocal and Outsiders: Connecting Cultures in Central Europe*, the Prague Biennale 3 comfortably relies on the concept of the "glocal"—a neat mutation that describes the dialogue between the global and the local in context. The Biennale met its objective as a space to test the glocal, proving that, in Eastern Europe, a complex, intricate road lies beyond the cliché of the personal as political. This theme is particularly suitable for a Biennale focusing on Eastern European contemporary art in a place made culturally distinct by the fact that the government was a relentless guest in every home for decades.

While maintaining a low budget in an ever-growing international art market, the ambitious Prague Biennale tackled several themes: the redefinition of the relationship between global and local, emergent painting in Central Europe, the 1970s and 1980s Czech Minimalism and Slovak Actionism movements. With its twenty-five sub-curators, in addition to the two directing curators Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova, the exhibition's twenty-two subsections yielded a labyrinth as every corner and nook was privy to curatorial vision. The site, a large industrial warehouse just outside of Prague's central city, is as massive as it is airy and beautiful. However, the unfortunate effects of old warehouses are the inevitable intermingling with the elements, in this case birds flying around the space—a romantic touch except for the bird dung occasionally targeting the work.

Several subsections were particularly distinguished. Marco Scotini's *Der Prozess: Collective Memory and Social History* featured works that cope with transition in a post-Communist world. Christian Pogacean's small, white wooden *Modernist Birdhouse* loomed on the wall quietly above other eyelevel works. This miniature Bauhaus-cum-Le Corbusier dwelling for birds refers to the coveting of space and privacy. Dan Mihaltianu's installation *Les Enfants de Ceausescu et de George*

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Matt Keegan, *Untitled*, 2007; collaged c-prints, approx. image size: 7 x 5 inches, framed: 12.5 x 10.5 inches (courtesy of the artist and D'Amelio Terras, New York); Barbora Kukliková, detail of *Veru a*, from the *Ghost Series*, 2005; inkjet print HP, 50 x 40 cm (courtesy of the artist)



DANA RAYMOND
RALEIGH, NC

Soros, blended elegantly into the background of a giant electrical board, with its CD player installed in a mechanism that played popular Romanian music from the last thirty years. Across from the electrical board was a card catalogue of index-sized photographs showing everyday life with a focus on people and places in the art world of Romania from the same time period. *Les Enfants de Ceausescu et de George Soros* is inscribed at the bottom of each card.

Czech Minimalism, Between Concept and Action, and *Kinetic Art in Eastern Europe* were comprehensive historic exhibitions that made the Biennale unique in its commitment to providing a context for contemporary art. Notable in these shows were the subversive 1970s photo-documentations of Karel Miller's performances in the streets of Prague. Rudolf Sikora's black, inky arrows paint snow in *Out of Town*, marking his trail in a black and white photo series from the 1970s. Ryszard Winiarski's black and white paintings resemble a Minimalist crossword puzzle and belong to an ongoing thirty-year series.

Vladimir Birgus' *Glocal Girls: Young Czech and Slovak Women Photographers* was, by far, the strongest section in the show. Barbora Kuklíková's extraordinary photo series *Ghost* displays a series of women who act out nightmares, beautifully rendered in dramatic, shadowy settings. A question graces the bottom of each photograph, turning every work into the puzzling mystery of a nightmare. In *The Town I Like*, Daniela Dostálková documents a Japanese factory that recently moved to Prague and employs Czech and Slovak workers. She transforms the sterile factory setting into a deliciously cool panorama of color, and a critique of this curious Eastern European-Asian economic development.

While the curators deemed contemporary painting one of the exhibition's driving forces, few painters' works were truly worthy. Cluj painter Adrian Ghenie's signature gray paintings evoke deep architectural spaces that are

remarkably lucid, deceptively simple, and comforting in their overtly cold appearance. His Romanian colleague Serban Savu's exceptional paintings depict everyday situations in the neutral, though vibrant, palettes of High Renaissance painters. Savu's paintings are never trite in their irony but achieve a sincerely subtle relationship to the mundane spaces and situations that he depicts.

Canonical videos by Marina Abramovic, Vanessa Beecroft, and Shirin Neshat were exhibited. The premise for this unwieldy inclusion of three works by established international artists was that their lives exemplify the movements between global and local. Such a juxtaposition of emergent and the established work, however, created a disconnect. The effect of the organizational effort among so many curators was like being trapped in the crossfire of the overbearing love found in a dysfunctional family. Indeed, it aptly reflects the plight of culture in Eastern Europe today.

—Lara Taubman

Filling almost the entire exhibition space at the tiny, though delightfully exploratory, Lump Gallery (September 7–29, 2007), Dana Raymond's installation *Mechatronic Symphony* seems to be run by playful ghosts as sixteen plywood doors shake and waffle slightly before coming to rest. In fact, we are witnessing the marriage of kinetic sculpture and computer technology.

Created with the collaboration of Robert Bailis, an electronic engineer and industrial designer, the complex apparatus driving the work lies within a low, twenty-five-foot-long platform. Once the doors, eight to a side, have ended their rather eerie shivering and are brought into alignment—have “homed”—a program drives robotic stepper motors to make them begin their dance, opening and closing, singly or in groups, swiftly or slowly, occasionally coming to a complete halt and starting up again. Brief tunes emerge from the vibration of the motors as they move at different speeds through four hundred possible stops and, perhaps amplified by the spaces within the doors, these sounds create an almost unearthly sense of things.

At times the doors seem to be conversing with each other, a pair or two opening on one side answered by similar moves on the other. As the “First Dance” sequence nears its conclusion, one of the doors remains partially ajar until the door next to it opens fully as though admonishing it. Surprise thus becomes an effective tool, a program apparently coming to an end as the doors line up, only to continue after a few seconds.

Though it took two and a half years to design and refine this installation, *Mechatronic Symphony* is still a work in progress. Starting with relatively simple programs—FPS (frames per second) Test, Wave, Pumper, and Induction—the movements have become increasingly complex and suggestive of states of mind. Raymond speaks of calling on his rational and irrational sides as he moves the doors symmetrically, asymmetri-

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Kaspars Goba**, *People of the Marsh*, from *Seda* series, 2004, photograph, 49 x 49 cm (courtesy of Elm Media, Riga, Latvia) **Dana Raymond**, view of *Mechatronic Symphony*, 2007, wood, steel, electronics (courtesy of the artist and Lump Gallery, Raleigh)