Georgia Scherman Projects Presents

Set Re-Set: Jennifer Marman + Daniel Borins

With essay by Earl Miller
And introduction by Ben Portis

Set Re-set by Ben Portis

The oft-used (but lately less so) artistic signifier, *avant-garde*, is a figure of speech. Of course, one replies, the term was transposed from an earlier strategic military coinage. Yet even within that original frame of reference it remains a figure of speech. Briefly consider the implications. In the cultural context, *avant* is assumed to connote temporal primacy. However perhaps it is better understood as positional – operating beyond established frontiers of order, confronting, subduing and harnessing chaotic forces, that is to say, the natural state of the unknown universe. Thus *garde* indicates the purpose of this operation, to protect and condition the familiar interior. The wild and domestic exist interdependently.

In his seminal 1939 essay, *Avant-Garde and Kitsch*, while Clement Greenberg drew clear distinctions between the two concepts, the title was not "Avant-Garde *or* Kitsch" or "Avant-Garde *versus* Kitsch." "Where there is an avant-garde, we generally find a rearguard" he wrote. He went on, "[t]he precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions, and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system and discards the rest." Greenberg was unconcerned that the hallmarks or recognition of avant-garde and kitsch should indicate taste or lack thereof on the part of society or the individual, which up to that point had been a central issue for aesthetics and art criticism. Discernment between avant-garde and kitsch was an intellectual and moreover disinterested matter.

As the avant-garde ranges, repositions and insulates the centre, kitsch reconfigures and evolves correspondingly. Over time, the onetime vanguard might even be reclassified as commonplace, even hackneyed. The avant-garde can be crude and brutal; kitsch sophisticated and refined.

This all becomes germane with respect to the art of Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins. Their triumphant 2009 exhibition, *Project for a New American Century*, assumed the literally concrete form of an idealist time machine, conjecturing a prototype detention-and-interrogation cell for ideological enemies, putatively devised by anarchist forces (in opposition to any ideology) during the Spanish Civil War. Within a hermetic chamber, the sanity of the prisoner would be unhinged gradually by a surreal setting of abstract and otherwise purposeless Cubo-Futurist block forms. Marman and Borins's propositional creation retrospectively retraces time such that subsequent artistic developments, rather than appearing as the avant-garde signposts toward a progressive future, were instead breadcrumbs lining a bizarre path into the woods of repressed history and kitsch. The materialized instruments of the hypothetical anarchist penitentiary in fact were pursued far more insidiously by Central Intelligence Agency experiments with LSD as a brainwash in its notorious MK-ULTRA project of the 1950s.

Recurrent formal and procedural parallels between free-agent avant-garde artists and black-agent operatives of and against dominant political systems are noted, from the global dissemination of American abstract expressionism in the ’50s (discussed forthwith by essayist Earl Miller) through to the alarming coincidences between minimal or conceptual art and methods adopted by United States and NATO in late stages of the Cold War. Recent clandestine missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and many other reported or unreported locales in ways seem prefigured by the grotesque installation art of Paul McCarthy. The symbioses of avant-garde and kitsch, enemy territory and homeland, civilization and belief, now churn in an indistinct torus. The lines of propagation and critique are likewise blurred. Home Depot and the Metropolitan Opera, each is a simultaneous site of set *and* re-set.

Ben Portis, May 5, 2010

Revolution/Irresolution by Earl Miller

> "The revolutionary role of modern art that culminated in Dadaism was the destruction of all conventions in art, language, or actions... [However], the critique of weapons had not followed at the time certain advances in the weaponry of critique..." (Debord 151).

> "To win the day, we have to pull our caps over our eyes, plug our ears..." (Borduas 40).

There remains a lingering fascination with Dadaist, Automatist and other manifesto-defined movements that sought, by elimination and by refusal, a revolutionized everyday. Of course, in retrospect, such faith in Modern art to provide utopian liberation for the artist and others, notably the proletariat, which Paul-Émile Borduas spoke passionately of freeing, is remarkable. What is equally remarkable is just how entwined early and mid-twentieth century Modernism became in capitalism and militarism.

