

5 days ago

For One (Short) Evening

Primacy always belongs to art and the artist. I've tried to keep overhyped careers in check, and had no effect whatsoever. In fact, so many shows in so many places mean that we now have an overload of writing about art. Joseph Beuys said, "Everyone is an artist." Now everyone actually is a writer. Like exhibitions that can't get traction, commentary also has a hard time gaining a foothold, unless you yourself enter the arena of spectacle, becoming something of a spectacle yourself. (Believe me; I know.) Adding to this, a generation of academically trained critics were taught to believe they should write in impenetrable language and refrain from opinion and negative criticism. (Jerry Saltz, "The Death of the Gallery Show," *New York Magazine*, 8 April 2013 [<http://www.vulture.com/2013/03/saltz-on-the-death-of-art-gallery-shows.html>])

Working backwards might be the most honed skill of the good researcher. The ability to start with the ordinary, or at least the present/current/available, and somehow end up somewhere else that is, hopefully, very very interesting. I started going to Center Berlin's FIGHT [<http://www.center-berlin.com/>] series of Friday night art installations at the recommendation of a new Berlin acquaintance. It was his best suggestion of a window into my new art scene, and a "good place to meet up with friends before going out." Fair play, he did also describe the premise, which is probably what sold me. So, here's the idea: every Friday in a space that appears to be repurposed from a construction zone, Center shows 3 works of art. Two are video/computer generated works by two different artists, shown on the same two creatively located flat screen TV's each week, and one is a textual work whose presentation varies; I went for three almost consecutive weeks (interrupted by a research trip).

Then, sometime in early March I noticed [this quick mention in Monopol](http://www.monopol-magazin.de/artikel/20108056/Richard-Wright-in-der-Galerie-BQ.html) [<http://www.monopol-magazin.de/artikel/20108056/Richard-Wright-in-der-Galerie-BQ.html>] concerning the year long -evolution of an exhibition by Richard Wright at Galerie BQ. A show in three interdependent parts, with each successive iteration building upon the previous over the duration of a year. What a commitment from both gallery and artist. I think that I read this on the train as I rushed to make the 19-21h window for the FIGHT show on a Friday night. 2 hours. One night.

That Monopol paragraph references an earlier article by Jerry Saltz (whose commentaries are often translated into German, much to my German teacher's delight), and that is how I landed on the quotation that begins this ramble. Saltz laments not only the demise of the Gallery Opening, but the isolation of the contemporary art experience (when did you last strike up a conversation with a stranger at a gallery?) and corporatization of the art market. It's a good read, even though it possibly indites me as one of the "everyone a writer" crowd.



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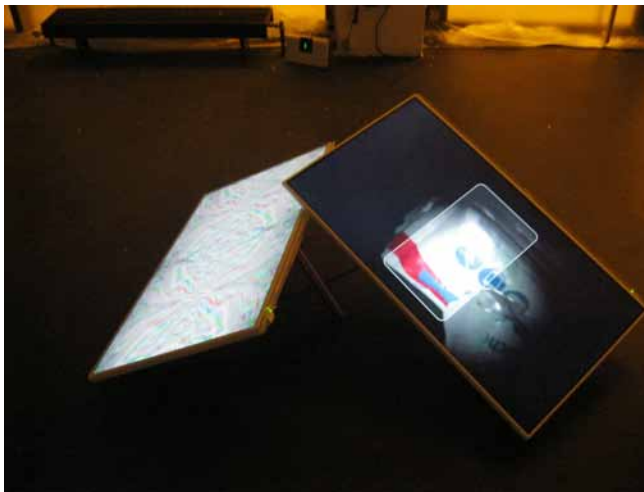
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So about that FIGHT scene. 21 February [<http://www.center-berlin.com/fight10.html>] : Steve Bishop, Renaud Jerez, Olivia Dunbar. The gallery was using the front door, evidenced by the crowd of chilly smokers on

that side of the building. This meant that once inside, the first piece was Bishop's seven minute loop of superimposed gymnastic tumbling. The screen was mounted maybe 25cm from the floor, requiring viewers to either stand back or sit down. Most opted for distance and stayed to watched the slow motion time-staggered translucent layered playbacks, as a young woman sprang, tumbled, landed, leaned too far, caught herself, corrected, and then a second later caught and corrected again. It reminded me of the time lapse of flowers blooming - an event brought to a visual speed that matches the attention span of the human eye. But in this case, the event was slowed to demonstrated the beauty inherent in physical quickness. Jerez's shorter video was screened at the most awkward angle ever and in contrast to Bishop's piece that drew the viewer into a slow motion spell, this work almost pushed one away with physical force. Parallel to the floor, the flat screen was mounted at just 20 cm over the average viewers head, requiring neck cramps for longer viewing. Fortunately, the work itself, a 4,30 loop of what appeared to be a Robocop-esque trailer obscured by a video filter of dripping water that "pooled" on the horizontal surface didn't demand more than one viewing. Finally, Dunbar's post-post-modern love/lust poem, written in text-speak, could be addressed to the technology it accompanies and references, rather than a fleshly operator.



