



number of smaller, portrait-like works: a black sun with a mournful smile, a chuckling man in suspenders, a grimacing white head. Looking sharply to the left with a disturbed, frightened expression, the eyes of the ambiguously gendered visage in *Milchbert*, 2012, are circled with black, giving them a distinctive pop.

Not surprisingly, in light of Gronemeyer's affinity for a grim palette, dense surfaces, and grotesque faces, Jean Dubuffet is frequently cited in comparison with her work,

to imagine that she shares his fascination with the art of *Gambling Caviar*, 2012, a terrifying, churning mass peers from a purplish murk, forming a composition that had been devised in an agoraphobic's art-therapy session. *Over* patterning constituted by the sea of bulging eyes is *Sie sind übergeschnappt* (They Are Crazy), 2011, in which a dappled background supports an evenly spaced array of faces.

In these works, Gronemeyer has slowly amassed layers of paint to create a rough impasto, which draws the viewer's attention to the material properties of paint. Yet this is also true of a work like *How*, 2012, rather than building up the surface, letting it dry, she dips it up some more, the artist evidently worked quickly, creating two disgruntled faces in a cloud and surrounding it with flecks of paint. Most of the surface is left bare, and the unpainted surface is paper—not canvas or board. So as the paint dries, it bleeds, leaving abject greasy stains around each mark—evidence of the medium that reveals its constituent parts.

It would be wrong, however, to understand this motif of separating the paper as an analytic focus on the thing itself. Rather, Gronemeyer's process here comes off as wacky error, a painterly fail. The work is a kind of slapstick mistake, one that evokes the foibles of cartoons. The painter here casts herself as a trained ape in human clothing—a touch of self-deprecation that gets at the heart of how we feel as we perform our lives.

—Lloyd Wise

Jessica Rath

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Rath's large-format photographs of apple trees in winter, all of which have a kind of alarming beauty. Taken with clinical precision, the ten images portray the barren trees against lengths of sky, either alone or in a row, rising up from a scrubby ground littered with bruised and rotting fruit. The blank backgrounds emphasize the shapes of the trunks and complex branching—the “architecture” of the trees—inviting the viewer to look for the differences between each image: Some trees have a human shape, others have outstretched or drooping branches, and still others are clipped or gnarled.

The photographs, and a selection of nine porcelain sculptures of apples that accompanied them, are responses to the complex discipline

of apple breeding. The abundance of apples in modern life involves a good deal more than the sun and the rain and the apple seed (as the song goes): It requires carefully executed cross-pollination and grafts, as well as a good amount of time—it takes several years for a new tree to bear fruit. The photographs show the work of Dr. Susan Brown at Cornell University, one of three apple breeders in the United States who engineer new varieties of the fruit for mass production; these trees are manufactured hybrids, entirely new. The titles Rath gives the images—*Sisters weeping*, *Clone with perseverance*, *Sisters small and different*—employ the particular jargon of apple propagation, but many would not be entirely out of place in an Emily Dickinson poem. And, with their white fabric backgrounds, the images have something of the austerity and introversion that we tend to ascribe to the poet as well.

The severity of the photographs, which speak to the future of the apple, contrasts with the glossy voluptuousness of the sculptures, which represent its past. Based on specimens in the archive of Philip Forsline, the “apple curator” at Cornell, these sculptures, produced over the past two years, depict rare breeds of the fruit—pure white apples, tiny apples, apples as large as a baby's head—many of which are on the verge of extinction. The romantic, wild hybrids of the past thus appear beautiful, tempting; it is as if the artist were trying to memorialize them.

Rath plumbs the theme of human intervention in nature but resists rendering ethical judgments. If it weren't for these acts of breeding, we wouldn't have apples as we know them; the likelihood of a sweet, edible apple that isn't bred by humans occurring by itself in the wild is slim. (Many scientists believe Central Asia is the birthplace of the edible apple, and a breed from that region, the Kazakhstan Elite, is shown here as a sculpture.) In our technological age, it is tempting to idealize the unthinking randomness of nature, but nature doesn't much care about our projections, our narrative needs. And if we are caught in a scientific and ethical quandary between meddling and “naturalness,” between, in this case, survival and extinction, we are caught in a metaphorical one as well. The fruit at the beginning of the alphabet, the symbol of wholesomeness and ease, has been for just as long the symbol of desire and damnation. *A* is also for *ambivalence*.

—Emily Hall

Simryn Gill

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My Own Private Angkor, 2007–2009, is a document that looks like a dream. Simryn Gill's suite of ninety black-and-white photographs, which has previously been exhibited at the 2011 Istanbul Biennial, was taken near Port Dickson, Malaysia, a seaside town that in recent decades has been developed as a beach resort. Gill, who will represent Australia in next year's Venice Biennale, made these images in a housing complex that was constructed there in the 1980s but then abandoned and never occupied. At some point, the houses were ransacked

Jessica Rath, *Sisters small and different*, 2012, inkjet print on paper, 32 x 41".





for metals to be sold as scrap; among other things, the vandals stripped the aluminum frames from the windows, leaving the glass panes leaning against the walls in otherwise empty spaces where time has given everything a patina of dust.

