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MOSTRA /
EXHIBITION

REPERTORY

A CURA DI /
CURATED BY

GARY CARRION-
MURAYARI

DOVE /
WHERE

PALAZZO
CAVOUR

ARTISTI /
ARTISTS

ERICKA BECKMAN	ARTHUR OU
IAN BREAKWELL	KARTHIK PANDIAN
HEIDI BUCHER	CARMELLE SAFDIE
STEVEN CLAYDON	ANDREAS SCHULZE
ISABELLE CORNARO	ERIN SHIRREFF
DAVID HAXTON	SUE TOMPKINS
ELAD LASSRY	ANDRA URSUTA
CHRISTIAN MAYER	ANDRO WEKUA

'A series of imagined presentations in a locked and empty theatre. The theatre has the conventional proscenium arch and raked auditorium. Each evening presentation lasts one hour.'
Ian Breakwell, *Repertory*, 1973

Ian Breakwell's nine-minute film *Repertory* (1973), from which this exhibition takes its name, is deceptively complex. While its simple framing and deliberate camera movements share the language of Structuralist film, its scripted narration suggests a more expansive expository intention that seeks to highlight, and transform, the relationships between objects and their performative potential. At its most basic level, the film depicts the exterior of a 'locked and empty' theatre in London. The camera moves slowly over the surface of the building in a steady horizontal tracking shot, capturing its exterior walls, shuttered windows and locked doorways as well as the occasional pedestrian who passes through the shot in a blur. At no point during the film is the viewer allowed into the actual space of the theatre; we are thus entirely dependent on Breakwell's narrator to describe the physical details of the performance space and the theatrical scenarios it might host.

This disembodied voice establishes the basic parameters of various performances, each lasting an hour and taking place over the course of two and a half weeks. For each performance he states the day, the position of the curtain – either raised or lowered – and the illumination of the foot lights and house lights, the latter variable suggesting whether an audience is attending or not. The scenes the narrator describes are entirely lacking in actors and actresses in the traditional sense; instead, they seem simply to be stage settings of varying complexity – empty arrangements of objects awaiting activation. Follow Breakwell's descriptions (as voiced by the narrator) of the first week's schedule and notice the specificity of his language in cataloguing the objects laid out across the stage:

– The set is a 1930s domestic interior: sofa; deep arm chairs; glass-fronted bookshelves around the walls; a standard lamp (which is on); a portrait of an old man with white hair in a gilt frame; a talking budgerigar in a cage.

– The scene is set for a banquet. Miniature portions of charcoal-grilled meats are set out on long trestle tables. Also, a variety of fish, raw vegetables in strips, freshly popped tomato, cheeses, spiced meatballs, several kinds of olives, stuffed vine leaves, bread envelopes containing shredded lettuce, cucumbers covered with yogurt, all in darkness. A single spotlight illuminates the lobster salad.

– The whole stage is covered with brass vases filled with roses.

– The scene is a modern domestic interior. On the top of the television, on the top of the stereogram, on the coffee table, in the fire grate, in the coal bucket, on the typewriter, on the inflatable sofa and on the black leather chairs are slabs of butter. The butter melts.

– The stage set is a contemporary living room. The walls of the room are white embossed. On the wall is a brass-framed mirror. On the corner of the mirror, a stuffed canary is perched. The ceiling is white embossed. The carpet: green with a yellow floral pattern. Gray, nylon covered chairs. Black, yellow and green nylon fur cushions. On the wall, a pair of brass bellows, on which is a side view of a galleon hangs from a hook in the shape of a front view of a galleon. On the mantelpiece is a hat-shaped clock, a bell-shaped musical box a swan-shaped flower pot and two empty candlesticks. On the brown carved sideboard, brown carved table, white painted window ledge and veneered cocktail cabinet are white vases filled with paper flowers. Every quarter of an hour, the doors of the cuckoo clock burst open, and the cuckoo springs out, making its noise.

These initial, detailed backdrops establish the expectation of some kind of dramatic or comedic resolution. But without a human presence, the theatrical experience becomes one less of observed action than of a durational looking in which unresolved scenes allow for various registers of time to coexist and compress: the real time of the film comprehends the weeks-long length of the repertory as well as the imagined experience of viewing each hour-long 'performance' and its attendant sense of unfulfilled waiting.