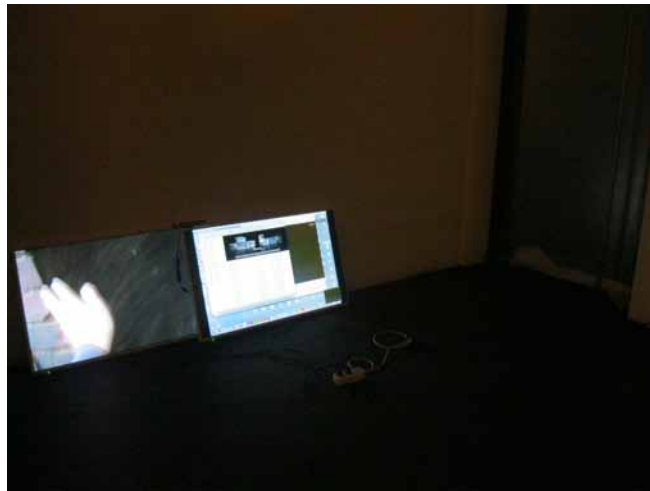
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28 February [<http://www.center-berlin.com/fight11.html>] : Stephan Backes, Rodell Warner, Tom Trevatt. Again entering through the front door (this is of course important at some point), there appeared to be an

artfully arranged pile of flat screens in the center of the room. Juxtaposed to the previous week's precise installation this reinforced the power of installation in determining not only viewer interaction (where to stand/sit, how to look), but also the overall vibe of the space. This week, more student-experiment rather than innovative-gallerist. Warner's short loop of mirrored fractals reminded me of a flicker film, not only for the lighting effect on the space, but also for the visual difficulty of focusing on the screen. A study in the power of the screen even without recognizable imagery tellingly titled *Love is Eyes*. Backes' *SOS* also proved difficult to view, but rather due to an overload of auditory information that obscured one's ability to truly marry sound to picture. *SOS* in this case stood for "Super Optical..." - something or other, but the digitized voice had already moved onto the next sound byte. Sometimes the phrases sounded like post-apocalyptic product packaging read aloud: "a simple touch...skin digestability and touch compatibility," other moments as if the never-embodied voice was reading the warning signs from airport walls: "customer don't leave your luggage unattended." The accompanying text by Trevatt ponders the limits of humanity, via limits of bodily temperature tolerance and the pressure exerted by changing environmental conditions. Will stress exerted on the system induce increases in tolerance levels or coping mechanisms? Back to Warner's fractal loop to find out...



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14 March [<http://www.center-berlin.com/fight13.html>] : Jaś Domicz, Max Ruf, Astrid Korporaal, Guido Santandrea. I thought that I missed it. The front door was locked. But no, just as the constant repositioning of the screens refuses too much interior familiarity, Center gallery also caught my entrance conditioning, pre-checking my powers of observation. The side door opens directly into the hall-space, so left to the bar, right to the art. This week the screens were casually leaning against each other, like old friends watching the power cord snake across the floor. Domicz's *Joyride* was on the left, a 32+ minute tactile adventure through Berlin: the protagonist following the surface of buildings, cars, dumpsters, railings, literally whatever he can get his hands on. An interesting collision of the visual with the tactile, after a few minutes I was much more conscious of the existence of my fingertips, recalling the sensation of concrete vs. stone. To the right, Ruf was engaged in another type of memory, but live rather than recorded. *There is a place in the pacific, that has hundreds of miles of shining water* appeared to be the artist displaying the visual contents of his hard drive from a remote location, Skype views of images and videos on another machine, somewhere else, came and went. At times it was possible to make a logical leap from one to the next, through the west-coast vacation shots for example, but at many moments, the movement of the mouse, the opening and closing of windows overpowered the contents thereof. At the time I had no idea that this was a performative piece. Center generally gives information only through the website or gallery/bar attendant, no labels. And I, of course, had not thought to ask. In retrospect, I would have liked to know - especially to ask if there was any type of feedback loop involved, and where the artist was located. The text by Korporaal and Santandrea, seemingly a paragraph by each, is both a poetic meditation on the inadequacies of mapping and a challenge to the Berlin art world - the second written as if the author had neither heeded nor perhaps even read the first section. The last exhortation however, I found most applicable to FIGHT: for one (short) night, come out from (and perhaps turn vision to) the tyranny of the plebes. I think that Jerry Saltz would agree.

Posted 5 days ago by [glovely](#)

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