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The Sunday Painter, 12-16 Blenheim Grove, London SE15 4QL

Sunset



Title : Sunset installation view, The Sunday Painter, 2013 (1)



Sunset (Jan Kiefer, Max Ruf, Yves Scherer)

The Sunday Painter, London

12 October - 17 November 2013

Review by Dan Munn

Taking up the front corridor at The Sunday Painter is 'Twilight', a collaborative work by the three Berlin/London-based artists Jan Kiefer, Max Ruf and Yves Scherer. Composed of hand-cut strips of dark blue carpet, it sets the scene for the textured problematising of nature's representation seen upstairs. Yves Scherer's exhibition text begins formally: 'Ladies and Gentlemen... Good evening,' but quickly relaxes into an informal tour of the show and the 'night's entertainment' in which the narrator relates that we must have just missed the bonfire, 'great bangers' and chocolate bananas. As the last light of day smoulders on the horizon, Scherer suggests we brace ourselves for a certain amount of incoherence, asking that we put an arm around 'some of [the]... crazier guests.'

Max Ruf's 'Drive' paintings comprise of quick strokes punctuated by skeletal impasto geometries and are shown alongside a laptop projection describing the artist's en plein air process. The blocks of colour are reminiscent of, yet in many ways also the anti-thesis of, Helen Frankenthaler's project, pointing to a temporal rather than an optical essence. Propped against the walls, two of the paintings are still wrapped in their translucent plastic and another sits beside its wooden packing crate as if reluctant to be attached to the space. Also dealing with mediations of nature, a Scherer sculpture held up with Ruf's boxes incorporates an 'Eskape' hiking boots box, damp fabric rose petals, and a rock inscribed with the words 'Please they all like animal here.' The tameness of the customised rock brings to mind Victor Segalen's frustration with tourism. 'If only they were wild!' he writes, 'But no; they are the sweetest-tempered among animals, the easiest to handle, to muzzle, to castrate. And if at times they suddenly start up' Of little importance... the damages are material ones.'

Ruf also presents two sculptures titled 'Jumper', which he makes by driving his van over lumps of wet clay. This results in imprinted forms that are then fired and spray-painted an (uncannily clay-like) metallic grey. Muscularly organic, they express a kind of rapid ergonomic improvisation that is part hand-made and part automated. In contrast, Ruf's projection is diffuse, made up of informal snapshots of animal pictures (found in rural hotels) and handheld VHS recordings of his painting process. At nearly an hour in length it merges with Jan Kiefer's 20-minute sound piece 'Siegfried Call'. The eight tracks of the editioned CD set versions of Wagner's iconic piece for French horn (lifted from Youtube) over the artist's own backing track. The incidental contexts of the recordings bring an informal sonic ambience to the room that complements Ruf's handheld shots. Muffled and frequently off pitch, the devolved Wagner is taken to a place far from its powerful and polished origins as it struggles under Kiefer's electronic beat.

Next to Kiefer's sound-system the painted papier-mâché sculpture 'Aesop' stands upright, recalling a coat of arms. Based on the fable of The Eagle and the Arrow in which the indomitable bird of prey is shot with an arrow 'feathered with one of its own plumes,' the arrow bears the same mottled surface as the eagle's chest, more extrusion than foreign body. On the facing wall a comic strip painted in thin oils depicts a complex 'backfiring' - a servant loads his master's rifle before being caught in an unfortunate position between the hunter and his game. The lesson of Aesop's fable, that we 'give our enemies the means for our own destruction,' is also at play in Scherer's 'Coolmaster Silencio', a computer case cut by a laser guided by the same computerised electronics it contains. The bat 'mod' is the only remnant of the case's powerful display-driving hardware; the presence of the image is like that of the warm-blooded creature it represents, both emerge only when the light has faded. What happens in this twilight hour is a sincere and richly irreverent remix of romantic idealism.