

Yoshua Okón



Yoshua Okón
White Russians
2008
DVD still

Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico City, Mexico

In order to grasp the various meanings that unfold, disturbingly, throughout Yoshua Okón's recent exhibition 'Ventanilla única' (Single Window) it is useful to think of his work as a system, a group of interdependent items that are linked and interact with each other. By playing with cause and effect, the energy and information contained in the five video and photographic installations flow between one another to create a physical and emotional impact on the viewer. Okón approaches diverse social groups who have chosen a different method of political, economic or cultural self-organization. With well-defined strategies (which involve the artist as a participant rather than as an observer), Okón has gone through many processes of negotiation in order to produce his work and to present the particular perspective the people he approaches have on the world.

Hipnostasis (2009) is a six-channel video installation made in collaboration with Raymond Pettibon. It is a portrait of six men who have lived rough on Venice Beach, California, for the past 30 years: society's lost renegades who gave up on conventional Western life. The only sound is of breaking waves; the men sit on rocks eating steaks, reminding us of the possibility of turning thoughts and desires into actions. *Hipnostasis* is a beautiful, meditative piece of work, and is surrounded by Pettibon's scrawlings on the walls, fragmented resurrections of Samuel Beckett, Jack Kerouac, Rudyard Kipling

and Lawrence Sterne. *Bocanegra* (2007) is noisy, uncomfortable and pathetic: a video work for which the artist spent time with a group of neo-Nazis in Mexico City, and with whom he orchestrated a series of events. Okón filmed them marching around their local park, saluting, singing and discussing race, class and social roles. Divided into four sections, the audience sees multiple views of these fascists as they cry and shout, and seem unable to agree on anything.

White Russians (2008) is a collaboration between Okón and a family in their home in Wonder Valley – a desolate, abandoned area in High Desert, California. Together with local residents, they created an expanded, fictional family who fight, sing, sit around (activities all previously rehearsed) while they are visited by the California Biennial spectators, who are all offered a 'White Russian' cocktail upon entering. The piece plays with the idea of looking: who looks at who in this staged situation? Disturbing and provocative, *White Russians* is a joke on cultural omnivores, poking at the simplistic notions city people sometimes have about those who live in the middle of nowhere; it reveals class tensions and a way of life that seduces through its nonconformity.

Jessica Berlanga Taylor

Daniel Richter

Essl Museum, Vienna, Austria

Daniel Richter's newest paintings – a series of four, comparatively modest, small-format works from 2009 – look as though they're in disguise. Along with the apparent disappearance of 'Blueman', the masked and helpless superhero who once appeared in many of the German artist's paintings, the super-contrived and visually violent parts of Richter's previous work have been replaced by the picturesque. No wonder these frank and humble reflections on the fall of the Berlin Wall feel almost disingenuous. But perhaps Richter's latest shift toward muted colours and more direct representation is to be expected: since the early 1990s, he has loped methodically through abstraction, pattern and gesture. In this frothy but concentrated exhibition of 20 pieces, drawn in part from the Essl Collection, his early works look florid and aggressive. In the later figurative paintings that dominated, however, most striking were Richter's oscillations between specificity and ambiguity, directness and subversion, in his use of motifs and references.

In *Amsterdam* (2001), a barely clad prostitute stands in what could be a garden plot or a construction site. She peers out obliviously over the johns assembled in her yard, who barely seem aware of one another. Like Richter's earlier abstract work, the composition is less perspectival than layered: the foreground doesn't work spatially; it's a seamless collage of disparate, interchangeable elements. Like much of Richter's figurative work, the setting and motifs are anchored in the specific and recognizable. The effect, however, is a layer of moods: angst, paranoia, confusion, isolation, grief and ecstasy – thanks to gorgeous, apocalyptic swathes of colour more than any definite narrative or conclusion. Compare this to the clear moral reproach of *Flash* (2002), where refugees are drowning in the sea: a boat

Daniel Richter
Borderline
2009
Oil on canvas
60 x 80 cm

