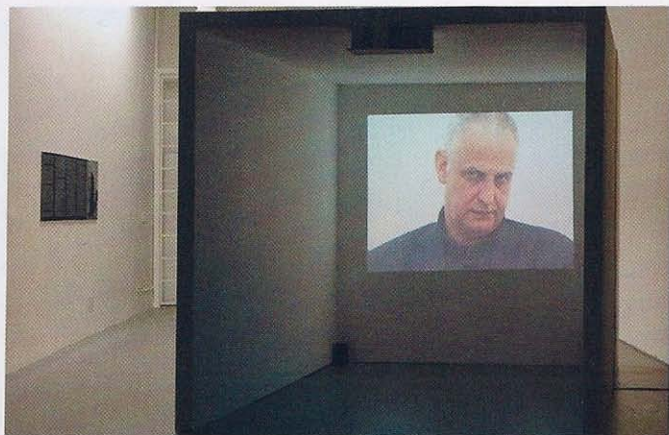


ACTING OUT THE AB-EX EFFECT

DE KOONING • ELDERFIELD • WINTERS • SILLMAN
JOSELIT • PRINCE • ARAKAWA • WOOL • MITCHELL
POLLOCK • DUBUFFET • TWOMBLY • TEMKIN
OEHLEN • SCHNABEL • EISENMAN • WILKES • SMITH



the non-present. Underscoring his metaphoric intentions, Sigg included in this show *The Swedenborg Room*, 2011, which recounts, across a five-panel text piece, Emanuel Swedenborg's experience of a supernatural vision at an inn in London in 1745; the work invokes Beckett, Deleuze, Foucault, Loyola, and, of course, *The Exorcist*. The appearance of this CliffsNotes guide to thinking about the exhibition was somewhat off-putting, bordering on gratuitous didacticism even as it acknowledged that the presence of language can compromise an artwork.

Text aside, the exhibition's conceptual conceit was lucid and only strengthened by the two other videos on view—*Room*, 2009–11, and *What an Excellent Day for an Exorcism*, 2010; a small, model-like sculpture also included in the show further focused Sigg's use of the *The Exorcist* as a tautological frame for the conditions of cinema. But it was the film installation *134 Exhibits*, 2009–10, that most deftly complicated the artist's reading of representation via moving image in its clever summoning of the apparition of painting. The work is a large, freestanding cube with one open wall. Projected inside is a nearly forty-three-minute-long fixed medium shot of Tuymans under hypnosis listing from memory an inventory of his paintings, (including the book, the exorcist, the angel, Dracula, the room). The Belgian artist's slow monologue is as difficult to place as it is unsettling, at times even improbably seeming to provide a description of Sigg's artwork.

When a subject is possessed, she is forced to cede control of her own body, yet during hypnosis, control is willfully surrendered from the outset. In this work, we not only watch a hypnotized painter, but one who is also, unwittingly, acquiescing to the weight of film and to the power-trippy, clinical fascinations of the young artist. In Sigg's hands, Tuymans's image becomes a filmic document, and his paintings are transformed into (reduced to?) language alone: aesthetic transubstantiation or simply erasure? And just as Tuymans so often draws on film for the figures that populate his paintings, Sigg implicates Tuymans himself as the subject of a film. The work is a cerebral portrait that speaks to the inversion of representation, to the authority of the artist, and to art itself as both memory and specter.

—Catherine Taft

MONTREAL

Valérie Blass

PARISIAN LAUNDRY

The sculptural modus operandi of Valérie Blass is hardly an unfamiliar one these days: She makes assemblages out of a wide repertoire of everyday objects and materials; the play of the Montreal-based artist's

perception and invention reveals itself more through the gaps and disjunctions in the construction or, rather, the arrangement of the various parts brought together through some seemingly imponderable conjunction of chance, intuition, and will than through any immediately perceptible formal resolution. However, unlike many other sculptor-*bricoleurs*, Blass distinguishes herself through her predilection for using the human figure as a base reference in her work. "Every sculpture is a body and has an attitude," she once said. "I play with the capacity we have to see a face (or a body) in an abstraction"—but also, it should be added, to see abstraction in a given face or body. In this she might be close to Matthew Monahan or Huma Bhabha, but, comparatively, they almost seem more like closet traditionalists—their figures like cobbled-together Frankenstein monsters trying to morph into integral humans seeking an empathetic gaze. Blass's forms, on the contrary, conjure once-whole beings whose human character has slipped away and become lodged in the alien world of inanimate objects. Or, to put it another way, Monahan and Bhabha's work moves from irony to pathos, whereas

Blass's flows in the opposite direction, from pathos to irony.

In the dozen sculptures and five collages on view in "*Petit losange laqué veiné*" (Little Glossed Veined Lozenge), that irony was often directed at gender roles. In the tradition, perhaps, of Louise Bourgeois's *Femme Maison*—a motif Bourgeois first addressed in the 1940s and returned to periodically thereafter—Blass presented a *Femme panier* (Basket Woman) and a *Femme planche* (Board Woman), both 2010. The first is a headless figure whose torso is—you guessed it—made of wicker basketry; but the "femme's" posture is twisted, too, as if to be woven into the pattern of someone's expectations. At once ingratiating and aggressive, she seems to be stepping forward like a dancer executing an oddly unstable



Valérie Blass, *Femme panier (Basket Woman)*, 2010, stockings, found shirt, hand tool, basket, paint, mannequin, 52 x 59 x 32".

bow, with one ceramic hand wielding a sharp gardening tool while the other hand shows off its skeleton-motif ornamentation. Nearby, the *Femme planche*, a stylized figure in Styrofoam rather convincingly masquerading as wood, seemed to be at once bowing in obeisance and executing everyone's favorite yoga position, the downward-facing dog; a long shovel rests on her behind, its shaft parallel to her legs and its blade pointing upward. Oddly, it's as if her body were being pulled up by the shovel rather than the shovel being held up by the body. In any case, the piece conveys a sort of slapstick indignity in a strikingly deadpan way.

Not all the sculptures were as glaringly figurative. *Une somme rondelette* (Round Sum), 2011, is a wooden construction resembling a crane but painted with a dainty pattern of brickwork—a material that could never actually be used to build a crane. But it, too, has a posture, an attitude—as though it were a person disguised as a crane pretending to be made of bricks. The sculptures were placed on pedestals or low platforms of various heights, shapes, sizes, and colors. And yet, in the rather grand space at Parisian Laundry, the installation strategy conferred a unity on the entire show by emphasizing the isolation of each sculpture from the others—as if each one, with its real or implied figures, represented a self-enclosed predicament, isolated by the tragicomic irrationality it embodies.

—Barry Schwabsky