Consider two examples where Modern art found itself linked to the machinery of violence - a link central to Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins' exhibition. First, take the streamlined sculptures of Constantin Brancusi, notably *Bird in Space* (1923), which captured by abstraction the freedom of a bird soaring into the sky. The sculpture's streamlining came not as much from artistic precedent as it did from automobile and warplane design. In turn, Brancusi's streamlined design had a profound effect on industrial design including weaponry. Robin Peck, a critic, curator and sculptor who has written extensively on Brancusi, discovered that "The contemporary firearms community is not unaware of its Modernist aesthetics; a writer for one firearms journal coined the neologism 'Brancusoid' to describe the ovoidal detailing on certain shotguns" (89). Second, recall that Jackson Pollock's all-over abstraction, a "void" free of any represented social realm became accepted as a central symbol of an independent American art at the time the United States entered the atomic age - his art, therefore, representing that new apocalyptic era:

> "The same public that was reading about the importance of art and modern art in magazines like Fortune, the same people who were being told of the new art's attempts to represent the unrepresentable and accept the unthinkable in their everyday lives, were also prepared to accept Pollock's "dripping" without undue astonishment, perhaps since Pollock's work at this time (late 1946) was rather close to depictions of fragmentation and disintegration" (Guilbaut 96).

The shotgun and the atomic bomb both seem odd partners for the supposedly spiritual field of canonical high Modernism. Likewise, Marman and Borins make an absurd pairing of Modernism and violence, such as a waterboarding table and a Frank Lloyd Wright house. By separating Modernism from dystopias that have paralleled its evolution, Marman and Borins provide a summation of modernity's failure to better the world. While at first aggressively confrontational, at closer analysis, their work raises a complexly nuanced debate regarding the root causes and perpetuating effects of the house training of Modernism's utopian revolt. Marman and Borins conclude that while Modernism may not be a vehicle for revolution, if irresolutely juxtaposed with the darker side of the social, it can build an effective forum for political critique.

This exhibition centres on lost ideals: how the radical manifestos of Modernism became domesticated - consumed, collected and tastefully arranged. Bearing a utopian-like hermeticism, modern homes with modern art shielded residents from the violent oppression of the same Western society that spawned and later ideologically exploited their contemporary lifestyle. To accentuate this loss, Marman and Borins install the "ideal" exhibition for a commercial gallery space consisting of a series of perfectly aligned sightlines, a balance of painting with sculpture, a strong centerpiece, and enough small pieces to ensure sales.

Entering the first gallery from the street is like walking into a theatre set through the back entrance. One is not met with art but with the disappointingly image-free backside of a temporary wall of unpainted, wooden theatre flats located in front and to the right of the gallery door. Confronting the viewer immediately, the backdrops take precedence over the eight pseudo-modernist paintings painted in eclectic styles hanging on their verso and their related sculptural elements in front of them together forming a collection or an encompassing solo show. An aggressive architectural intervention, this installation interferes with the physical structure of the commercial gallery space and in turn the conventions of exhibition display.

While circumventing this immediate obstruction is easy enough, one realizes that one is blocked from the outside, cut off from the reality of the wider social context by the gallery system whose façade structure here indicates a certain inauthenticity. Consequently, the visual aspects of exhibition design become integrated with the art. One next sees *Rock Sculpture*, a sculpture of five rocks covered in five bright colours of Astroturf on the left of the gallery, with two adjacent paintings, each titled *Rock Painting* which, in echoing the sculpture's rock configuration, appear almost as if they were exhibition posters. What first comes to mind when viewing the sculpture is Brancusi's *Fish* (1930), the stone form which loosely resembles a fish on a plaster base, or Henry Moore's figurative sculpture, or perhaps even Anish Kapoor's pigment-heavy sculpture. Simultaneously, it resembles the faux-rocks used to hide outdoor speakers on backyard patios. High culture meets low culture directly and hilariously.

