

Uri Aran

Two Things About Suffering

01 September – 01 October 2016

62 Kingly St London W1

Tuesday – Saturday, 11 – 6pm

In his first exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, Uri Aran presents a group of videos, sculptures and paintings. Throughout, he returns to the intersecting themes of genre, gesture and artifice – both as they occur in art and in everyday reality. Arrayed throughout the gallery is a group of short videos, variously projected or displayed in the form of a 'workstation' (a screen and speakers placed on utilitarian office furniture). Each video is a self-contained chapter or act. The same pair of actors appears in a distinct scenario, operating under a given set of directions. Filmed variously in the glaring light of the Texas Desert and sombre interior settings, the two men perform short double acts – scenes of 'physical theatre' which shift beguilingly between slapstick, ennui, antagonism and friendship. One of the men is the artist's twin brother, a kind of second self.



In their dual simplicity of form and fluidity of meaning, Aran's short films glance at genres as diverse as absurdist theatre, the early cinematic routines of Laurel and Hardy, the spaghetti western and the quizzical conceptualism of Marcel Broodthaers (a long-term touchstone for the artist). The concept of genre – as something both readable and malleable – is at the heart of Aran's sculptures and paintings. In two wooden units, he has assembled paintings, drawings and objects into meticulous compositions. These contained – or caged – elements imply hierarchies, patterns and systems; and yet Aran hints at the capacity for structure (and with it, easy meaning) to unravel and mutate. Often, a gap opens up between an object's superficial appearance – a cotton reel, for instance, or a biscuit – and its material form. In one free-standing sculpture, a horse's saddle has been encased in black paint. It transmutes into a glossy caricature of itself, but equally an abstract sculptural motif.

Aran's materials – whether readymade, crafted, commonplace or unidentifiable – are both mundanely literal and suggestively symbolic. He constructs a topography (a physical aggregate of things) that is also a form of typography, a language that demands to be read and interpreted. "There's an element of play between something very formal – a hierarchy or taxonomy – and something more humorous and potentially abject", he states.

In his videos as much as his sculptures and painting, Aran coerces disjointed elements into a formalist whole. The show draws its title from a new video, *Two Things About Suffering*, installed in the back gallery as the exhibition's culminating chapter. The same two men are seen pacing together in an indistinct walled space, against an emotive orchestral score. Their monologues and gestures flit between offhand (seemingly aimless) propositions and more deliberate statements or acts. At times, the line between these modes – improvised and choreographed – fades or dissolves. One of the unnamed characters speculates on "the conditions in which we are expected to act", and in so doing pinpoints a concept at the centre of Aran's art – the parameters in which artifice plays out, and the process (on the viewer's part) of suspending disbelief. "I wanted the title to sound like a lesson. Maybe these figures are two forms of suffering," the artist has commented. "They 'walk the yard.' They are two fish in a tank. The space is so deep and so high they could be two men inside the belly of a whale."

The video *Two Things About Suffering* was commissioned by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, for the inaugural Walker Moving Image Commission, with major support provided by the Bentson Foundation. Uri Aran (b. 1977, Jerusalem) lives and works in New York. He graduated from Columbia University in 2007, and has since exhibited internationally, with major solo presentations including *Mice*, Koelnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany (2016); *Puddles*, Peep-Hole, Milan (2014); *Five Minutes Before*, South London Gallery (2013); and *here, here and here*, Kunsthalle Zürich (2013). He has been included in group exhibitions including *Walter Benjamin: Exilic Archive*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Israel (2016); *do it*, various international venues (2013-15); Liverpool Biennial 2014; the 2014 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *The Encyclopedic Palace*, 55th Venice Biennale, Venice (2013); and *Empire State: New York Art Now*, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (2013). From November 2015 – May 2017, his work will feature in *Question the Wall Itself* at the Walker Art Center. In 2015, the first major monograph on the artist's work was published by JRP Ringier to mark his exhibitions at South London Gallery and Kunsthalle Zürich, with texts by Fionn Meade and Liam Gillick, and an interview by Beatrix Ruf, Niels Olsen and Fredi Fischli.

Uri Aran will be in conversation with Alessandro Rabottini at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London on Friday 02 September at 1pm.

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