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Short Turns

Messieurs Delmotte, Peter Finnemore, Kuang-Yu Tsui
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Short turns are short stage acts. Historically, the phrase comes from the burlesque tradition of brief, unexpected or comic skits that follow one another in rapid tempo. The *Short Turns* exhibition brings together series' of works by three artists, all of whom, in the spirit of burlesque, unite absurd one-acters and disconcerting performances, which they have themselves recorded on video. What connects their work is not just a disarming form of physical humour, but the use of the idiosyncratic and the nonsensical as a trigger to challenge social conditions or to counter the automatism that rules our existence.

The work of Messieurs Delmotte (b. Liège, 1967) is situated somewhere between reality and imagination, somewhere between genius and dilettantism. Delmotte is distinguished by his dress code and facial appearance. He always presents himself in a two- or three-piece suit. His semi-long hair is another distinctive trait, overabundantly daubed with gel, combed flat against his head and cut straight across at the bottom. The finishing touch, an exceedingly precise stripe down the middle, completes the geometric coiffure. Delmotte puts forth a character who dashingly barrages his audience with gestural discoveries that are as unpredictable as they are absurd. In all this merriment and nonsense lies the existential and poetic revolt of the work. It is always about interfering in a situation, about engaging in a hilarious and heroic battle with the trivial object, a character of a given circumstance. In *Balloon Man*, for example, a video from his new series, *Breakdown Dream* (2006), the artist remains invisible amongst a mass of balloons that have taken over his body. From the inside, he pops them one by one until he finally appears. In Delmotte's opinion, society is irrational and possesses insufficient sense of fairness and common sense to dismantle the mechanisms of social conditioning that determine our existence. This explains his escape into the ridiculous, the absurd, the moments of abandoning good taste as an outlet for that which refuses to do battle with society. The physical commitment of his own body as an instrument of unruliness plays a cardinal role. For *Short Turns*, Delmotte intersperses works from his *Breakdown Dream* series with classic pieces selected from his rich oeuvre.

The work of the Taiwanese artist Kuang-Yu Tsui (b. Taipei, 1974) is closely related to such early Messieurs Delmotte series as, for example, *Ce qui est fait, le mal est fait* (1997-1998), which takes aim at society with scores of interventions in public space. Tsui does not present a character type in the way that Delmotte does, but he does act out staggering roles. As a kind of anti-body, he repeatedly interferes in some specific social context. In *The Penetrative*, the first of his three-part series, *Eighteen Copper Guardians in Shao-Lin Temple and Penetration* (2001), he takes on physical confrontations by banging his head against obstacles – a billboard, a shop window, a video wall or a cow. Like a chameleon, in *Superficial Life*, the first of another three-part series, *The Shortcut to the Systematic Life* (2002-2005), he continually adapts to new environments by changing jumpsuits. He assumes, among others, the identities of a businessman, a sports figure or a taxi driver. For Tsui, identity is a societal convention, coded and predetermined, which you can slide into and out of at your convenience. The superimposition of two disparate realities is important in Tsui's work, as in *City Spirits*, the third segment in *The Shortcut to the Systematic Life*, in which he goes bowling in London, using pigeons as bowling pins, or plays golf in one of the rare patches of grass in the city centre. In his performances, the artist playfully and ludicrously seeks out an antagonistic space for manoeuvre, averse to all social convention.

Where Messieurs Delmotte and Kuang-Yu Tsui are solo performers, Peter Finnemore (b. Llanelli, Wales, 1963) involves several members of his family, his neighbours and even his cat. Large segments of his *Project Jedi* (2005) are included in the *Short Turns* exhibition, along with other recent work. All of Finnemore's activities take place in his garden, which looks out across the Welsh Gwendraeth Valley, where his family has lived for the last five generations. The peaceful, pastoral atmosphere of the garden is disturbed by Finnemore's playful, existentialist performances, which balance between the clownish and the sublime. Like his companions, he is adorned in rather loose-fitting, military camouflage gear, an unmistakable parody of machismo and authority. In the figure of Finnemore we see a preposterous conglomeration of quasi-traditions – guerrilla, vagabond and vigilante. Dysfunctional behaviour and the reversal of a 'normal' situation make up the core of his performance. *Project Jedi* refers to an initiative on the part of the American military intelligence services to set up an army corps of super-soldiers with exceptional psychic gifts, prepared to deal with paranormal forces. In due tribute to the reversal, to the styles of burlesque caricature and, naturally, to humour for its own sake, Finnemore reconstructs his backyard into a scene in which he can enact an uninhibited parody, a travesty of the industrial military complex. At the same time, the man in the camouflage suit can also be seen as a contemporary interpretation of the Celtic myth of the Green Man, a magic ritual figure constructed of branches, leaves, plants and flowers.

What Messieurs Delmotte, Kuang-Yu Tsui and Peter Finnemore have in common is their permanently hypersensitive state. Their short, absurd and eccentric sketches, whose multiplicity and repeated motifs take on virtually epic character, have everything to do with the uncontrolled impulse, a compulsive-obsessive reaction against the treadmill of society.

Extra info

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