

Previous Shows

Amy Granat & Emily Sundblad

CASTILLO/CORRALES, PARIS, FRANCE



Fashion, according to Walter Benjamin, prescribes the ritual by which the commodity wishes to be worshipped. This is a hardy insight for fashionable art scenes or, in the case of Amy Granat and Emily Sundblad’s current show in Paris, any transmigration thereof. Benjamin was writing about Paris, capital of the nineteenth century. As for the capital of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, this show argues the obvious: fashion now resides in the Lower East Side. As producers in and of this scene, Granat and Sundblad appear like ambassadors of its effortless chic.

Their current show at castillo/corrales is indeed fluently cool, to the degree that it appears to be as much a film installation as the aftermath of a soirée. It is the former: a three-channel collaboration conceived by this American duo. Yet it is also the latter, in that it follows on from an opening-night screening of 16mm films and, improbably, guitar playing. When I visited, a

stray stepladder and wineglass sat alongside an inexplicable houseplant. This was in keeping with the show’s slapdash presentation: the projectors are posed on furniture drawn from the back office, nails from the previous show jut from the walls, and cords snake around the space. The disorder balances the inherent preciousness of the films. Projected low and close to the wall, their picture-frame dimensions endow them with fetishistic intimacy, despite the fact that they have been transferred to DVD.

Three projectors screen a montage of nine films, all playing simultaneously on differentiated loops. The footage consists of Granat and Sundblad performing – as if for home video – various activities such as baking, window-shopping and flower arrangement. Like the ill-fated sisters from Christina Rossetti’s ‘Goblin Market’, guilelessly ensnared in a system of desire and commodity exchange, they lounge, stroll and frolic, sometimes with firearms.

In one film, Sundblad, armed with a shotgun, traipses along the shoreline of an idyllic beach. Post-production colour manipulations, recalling the psychedelic spectrum of Jennifer West’s filmstrips and, more significantly, Stan Brakhage’s ‘Vancouver Island’ films, consume the frame like a tide of colour fields. Though most modifications result from digital editing, Granat and Sundblad frequently exploit the tropes of experimental cinema: conspicuous cuts, decelerated time, materiality. Yet, because the fragility of celluloid limits these tropes, it is both facile to place Granat and Sundblad in this tradition and difficult to substantiate their commitment to it. Granat and Sundblad seem propelled by a certain levity: baking is done wearing a Groucho Marx mask; flower-arrangement, as if in girlish *détournement* of Vito Acconci’s *Three Adaptation Studies* (1970), is performed blindfolded. Though Granat and Sundblad are not the first to deploy cheeky femininity in contemporary art, their manner is particularly evasive. Paradoxically, the fact that their domains – experimental cinema, urban idleness (the exhibition’s title, ‘Les femmes qui dorment’, is a twist on Georges Perec’s *L’homme qui dort*) and the dominion of the cool – traditionally exclude women is eclipsed by the dominance of these domains in their work, by hip disinterestedness on one hand, and the monomania proper to the ‘impure medium’ on the other. Granat and Sundblad play the part of the *flâneur* so well that they elide the sentimentality and the gender difference in reincarnating him. From the plastic beauty of their shots to the casual montage, and, finally, the not-even-trying mode of presentation, the conventions bracket the content.

In one brief shot, Granat visits Eileen Quinlan’s show at Miguel Abreu’s Lower East Side gallery, nibbling truffles as she goes. It’s not difficult to see your own reflection in this insouciant spectatorship – where the art seems secondary to the etiquette, and the etiquette is, regrettably, one of sweet indifference.

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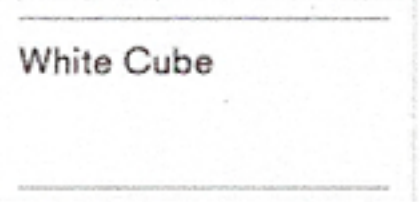
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