

Mary Mary

MOULÈNE, CLARE; ARTFORUM, JUNE 2009

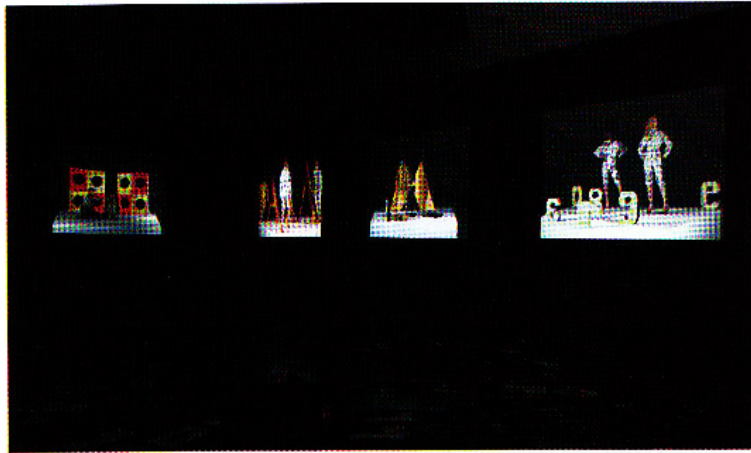
POUGUES-LES-EAUX, FRANCE

Lili Reynaud Dewar

PARC SAINT LÉGER CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN

"I always work in a disturbed in situ," explains French artist Lili Reynaud Dewar, whose solo show here included a large black wall that partitioned the gallery in two. Within this bisected space, which hosted video, sculpture, and photography, she built bridges—deliberately anachronistic ones—between the media of cinema and performance.

Reynaud Dewar's inspiration was the Black Maria, Thomas Edison's Kinetograph production studio, which operated for just four years at the end of the nineteenth century. Kinetographs were the very first



View of "Lili Reynaud Dewar," 2009.

motion pictures, and the studio attracted hordes of performers who wished to appear in them. The resultant milieu, "where dancers, the strongest man in the world, and Buffalo Bill all crossed paths, produced," according to the artist, "vibrant miniscenes on the frontier between cinema and live entertainment." From this cusp, "a world split by the question of genre," Reynaud Dewar borrows the ambiguous format of the filmed performance.

Before the exhibition's opening, the artist arranged objects inspired by modern and constructivist design (A-shaped totems, pedestals, ladders, and screens) on a white wooden stage positioned before the black wall. Painted with a chromatic palette that emphasized blue, pink, and gold, these cartoonlike sculptures flirted, as Reynaud Dewar's work always does, with the two-dimensionality of a stage set. Among them the artist staged—and filmed—a series of performances starring four eccentrically dressed women: a duo in ponytails wearing jumpsuits made with toile-de-Jouy patterning, a woman with severe bangs in a suit with African accents, and an older woman wearing a bronze pinfore dress (who recalled cabaret singer Klaus Nomi's unclassifiable look). Reynaud Dewar controlled their bodies meticulously, so as to

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call into question the distinction between actor and prop: “I position the characters as I might place objects,” she says, “to the point that one could say the girls are painted and the objects are wearing too much makeup.” The feminist performances comprised poses that referenced female cliché (wearing masks or applying makeup, the actresses’ faces daubed in blue or in black) and female liberation (smoking or fighting—ultimately, perhaps, another kind of cliché).

During the exhibition itself, the set pieces, costumes, and photographs of the performances are arranged in the gallery. In a room upstairs, the footage from the performances plays on four screens—a sequence of one- to five-minute scenes, approximating the short format of the Kinetographic film. Like Edison’s *Black Maria*, where the immediacy of live performance was atomized into the Kinetoscope’s tiny, infinitely repeatable moving images, this show’s spatial and temporal play shifted the notion of the event itself.

—*Claire Moulène*

Translated from French by Molly Stevens.