

Claire Fontaine

*Équivalences et Généralités*

10 March – 21 April 2012

For her second exhibition at Galerie Chantal Crousel, Claire Fontaine will be present in both exhibition spaces. Through new works, she continues her reflection on the crisis of the author-function and the consequences of technical reproducibility in the age of digital technology.

In "Équivalences" presented at La Douane, Claire Fontaine's complete series of *Équivalents* (2007) will be exhibited. Eight sculptures take the form and the layout of the eight *Équivalents* presented by Carl Andre in 1966 at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York. Each of them is composed of 120 firebricks.

Claire Fontaine's *Équivalents* deliberately stand at the problematic crossroads of minimalism and conceptual art. Carl Andre's silent gesture to which they refer appears somewhat subtitled or obliterated by the introduction of textual and visual elements. In Claire Fontaine's work, the 120 bricks that compose each element are covered with 120 reproductions on archival paper of paperback 'Folio' book-covers. The 120 books were selected for the subjective and objective interest they have for Claire Fontaine, as well as for the potentiality of their titles to associate with each other and with the reproductions of artworks on their covers.

The *Équivalents*' origin is to be found in a first operation carried out on isolated bricks (*Brick-bats*, 2006), which underlined both the illegibility/inaccessibility of the book object and the literal possibility to transform it still into a weapon.

The *Équivalents*' vocation is not so much to insist on the petrification that the book has undergone, but rather to function as visual puzzles where the images of the Folio book-covers establish connections between each other and with the books' titles. The sculptures underline the new perception that the general public has of our culture's major texts once they have been rendered economically accessible while keeping perfectly intact the difficulty of their intellectual assimilation.

The video *The Assistants* is screened at La Douane. In the first part of the video poet Douglas Park reads a text by Giorgio Agamben entitled *The Assistants*, while in the second part he remains silent during an equivalent amount of time. In this second part, his face appears as a landscape crossed by different weathers. It reflects a nudity and a disarmament to the world that make explicit the fact that he himself is one of those creatures described in Agamben's essay: idle beings, imperfect and fairy, messengers of a truth that they do not understand themselves.

The concept of the assistant, as it emerges here as a watermark, is at the heart of Claire Fontaine's project. Not only are these creatures translators and foreigners, but they are obscure characters whose indecipherable help allows things to get done. In the messianic economy mentioned by Agamben, awkwardness, shame, undisclosable desires will be our pledges for salvation. Everything with which we painfully cohabit today will actually allow us to access greater closeness with ourselves in an aftertime, that we can imagine being the time of revolution.

Under the title "Généralités" Claire Fontaine chose to present a selection of new works in the main gallery space, including ten silkscreens on canvas entitled "*Équivalents joke paintings*." This group of silkscreened paintings is inspired by various documents referring to the scandal and the ensuing debate in the British press in the 1970s, sparked by Tate Modern's acquisition of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII*.

The debate that aroused from that minimalist sculpture is fascinating as it develops around issues and problematic that are still very contemporary: the question of the artistic and monetary value of the artwork at the heart of the economic crisis that struck England at that time. These perplexities, sometimes expressed in very violent and condensed ways by cartoons are the main subject matter of the silkscreen paintings presented by Claire Fontaine.

*Untitled (Jungle Gym)*, a large black scaffold installed from floor to ceiling and throughout the gallery is the support for hanging the paintings. Its title comes from the urban practice of using these metallic structures for exercise. Its presence in the exhibition evokes the outside space and materializes an alleged fragility of the architectural structure of the gallery.

The sculpture *Untitled (2x2 vinyl foam)*, made from wrestling mats, explicitly refers to Carl Andre's floor pieces. It can be used by the visitor as a resting place, a wrestling mat or simply a different consistency zone on which to walk within the exhibition space.

The video *Situations* paraphrases a street fighting instructional DVD and invites the visitor to reproduce the same gestures. In a Brechtian device, the actors constantly interrupt themselves in order to comment on the movements that they are showing us; at the same time, through this explicitly pedagogical process, they make their gestures "reproducible" by anyone, as much by our friends, as by our potential enemies because they redistribute their knowledge indiscriminately. They realize thus Brecht's programme, which was to make gestures "quotable."

The actors are filmed in a white cube, in conditions of spatial and temporal abstraction.

*PAST PRESENT FUTURE* faithfully reproduces a neon sign from a New York clairvoyant's shop window. It refers here to the need for stability that is associated with any project, but it also raises the contradiction between the necessity of revolutionary ruptures and the need to maintain a strong link with the culture of the past.

The sculpture *Untitled (The Invisible Hand)* is a modified ready-made, created from an executive toy, a Newton's cradle, customized by Lehman Brothers. Small metal balls are suspended from a frame above a miniature tennis court, on which is inscribed the word "Networking," and they are kept in perpetual motion. This is both an ironic comment on the bankruptcy of this company, that has become the emblem of a crisis in which we are still plunged in - and a metaphor of Adam Smith's theory that explains how an invisible hand would regulate free markets.

*EDF Recession sculpture* is a French electricity meter with a device frequently used by people as a survival strategy to stop the rotating disk in order to minimize the consumption of electricity. A hairpin attached to a thin thread with a crystal pendulum allows the user to block the disk and thus stop the meter.

*Untitled (Christies: Lehman Bros. Sale, Wed. 29.09.2010 at 12.00pm)* are reproductions of some pages from the Christie's catalogue of the Lehman Brothers' sale of their collection. The auction took place after the company's bankruptcy. The reproductions chosen here feature paintings from the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries representing boats in storming seas.

Retrospectively, these images of dangerous travel and fleets in distress seem to be premonitory of the company's tragic destiny. This iconography reminds us of Broodthaers' *Bateau-Tableau*, which plunges us into the throes of a perilous journey where the sea is nothing but blue paint, and the wet and heavy wood of the boats is a totally dematerialized projection.

Finally, a rotating suspended mirror, *Untitled (Vanity)*, offers a changing view of the exhibition including the image of the viewer, the mirror being suspended at eye level.