

NineteenEightyFour

MAY 27 – SEP 5, 2010

Artists: Cory ARCANGEL & Hanne MUGAAS (US/NO), Judith FEGERL (A), Nicolas GROSPIERRE & Kobas LAKSA (P), Dariusz KOWALSKI (A), Paul LAFFOLEY (US), Mark LOMBARDI (US), Rachel OWENS (US), Florian & Michaël QUISTREBERT (FR), Gerold TAGWERKER (A), Tris VONNA-MICHELL (UK), Clemens VON WEDEMEYER (D), Flora WATZAL (A), Jordan WOLFSON (US)

This exhibition examines the evolution of imagery and language in what has been described as our panoptic era. While its roots are grounded in the concepts that arose from the 1948 novel by George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which clearly reflected the historical background of totalitarianism, this show attempts to distance itself from this source by considering forms of surveillance and control today, where an all-powerful apparatus as described in Orwell's work appears overly simplistic. The expansion of the scope of media, both through information technology innovations and connectivity, has shifted the frontier delineating what is public and private. Stereotypical notions, such as the ubiquitous eye of "Big Brother" and CCTV channels constantly recording the streetscape, seem less relevant as we enter a new age of alienation. It is now as if the objects and ideas we desire control us more deeply than those that *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* protagonist Winston Smith feared controlled him. In addition, the acceptability of constant self-exposure entices us into what can be called the "participatory panopticon." As a result, the artists represented in this exhibition, all of whom live and work in Europe and the United States, continue to question the effects of surveillance systems on the subject, but also the possible subversive usage by the subject, in a variety of media – including painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, video and installation.

Four overlapping themes emerge against the background of these complex and recursive relationships. One addresses *visuality and control*, where the artists can be seen as working with forms of surveillance and anti-surveillance, and where systems of visual control are inverted or exposed, revealing their inherent blind spots and often descending into the realms of absurdity. For example, in the work of **Mark Lombardi**, seemingly abstract drawings expose the connections between corrupt political powers and the secret influence of multinational corporations. The viewer's gaze is constantly disrupted by the frenetic movement

of a ball in **Flora Watzal's** work, *Monitor*, while simultaneously being tightly controlled within the frame of her source video. In a collaborative work by **Hanne Mugaas** and **Cory Arcangel**, a functional humidity recorder is inserted into the gallery. Since it exists outside a system able to make changes to the relative humidity, any attempt to control the surrounding environment is foiled; instead, the meter visualizes an unregulated environment dependent on external factors, such as the presence of bodies within the exhibition space.

Departing from more concrete conceptions, another approach deals with *surreality, surveillance and the subconscious*, linking together the various visual perceptions in our panoptic era. In the works of **Florian and Michaël Quistrebert**, pyramidal constructions embedded with mystical symbols evoke connections from conspiracy theories to the occult while simultaneously recalling the ominous majesty of urban structures. The personal, symbolic and seemingly paranoid language depicted in the work of **Paul Laffoley** certainly speaks to the mystical, while his bright colors and strange imagery also touch upon the realms of Science Fiction. **Dariusz Kowalski's** video work, exclusively downloaded from Internet sources, challenges systems of surveillance from a subjectless and anonymous perspective by essentially showing nothing but empty rooms or empty streets, except perhaps the occasional eye of the camera looking at only its own reflection.

Another angle is dedicated to *architectural representations* as both tools of power and control as well as models for utopia through an investigation of urban environments. Architecture always addresses the body itself in ways that can be both phenomenological and sociological, thus regulating the factors of social inclusion and exclusion. In a site-specific commission, **Judith Fegerl** transforms the iconic building of the Austrian Cultural Forum into a living, monstrous machine using dozens of flashing LEDs. **Nicolas Gropierre and Kobas Laksa** re-imagine Warsaw's urban architecture through digitally altered and constructed photographs representing a possible utopian future for each building. **Rachel Owens'** sculpture takes the form of a privet hedge made of shards of broken, green glass, and acts as a symbolic representation of separation between those who have wealth and those who do not, ultimately maintaining a very prevalent form of control: control through desire. The large-scale architectural photographs of **Gerold Tagwerker** explore both ideas of utopia, through their repetitive, modernist forms, and power, resulting from their oppressive monumentality.

A final focus investigates the alienation inherent in *contemporary language*, which is especially apparent in communication through the use of new technology, for example in reductive webspeak and the sound

bites of politicspeak. The use of meaningless or clichéd language, a phenomenon of which George Orwell was famously wary, is revealed in the work of **Clemens von Wedemeyer**: he stages the rehearsal of a politician giving his inaugural speech after just winning the presidential elections, exposing its fabricated nature. **Tris Vonna-Michell**'s installations are both based on found images, and express a personal, obsessive, fast-paced narrative. The contrasts between his subtle imagery derived from vintage contraptions and the velocity of his storytelling, play upon this theme. In an untitled video by **Jordan Wolfson**, the camera slowly pans down through leaves ultimately focusing on a vintage Macintosh computer. Reminiscent of and drawing parallels to Apple's infamous, Ridley Scott-directed 1984 commercial, which was heavily based on the themes of Orwell, the voice-over – discussing the emergence of American post-war painting – is completely disjointed from the image. As the camera draws back it reveals its subject sitting on the side of a highway, with cars speeding past, evoking the inevitable obsolescence of technology.

Concept and produced by Andreas Stadler, **Curators** David Harper, Martha Kirszenbaum (New York) and David Komary (Austria), **Curatorial Assistance** Anne Marie Butler, **Exhibition Coordination** Elisabeth Haider, **Exhibition Assistance** Natascha Boojar, Maria Simma, Eva Stockinger, Natalie Thonhauser

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