

STROKING SHEETS OF BACKLIT GLASS

@ HD: Projects, 131 Essex Street, New York, 10002

Matthew Johnstone, Dan Shaw-Town & Nick van Woert

Opening preview Saturday 9th March, 2-5pm

*(This exhibition is a curatorial collaboration between
Christopher Crescent, London and HD:Projects, New York)*

*Exhibition hours;
Weds-Sat 12-6pm and by appt.*

STROKING SHEETS OF BACKLIT GLASS has its roots in the January 20th edition of 'Fast Lane', a weekly *Financial Times* feature written by the editor-in-chief of *Monocle* magazine Tyler Brule and in a short piece of writing by the artist Peter Halley in the December 2012 issue of *Art in America*.

Tyler discusses his admiration for a colleague who has eschewed superfluous technology (ipads, smartphones, laptops etc) and envies a life that is lacking the continuous attention such devices demand of their owners, and hence affects ones ability to be lengthy and arduous in the pursuit of an ambitious goal. This show celebrates a methodical and labour-intensive body of work that in places is suggestive of our willingness to consume information, often via high end electronic platforms, but this only belies the man hours in physicality and thought that have come before.

Halley, commenting on his feelings about the zeitgeist of 21st century art, proposes that 'the ethos of contemporary art has undergone an almost perfect reversal since the beginning of the 1980's'. Where anti-illusionism and the truth of material ruled, the Spectacle has usurped it (in accordance with Guy Debord's definition that production became inseparable from seduction). In the works on show of Shaw-Town, Johnstone and van Woert, one could propose that the exhibition is a demonstrative sliding scale of anti-illusions through to spectacle, but in fact each artists work has characteristics that purport to the full gamut of Halley's proposed shift in art-making sensibilities.

Shaw-Town historically has utilized industrial and art materials in his multi layered practice, disrupting and stretching their presumed parameters and transforming plain grounds into rich, heavy and greasy contoured surfaces. A muscular approach that is effected by his own bodily actions, his is a practice that typifies his desire to flag up the truth of his chosen materials. However, rather than becoming gentle pastiches of art of a previous generation, century even, his use of tokenistic markers, in the form of last weekends newspaper, xerox prints of coat pocket contents or motifs from his own back catalogue, mean that his pieces will go down as reportage of the world he inhabits and the minutiae that he encounters daily. In particular, the ironing on of no-more-than-week-old newsprint renders each work an historical archival record of the way the world was at the given time.

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Johnstone presents 2 strands of his oeuvre in this exhibition. In the **BLOBBz** series, an indeed appropriately blobby form remains static in the centre of an HD digital photo frame while the background subtly changes. It transpires the form is in fact an image of a sculpture produced in the artist's studio over many hours, constructed of many tiny balls of plasticine, and the backgrounds are multiple stills from footage of such found geographical documentary segments of a mountain face exposed to the shifting sun or images culled from the artist's own films. That the sculptures are presented as anchored focal points in the shifting slideshow is the foil for Johnstone's other strand, **AAW**. The source of the images are high-end fashion advertorials, presented in multiple formats such as magazines and bill boards. The artist utilises keen, and exhaustive, photo editing skills and techniques to render the subject (ie the model wearing the brands clothing) void, disappearing the figures and forms until what remains are merely backgrounds and scenes playing out minus their central actors. Similarly laborious to **BLOBBz**, the artist is suggesting that the time spent in his production means that his own creations are more deserving of centre stage than beautiful models and expensive clothing, all the while utilising the kind of commercially derived platforms that naturally would be housing the original campaigns.

The sculptures of **van Woert** allude to a relationship between nature and man-made. Often taking the form of robust and significant forms, in varying degrees of figuration, works draw attention to a language of materiality, combining cocktails of elements as diverse as hair gel, polyurethane, aquarium gravel and dishwasher tablets. The overall practice has an entropic quality, is often smelly, and is defiantly based around intense studio experimentation, where substances are torn apart to see to see what they really are. In particular the coal-slag covered works in this show have a post-disaster quality that suggest nature has sculpted its own demented and twisted forms based around human-made armatures. The artists up-bringing in Reno, surrounded by a heady mix of aspirational gambling based architecture and raw natural landscape have laid the foundations for an oeuvre where the spectacle of figure and form therefore are the grounds upon which van Woert attempts to produce things that have an inherent quality of fitting in with the natural order of things, and probes the audience to always question how our built environment is constructed.

Recent shows;

Matthew Johnstone; The Green Room, London (solo), Jerwood Space, London (solo)

Dan Shaw-Town; ROOM EAST, New York (solo), Indianapolis Museum of Art (group), Unosunove, Rome (solo)

Nick van Woert; OHWOW, LA (solo), Grimm, Amsterdam (solo), Yvon Lambert, Paris (solo)

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