

The Box

Leigh Ledare

VOKZAL

April 1, 2017 – May 13, 2017

Opening reception: Saturday, April 1, 6-9 PM

“...to shine onto social relations a black beam, the reciprocal of a searchlight.”
—Wilfred Bion

VOKZAL, Leigh Ledare’s second Los Angeles exhibition at The Box, presents four linked works: *Stalemate*, *Vokzal*, *The Walk*, and *The Large Group (Zurich)*. Consistent with Ledare’s earlier projects, each of these works intervenes into—or newly constructs—an open system which submits its subjects and the viewer to distinct social, material or psychological processes. As such, the works in *VOKZAL* hold an allegorical function.

Suggesting an end game, a stalemate is a social impasse where the system comes up against its own limits and the rules of the game stumble over themselves.

Sealed between large glass panels, the triptych *Stalemate* is a grid of montage elements that suggests an ordered (and equally disordered) social field. Using image relations to mirror human relations, Ledare appropriated tear sheets from various mass media sources—voiced by multiple authors, within various contexts and cultures. He then organized these representations to suggest a typology of individuals who, bound to the movements of their identity, appear like pieces on a chess board; putting into play social issues related to race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and socio-economics. Moreover, *Stalemate* suggests that certain forms of representation serve as repositories for our collective desires, fears and psychic baggage. Each piece is marked by one of three stains—foie gras, excrement and liquid soap. While food is traditionally a symbol for nurture, in this case foie gras carries connotations of cruelty, privilege and affluence. Conversely, excrement speaks to the “other”, the socially deviant, befouled or befouling, simultaneously representing the child’s first gift to the parent. When food touches shit it’s shit—soap becomes necessary. Cast as a social process, these stains become cultures in their own right.

Ledare’s 60-minute 16mm film *Vokzal*, shot in Moscow, uses the sprawling public space connecting three train stations as a rubric for mapping complex group dynamics.¹ The film captures interactions between various individuals passing through, working in, loitering around or policing this public zone, linking instances of individual behavior to clear signs of social breakdown. Within this environment competing ideas of order play out, highlighting social fractures and laying bare a collective predicament. *Vokzal* suggests a portrait of society unconsciously shifting between forms of dependency, fight-or-flight responses, pronounced individualism, and non-differentiation. For *Vokzal*’s installation the gallery’s main room has been bisected lengthwise by a 38’ long x 28” wide corridor. Both psychological passageway and barrier, the corridor divides the space into two interconnected viewing rooms. The full 60-minute film has been split into three 20-minute looped 16mm projections. Each projection punctures from one room, through the corridor’s walls, forming an image on the far wall of the room opposite. Transitioning through the corridor the viewer is forced to cross between the projector and the subjects being captured by the camera, in turn casting their shadow as yet another layer of projection.

Like *Stalemate*, *The Walk* uses materials associated with digestion, decomposition and sanitation to parallel psychic and social processes.² Focusing on the internal drama of individuals, or pairings of subjects, each of its 34 panels contains four parts. Two images—either a male or female character actor from a collection of 1960s Soviet post-

¹ *Vokzal*, the Russian word for train station, derives from Vauxhall, the outlying destination of the first Russian railway line built in 1838 between St. Petersburg and Pavlovsk. At this site an elegant train station was erected, the interface to a dancehall and English gardens. ‘Vokzal’ later became synonymous with ‘pleasure gardens’, but can also be transliterated in German as ‘hall for common people’, which may forecast its contemporary condition as junkspace. Rem Koolhaas writes: “Modernization had a rational program: to share the blessings of science, universally. Junkspace is its apotheosis, or meltdown... Although its individual parts are the outcome of brilliant inventions, lucidly planned by human intelligence, boosted by infinite computation, their sum spells the end of Enlightenment, its resurrection as farce, a low-grade purgatory...”