And so, over the course of the film this expectation falls away; the viewer begins to focus instead on the latent performative potential of the objects themselves. The second week's scenes are less about setting than about the material facts of the objects and the emotional and psychological resonance they can convey when framed within a specific context. The descriptions of the final nine performances again consist of otherwise unremarkable, everyday objects and animals which become evocatively absurd simply in their juxtapositions and staging:

– On the stage is an old aeroplane.

– Onstage, a tethered dog walks round in circles.

– Onstage is a small illuminated fish tank, in which a big grey carp swims backwards and forwards.

– Onstage is a sunken swimming pool, illuminated from below and filled with blue water. Around the swimming pool stand stuffed sheep.

– Onstage, spotlights illuminate an indoor show jumping arena. Overlooking the arena, green-tar pollen covers a structure 10 meters tall like a one-fingered glove.

- Onstage is a three-metre white cube which moves 50 centimetres upstage during one hour.
- Upstage, in a line close to the footlights, stand wooden toy animals on wheels: dogs, cats, horses, cows, zebras, lions and tigers. Their shadows fall on the white backdrop at the rear of the stage.
- The stage is covered with earth, in the middle of which stands a small tree, on which a swarm of bees have settled.
- The stage is covered with artificial grass, on which squirm thousands of earthworms.

In these scenarios, the implied experience for the imaginary audience starts to become untethered from the structure of a theatrical performance and more concerned with moving images or sculptural tableaux. *Repertory* serves as the starting point of this exhibition precisely because of the varying activities it suggests for objects – and in turn, artworks. Its sequence of performances posits an experience of film, theatre or sculpture open to the surreal possibilities of the viewer's imagination. The rather drab walls, doorways and architectural details of the building may have their own physical and social history, but they also are able to absorb the independent dramatic content of the narration. In this sense language can produce sculpture, sculptures can be actors, and architectural space can become a kind of receptacle for memories, narratives and impossible scenarios. Breakwell suggests the possibility of translation and transmission between the surfaces of objects and images and a slippage between these forms when they are divorced from utility and artistic convention alike.

The works in the exhibition embody the various potentials of objects and surfaces that Breakwell's film describes. They exist as their own 'repertory' – a sequence of propositions laid out, linearly, across a unique architectural space – with the potential to absorb a variety of stories, memories and ideas within their surfaces, regardless of whether they take the form of sculpture, painting or photography. With the exception of the Scottish artist Sue Tompkins, whose performance and texts activate space by radically reforming the visual and rhythmic patterns of words, most of the artists in the exhibition rely less on language to construct their narrative potential. And while some artists, like Andra Ursuta and Andro Wekua, create their own surreal sculptures suffused with psychological and political memory, others suggest dramatic imaginary worlds in the flat space of painting and photography. Nonetheless, each artist on view undertakes a form of translation and transposition to accrue meaning to their artworks beyond their immediate material properties.

David Haxton's film *Cube and Room Drawings* (1976–77) creates a performative space by playing off the relationship between two and three-dimensional space within the camera frame. Like Breakwell uses language, Haxton uses drawing and light to suggest a projected space for action beyond the physical reality depicted in the image. More visually abstract than *Repertory*, *Cube and Room Drawings* relies on a rigid formal structure to open a space beyond the immediate facts captured on film.

Similarly to Haxton, Erin Shirreff relies on an ambiguity of surface appearances to investigate the nature of sculptural form. Her photographs and films suggest landscapes or monumental forms through simple means: studio detritus and photographs of models or preexisting sculptures become

remarkably complex explorations of material and time. Meanwhile, in his series of recent contact prints, Arthur Ou pushes the surface of photography to a point where visual fact, formal abstraction and historical depth exist within the same two-dimensional space.

The late Swiss artist Heidi Bucher's method of translating psychological and corporeal memories onto the surface of minimal forms was to suffuse fabric with latex and use this material to capture the surfaces of architectural spaces. Isabelle Cornaro also uses a type of casting, but is more concerned with interrogating the objects themselves: her *God Boxes* act as monumental inventories of objects whose values have been flattened into a new, democratic space. Meanwhile Carmelle Safdie's rubbings of gravestones reveal complexities of colour and decorative expression beyond the obscure histories of the individuals they commemorate. Sculptures by Karthik Pandian comprise found forms that likewise seem to be awaiting activation, or that seem to have chosen their own arrangements according to a logic removed from function. Steven Claydon's sculptures provide their own self-contained compression of references, mixing historical memory with reflections on process and form. Like the objects described in Breakwell's presentations, these objects have inherent cultural and social connotations, but by translating the residue of these objects through casting, combination, or other means they become active, radical explorations of form and social value.