This backstory of real estate speculation gone awry supplies the entire overt content of the work, which is otherwise little more than the placement of those windowpanes around the deserted rooms. It's a familiar tale we've heard even more often since the housing bubbles of Europe and America burst a few years ago; one can easily imagine similar images being made in spots ranging from the suburbs

of Dublin and the Costa Brava of Spain to Orange County, California. But while it's never amiss to point out the irrationality of housing markets, such critique is clearly pretty far in the background of the drama Gill's images suggest. I think she was more interested in—perhaps even identified with—the thieves who are the other invisible forces behind these scenes, following the speculators. In these images, the fascination of trespass becomes palpable and takes on an eerie beauty. It's impossible to view them without feeling that we are looking at something that was never meant to be seen, that we are stepping through territory that is somehow off-limits. I have no idea whether the photographer entered these quarters with permission or whether she had to sneak in through a hole in a fence, nor do I think it finally matters. But the pictures themselves are illuminated with the heightened perceptiveness that comes with risk. We sense that even as the photographer slowly, carefully took in her surroundings, she was poised to hightail it out of there at any moment, should the unwelcome sound of another's footsteps be heard in the distance.

Formally, there's a nod to Minimalism in the repetition and seriality that characterize the sequence as a whole, the way each image seems to be a sort of variation on every other. And of course the shiny rectangles leaning against the walls inevitably recall John McCracken. But the lushly atmospheric quality of these photographs is anything but cold or impersonal. One thinks instead of photographers who insistently pursued an inner vision rather than objective reality—image makers such as Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Duane Michals, or Francesca Woodman, artists who seem to be trying to catch the shadows of ghosts or to see, as Meatyard once put it, into the past, the present, and the future at once. Meatyard's fascination with abandoned antebellum mansions is echoed in Gill's attentiveness to more contemporary ruins located an hour's journey from Kuala Lumpur, but what distinguishes her from the photographers I've mentioned is the absence of the human form in these images. And yet what she shows us is not quite an empty stage. There is drama in these works—a play of appearance, absence, movement, tension, and maybe transcendence—but the protagonist is light. Like the scrap-metal thieves, perhaps like the photographer herself, it comes stealing in uninvited. The light invades the space in oblique shafts, advances and withdraws and mingles with shadows in movements the photographer traces with great sensitivity, and in that way it takes the measure of time.

—Barry Schwabsky

BOSTON

Derrick Adams

MILLS GALLERY AT THE BOSTON CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Situated within a performing-arts complex, Derrick Adams's exhibition "The World According to Derrick: Performative Objects in Formation" synced nicely with its surroundings. The show, organized by art historian (and *Artforum* contributor) Nuit Banai, tracked more than a decade of the New York-based artist's production, dating back to his student days. From the beginning, Adams has invested his work with a high degree of performativity, though to call him a performance artist would be too limiting. Rather, he fluidly traverses the categorical distinctions typically drawn between performance and sculpture.

Throughout this exhibition, numerous references to walls, both metaphorical and actual, communicated Adams's drive to acknowledge and negotiate obstacles of all kinds. In the hands of a less subtle artist, the faux-brick surfaces might have come across as dated parodies of Minimalist painting, but his projects are peppered with just the right measure of politically informed wit. For *Four in One (The Same League)*, 2008, Adams lined up four "bodies," edge to edge, along a wall, the chest of each composed of a faux-brick rectangular box outfitted with a brown hoodie. One of these "torsos" supported a small carved-wood sculpture of a contemporary-looking black youth that, from a distance, resembled a West African statuette. Multiple layers of embodiment were also demonstrated by a black-and-white photograph depicting the African-American artist, only the whites of his eyes clearly visible, gazing back at the camera menacingly from beneath a model of the White House, itself casting deep shadows into the surrounding darkness. Titled *In the House*, 2010, this work evoked both the contemporary fears associated with Obama's election and perhaps the deeper US legacy of violence in response to perceived threats of blackness.

The barbed humor conveyed by Adams's object-based works is only amplified and made more explicitly comedic in his performances. Notably, several sculptural elements presented in this show had previously appeared as props in live events. For example, a static work titled *The Romantic*, 2003, comprises a suit featuring a long, curling, tail-like phallus sprouting a bouquet of flowers. Like Joseph Beuys's felt suit, which could be an active element of his work whether worn or hung on a wall, Adams's sculpture functioned both as costume and object in its own right. Regardless of the state in which a piece appears, Adams always stokes this tension between aggression and generosity. This dynamic was particularly evident in his video documentation of *Pagan Rite*, an interactive performance from 2002. Ostensibly taking place during a gallery opening, with guests circulating, smiling, presumably exchanging pleasantries (their words are inaudible), and holding glasses of red wine, the orderly scene comes unhinged as the participants begin spitting their drinks at one another, exposing the repressed urges of a familiar art-world ritual. For a new performance, *The Sanctified Space*, 2012, staged during the current exhibition's opening, Adams sat behind a free-standing wall covered in floral wallpaper; he was invisible to the crowd