² “*The Walk*” might refer to: leisure walk, dog walk, perp walk.

cards, plus the depiction of a purebred dog from a comparable set of cards.³ In addition, one page torn from R.D. Laing's seminal 1970 book *Knots* has been stained with either soap, food, shit or paint. These stains suggest representation as a projective act, in which specific groups are cast by society to hold desirable or undesirable aspects of our collective experience. Sandwiched between glass, the Rorschach-like stains are sealed from within using black silicone caulk. This inverts the regular function of the frame—rather than keeping the outside out, the seal functions as a containment, holding the “outside” in.

Lastly, the 68-minute single channel video *The Large Group (Zurich)* will be shown in The Box's side gallery. *The Large Group* presents a single session culled from an expansive body of work wherein Ledare employed psychological practices in place of performance as we know it in the field of art. Using a method of structural psychology first developed by Wilfred Bion at London's Tavistock Institute, Ledare organized and filmed an immersive, three-day experimental group psychology conference. Ledare enacted these three days of Tavistock sessions using 21 participants living in Zurich. He did so with the help of six psychologists who both ran and participated in the groups. As a cross-section of Zurich society, the participants and psychologists represented a diverse pool of identities organized around gender, age, nationality, ethnicity and class affiliations, as well as sexual orientation and professional background. The intention being to reflect on the complex intersections between authority, identity and role that form within social life. Like all the works in *VOKZAL*, *The Large Group* comprises a social apparatus that sets the stage for the psychological production of lived dynamics.⁴

Ledare's work has been shown widely in the United States and Europe, and is included in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Museum of the Art Institute of Chicago, and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, among others. His work has been the subject of major surveys at WIELS Centre for Contemporary Art, Brussels; and Kunsthal Charlottenberg, Copenhagen, Ledare has also presented solo exhibitions at Office Baroque in Brussels (2016), Mitchell-Innes and Nash in New York (2014), The Box in Los Angeles (2012), and Pilar Corrias in London (2012, 2010). His work has appeared in numerous group exhibitions, amongst them *The Whitney Biennial* (2017), and *Manifesta 11* (2016). In September 2017 Ledare's work will be the subject of a major solo exhibition at The Museum of the Art Institute of Chicago. Ledare lives and works in New York City, where he teaches in the MFA programs at Columbia University, New York University and Yale University.

Previous publications by Ledare include: *Double Bind, Conversations* (A.R.T. Press, 2015) co-written with Rhea Anastas; *Ana and Carl and some other couples* (Andrew Roth, 2014), a collaboration with Nicolas Guagnini; *Leigh Ledare, et al.* (Mousse Publishing, 2012), edited by Elena Filipovic; *An Invitation* (Leroy Neiman Center for Print Studies, Columbia University, 2012); *Double Bind* (MFC-michèle didier, 2012); and *Pretend You're Actually Alive* (PPP Editions and Andrew Roth, 2008).

³ Pairing representations of people and dogs, *The Walk* suggests the function that dogs serve socially. Not only as nostalgic projections of their owner's personality and taste, but in roles as diverse as service animals, objects of devotion, slaves to their master's whims, and unconditional companions—pampered, abused, controlled or neglected. Within *The Walk* the social distinctions (and often arbitrary similarities) between the social worlds of dogs, of people and dogs, and of people and people, function as an allegory for the class issues inherent within the other works in the show.

⁴ The 21 participants and 3 consultants selected seats in an arrangement of three concentric circles. Within this arrangement, it was impossible for members to maintain eye contact with all other members of the group. Participants not only imported their identities, but also specific feelings, affects and anxieties that surfaced through their relation to the group. Participants were not given topics to discuss and they were discouraged from lapsing into private histories or desires for therapy. Rather, by encouraging the group to encounter itself in the “here and now,” and thus confront face to face the differences, biases and contradictions held by other members of the group, an intensely self-reflexive system was created. Inside this system, reflection detournes in unanticipated ways—from first impressions, stereotypes and projections, to more complex patterns of identification, transference and role that emerged as the sessions evolved. Mirroring the gaze of the collective's 24 individuals, plus the many subgroupings that formed, the cameras' multiple viewpoints were edited in-sync to represent the real time of the session, before being subtitled in English.