Repertory also predicts a kind of grappling with culture as an accumulation of objects and images and the results of conflating the two. The paintings of Andreas Schulze, for instance, are eerily familiar depictions of abstracted objects and architectural spaces that seem to capture surfaces we already know even while immersing us in a visual language that is somehow divorced from our experience of the surrounding world. Ericka Beckman's films bring humans back into the pictorial world, but on no higher level than her highly aestheticised sets and props, suggesting an equality (and complicity) between the viewer and the media that he or she consumes. Following Beckman, Elad Lassry highlights and upends conventions of photography, exploring how material world is captured in images and the way in which these pictorial codes can compress and digest multiple histories. Finally, Christian Mayer's photographs, printed using an obsolescent process, of ancient seeds plucked from the Siberian permafrost suggest how media allows us to participate in widely divergent experiences of time within the space of single image.

To an extent, *Repertory* is very much of its time: its spare style and rigid, overarching structure clearly relate to both British and American conceptual art and Structural film. However, the propositional nature of the film and its expanded view of sculptural form resonate with artists far outside Breakwell's historical context, let alone his immediate peers. Breakwell provides a model for thinking about the way in which the identity of an object lies between use and representation, and for thinking about the way in which an object can be suspended between its physical form, its representation and the meanings, memories and narratives that accrue within it. Like Breakwell, all of the artists in this exhibition set in motion scenarios in which objects perform, interact and produce.

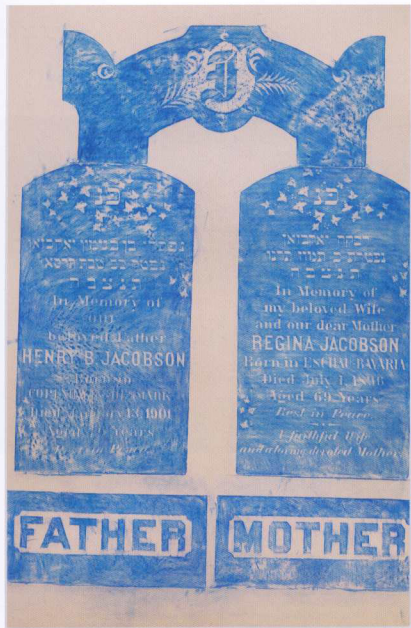


Carmelle Safdie (1982, Cambridge, MA, USA) vive e lavora a New York. La sua ultima serie di opere incarna un approccio intuitivo e sistematico alla traduzione di superfici ricche di contenuti storici ed espressivi. Nel corso di una (fortuita) visita a un cimitero ebraico in rovina, in una propaggine estrema del quartiere newyorchese Queens, Safdie è stata colpita per prima cosa dalle informazioni stilistiche offerte dalle pietre tombali, in contrasto con la specificità storica delle persone e delle famiglie che queste commemoravano. I coloratissimi calchi di tali pietre che ha in seguito prodotto sono stati esposti sia sotto forma di lunghe pergamene,

documentando le molte prove colore eseguite in situ, sia come oggetti più compiuti, montati su pannelli di MDF. Questi ultimi, caratterizzati da una materialità indipendente, trasmettono la fascinazione di Safdie per la selezione e la traduzione delle forme decorative.

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Carmelle Safdie (b. 1982, Cambridge, MA, US) lives and works in New York. Her most recent series embodies an intuitive and systematic approach to the translation of surfaces rich in historical and expressive content. During a (fortuitous) visit to a derelict Jewish cemetery in the outer reaches

of Queens, New York, Safdie was drawn first to the stylistic information borne by the gravestones, as opposed to the historical specificity of the individuals and families that they commemorate. The brightly coloured gravestone rubbings that she subsequently produced have been exhibited both as long scrolls, documenting various colour tests performed on-site, and as more finished renderings mounted on MDF. These latter works have their own inherent materiality and capture Safdie's fascination with the selection and translation of decorative form.



DEC. 19, 2011, 2012
Soft pastel on newsprint mounted onto MDF
Courtesy the artist