



## REVIEWS

### JIŘÍ KOVANDA SECESSION - VIENNA

Jiří Kovanda is an artist whose early work from the '70s consisted primarily of what the artist himself has dubbed 'actions.' Given the performative nature of these interventions and the time in which he executed them, he has often been compared to the Viennese Actionists in Europe and to conceptual artists like Chris Burden and Vito Acconci in America. Kovanda's site-specific installation "White Blanket" in the main hall of Vienna's Secession is significantly more subdued than the typically jarring nature of the aforementioned conceptual artists and the Actionists.

Upon entering the exhibition the vastness of the stark white that fills the gallery is immediately arresting. The abundant whiteness however does not provoke the sense of emptiness that one might imagine. A wall rising only to eye level bisects the space as it juts in and out through a series of "bays" and "salients." The architectural imposition of this wall fills the space while guiding the viewer through it. It is this wall, which just barely allows you to peek over it, and its claustrophobic niches, that

confirm comparisons to Kovanda's work with Burden, Acconci and the Actionists. It is similarly uncanny and unsettling; it is a game of sorts that implies the viewer, whether you like it or not.

Interrupting the capacious whiteness of the installation are a number of ordinary objects: first a yellow broom leaning against the wall, a red lamp, a blue orchid on a pedestal, a chair situated at the back of the hall, and finally white blankets and a pillow arranged in a corner in such a way to suggest the most modest of sleeping arrangements. The Secession states in its description of "White Blanket" that the "subtexts of the objects suggest erotic connotations." That may be true of the objects' subtexts, but the outward aesthetics of "White Blanket" lack any seductiveness at all.

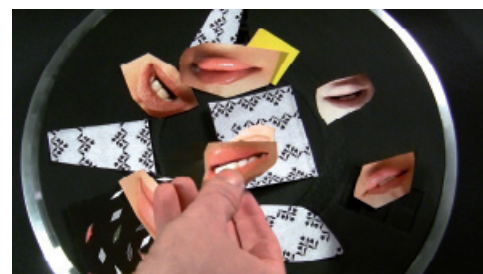
The exhibition positions its guests as both voyeur and watched, subject and viewer. Kovanda's installation manages to be reductive and quiet, but still it arouses an uneasy sense that the artist's hand is still very present as it quietly yet forcefully intervenes in the viewer's experience.

*Alexander Ferrando*



JIŘÍ KOVANDA, *White Blanket*, 2010. Installation view at Secession, Vienna. Photo: Wolfgang Thaler.

### LAPSED CINEMATIC STEINEK - VIENNA



JD WALSH, *Dramatization Disc*, 2010. Courtesy Steinek, Vienna.  
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"What is it that fascinates contemporary artists about film?" is the overriding, non-binding question posed by "Art&Film," this year's "curated\_by\_vienna" theme. "Lapsed cinematic," currently on view at Galerie Steinek, can not but fit in. However, the more appropriate question here might be: "What is it that fascinates Tony Oursler about film?"

Oursler, as first-time curator, has drawn together three artists who, as he does in his own canon, grapple with those tried-and-true parallels of madness vs. clarity,

paganism vs. Christianity, sub-consciousness vs. consciousness.

JD Walsh's *Dramatization Disc*, a suspended, oval screen, evokes but also uses a cymbal as canvas upon which to layer movement and sound, countering the anticipation and tangible realities with an unexpected synthetic audio and a digital rendering of hallways upon hallways. Martin Murphy's pieces center around a confused and bleeding car crash victim. The ethereal and eternal moment between what is normal and what is a head wound is neither demonstrated nor extrapolated on, but further heightened by the addition of three tablets nearby, wherein twittering, distorted chants resonate with the monologue trickling from the victim.

The meatiest contribution to the show is Erik Aalto's *The basic shapes*. Three monitors all facing the viewer reflect via silent visuals and subtitled monologues on three abstract shapes (a pyramid, a circle and a square) or their personified characters (a carpenter, a Smurf and an animal). Within this framework, Aalto alternately indulges in and exploits our search for perfection and

origin, our fascination with kitsch and taboos, and our basic gut instincts.

These three young artists are really just an evolution of Oursler's own take on the human condition. His is less a fascination with film than an appreciation for its capacity to combine sound, image and movement. And while the teetering windmills of the mind are not unfamiliar territory in any way, it is not without reason that generation upon generation take up the challenge to define it in its own terms. Which is as it should be.

*Dustin Cosentino*

ERIK AALTO, *The Basic Shapes*, 2010. Courtesy Steinek, Vienna.  
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