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Tom Burr *Abridged* 26.10.2017 – 30.11.2017
Opening reception 26.10.2017, 6 – 9 pm

Jean Genet's play *The Screens* opened in 1961 at the Schloss-park Theater in Berlin. This first production and others that followed in the years just after were partial, abridged versions of the lengthy text which Genet began working on in 1955. He completed a first version in 1958, only to rework the play the following year. He rewrote sections of it again in the early 1960's after it had been published. In 1976 Genet reworked the play yet again, into a fresh and final version.

In 2003 I made the exhibition *The Screens* at the Institute for Visual Culture at Cambridge University. I was considering this title, borrowed directly from the Genet play, within the context of political aggression; Genet's *The Screens* was focused on the French-Algerian War, and the historical exodus of the French colonials after 130 years of relentless exploitation of generations of Arabs in Algeria, and the bitter recriminations that resulted. I planned my exhibition in 2003 during the months that led up to invasion of Iraq, which signaled the start of the Iraq War, in what was dubbed by the US "Operation Iraqi Freedom." I was interested in the two uses of *The Screens*, mine and his, folding one into the other.

Genet's play had a simple and singular visual motif as stage set, the physical screen. The play's cast of over fifty characters moves through seventeen scenes, the world of the living breaching the world of the dead by means of a shifting of the screens. I was drawn to this device. Through this loan from Genet, I was considering the relationship of form to political aggression, of formalism to its other somehow - to history - to the media news and all of those multiplying electronic screens, (the U.S. invasion of Iraq was the most widely and closely reported war in military history).

And the black, vinyl flowers. I took them from Warhol, from his silkscreened poppies. But I wanted them to act more like the bodies in his films: languid and largely ineffectual, slumped and propped for the duration of the viewing, not the perky, optimistic forms that cluster on his canvases. As in Genet's play, I intended them to exhibit lifelessness, or something between waning vitality and complete physical exhaustion. Performing as depleted figures. People have remarked that Warhol's poppies were suggestive of assholes, that beneath the vibrant flora something earthier lurks. Maybe. Regardless, the conflation of flowers and assholes into a dialectical entanglement of pleasure and abjection, say, treads heavily within Genet terrain.

This re-staging of (my) *The Screens*, in Berlin, right now, is a partial one; the 2003 exhibition consisted of four of the wooden walls-as-screens. This installation is an abridged version of itself. And this version is augmented, in a sense, by other works of mine which take the original installation both into and out of itself, allowing it to become something else that is calibrated to this time and location. Both condensed and expanded. The point is of course, that I made these specific decisions myself, within the context of this particular situation, in order to make the whole of the exhibition appear with more of a self-consciousness, to create a certain anxiety of presence maybe, and to register the distance from then to now.

Tom Burr
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