

Ariadne's Threads

JAMES LEWIS
"INJURY"
GALERIE HUBERT WINTER
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Lean and mean it is. This installation of James Lewis (*1986) is a Rubik's Cube of allusions to the body, and an allegory of space, time, place, and setting. Its premise is established by a large rudimentary sculpture (6 metres squared). Transparent and lit by a dirtied fluorescent tube, the enclosed pared down structure is thick with heavy strips of see-through plastic, the kind you might find partitioning a meat locker. Its lighting emits a lurid yellow haze while an embedded four-channel soundtrack plays the deracinated sounds of public spaces (such as a bus) as recorded by the artist. That the dimensions correspond to the social distance parameters of the present age is no accident. (Six metres square equals the new social distancing, and with a trace of bitter irony suggests six feet under.) In the centre of this

cubic interior is a low-lying crudely assembled Plexiglas sculpture. It's hard to decipher through the mist of ambient colour but its significant form turns out to be a crude model of the Venn diagram, the mathematical linchpin that motors the exhibition. Once the cognitive spark engages with that demure hint, one can glean the expansive components that link the subordinated parts to the whole of the show.

Pushing back the curtains on the boundaries of the body, are we or are we not more than mere flesh and bones? Lewis has concretised the most knee buckling facts of biological life in its most elusive outlines of weights and measurements. Engraved on largish aluminium tondos that look like beat up old coins are numbers and symbols related to said topic. Each one is identical in size yet different in degree, engraved with numerological coordinates and representative carvings. Did you know the length of the digestive tract is 900 cm, or that the surface of human skin covers two square metres? How many seconds are in a day (86,400), or how many hours in the lowest average lifespan? (A grim 464,280.) How arcane all of this salient information is.

How drily conclusive and bluntly matter of fact, how philosophical materialist.

Essentially, it is through the side door of an analytic conceptualism that Lewis has produced a show about a kind of "figuration" as it is a physiological study of the mind-body connection through Cartesian coordinates. What's the measure of Vitruvian Man when he's "unboxed" by the genomic sequence and the banal calculations of scientific outcomes? When our minds wander in daydreaming, are we not out of body and more in tune with ephemeral things than mere blunt matter?

The show makes one take pause to contemplate the shadows that surround us. Beware of the sedentary life, though. In the back room, a fossilised love seat on a pedestal has tumblers of cheap whiskey arranged around it. One can smell the spirits rising up out of the glass and, through the olfactory senses, the gradual inebriation of its occupant. The encrustations on the concrete patina suggest a numbed out passiveness as life passes by the spectator watching, whiling the time away in a waking forgetfulness of buzzification.

Aspects of hidden realities are in plain sight, along with a sense of displacement or detachment from one's physical surroundings. Hence the street signs interspersed throughout the show. These squarish cast aluminium London street signs (hung nearly at street pole level) allude to being somewhere and nowhere at the same time. And it's amusing to know the clever devices cartographers use to copyright their work by adding in phantom streets that only exist in the reality of the unfolded printed map itself.

Full of shades of research, I digested the show with its anthropological polarities lodged somewhere in my gut flora. Thinking, here we are, the human race, homo sapiens, at the dawn of synthetic biology reduced to Giorgio Agamben's explication of bare life. And that the battle for our biological



Dilwium, 2021, Wood, foam, plaster bandage, concrete, glass, whiskey, strip light, clay, acrylic paint, 180 x 95 x 90 cm



Narrowly true but broadly misleading (DIVORCE), 2021, Cast aluminium, 64 x 64 x 2 cm



Narrowly true but broadly misleading (CONTEMPT), 2021, Cast aluminium, 69 x 69 x 2 cm



Narrowly true but broadly misleading (ZEN), 2021, Cast aluminium, 64 x 64 x 2 cm



Imaginary counter power, 2021, Wood, polyvinyl chloride (pvc), strip light, clay, acrylic paint, stainless steel, epoxy resin, speakers, amplifier, electric cable, 215 x 205 x 200 cm

organisms versus the synthetic interlopers has already begun. On a conceptual level, through a unity of media with its plasticity of discordant sound and elemental sculptures, the exhibition is a subtle combination of multiple fronts. It's a conflation and expansion of complex things in a pared down language. Food for thought deep in the labyrinth where poiesis leads to epiphany. Lest

you thought that sentient man hath totally lost their human way, circle back to that Venn diagram as the key ingredient to finding the hidden rock. And, like Ariadne's thread, it will guide you back from the delusive snares of clinical fleshly demise to an expansive discourse on the magnetic pull of the living ineffable.

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Courtesy the artist and Galerie Hubert Winter, Vienna. Photos: Simon Veres