The pairing of sculpture and painting is significant because it introduces the central theme and visual motif of the double. Doubling but not replicated similar images creates a Surrealist uncanniness by representing a slightly altered if not psychedelic reality. Additionally, the matching of similar yet separate forms can be seen as symptomatic of the art being made by two artists who collaborate. Their mirroring of sculpture in painting produces a harmonious balance of image and form. Marman and Borins exaggerate this balance by repetition to debunk the goal of a perfectly designed space as a hermetic cover up for an architecture of socio-political detachment.

The next works one encounters are the sculptural doubles to the eight paintings, mounted on a configuration of eight display footings - sculpture platforms - on the gallery floor, which resemble a museum exhibition layout, or, for that matter, a high end retail display. In one set, *Green Rocks Painting* and *Green Rocks Sculpture*, 15 green Astroturf rocks

appear both in two and three dimensional manifestations in what is a double-doubling of the larger *Rock Sculpture* and its painted reflections.

The paintings, within themselves, present a series of oppositions: representation versus abstraction; serious Modernism versus kitsch; and elite public collections versus mass-produced Modernism for consumers. Marman and Borins reconfigure a range of Modernist motifs, referencing high Modernists such as Moore, Brancusi, Kline or Mondrian, to produce pieces that could date anywhere from the fifties and sixties to the Ikea style paintings that grace today's domestic interiors. Either way they manifest Greenberg's nightmare of populist abstraction.

A small room on the left past the first gallery contains a painting and a painted sculpture, both with black, blue and white vertical stripes. The sculptural piece, *Folded Sculpture 2*, droops, falling to a raised platform covering the whole room's floor like a flaccid Barnett Newman painting. The Modern spills out onto what turns out to be a flimsy, temporary support - undoubtedly a clue something has gone wrong, especially if one remembers that in *Wha Happened*, a 2008 exhibition at Gallery TPW, Marman and Borins installed a similarly flopping painting at the gallery entrance.

Despite this common ground, another of Marman and Borins' exhibitions, *Project for a New American Century*, relates even more closely to *Set Re-set*. In that 2009 exhibition, which was held at the Art Gallery of York University, a gallery that is set amidst that university's sixties-Modern near-Brutalist campus, Marman and Borins played with that prison-like environment, constructing their own version of a cell analogous to the one allegedly used by Spanish anarchists to torture prisoners with Modern art. In this current exhibition, Marman and Borins move from placing institutional Modernism against political violence to placing it against the consumer Modernism of the commercial art gallery and of the bourgeois home.

By the late 1940s in the United States and elsewhere, Modernism had become a status symbol of the bourgeois elite, a way of showing, as Serge Guilbaut says, that a collector belongs to a "higher rung of the social hierarchy" (185). Accordingly, as a commodity for the forward-thinking wealthy, abstract art had absorbed enough "elements from capitalist society and its purposive rationality that it became indistinguishable" (Lütticken 40).

Mid-century Modern art, design and architecture - a crucial historic reference in this exhibition - marked the apex of such commodification by its provision of a sheltered faux-utopia for those who could afford it. In *Set Re-set*, one may imagine being in a Modernist Neutra home, perhaps similar to the one owned by the decidedly counter-revolutionary Ayn Rand, and likely with a magnificent swimming pool and a formidable collection of abstract paintings. Or, one may think of the meticulously kept automated Modernist castle of Jacques Tati's *Mon oncle*, a streamlined wedding cake of white walls and gleaming chrome, with nothing, not even a blade of grass, out of place. Turning to contemporary art, one could reference Rodney Graham's, *The Gifted Amateur Nov. 10th, 1962* (2007), in which the artist took on the persona of an amateur artist, photographing himself as that character in a Modernist "lifestyle" home of the sort built in the greater

Vancouver area in the sixties by Arthur Erickson and his contemporaries. While Marman and Borins, unlike Graham, are not taking on a persona and by no means offering the stylistic cohesion of a conventional artist's oeuvre, they are producing art that revisits bourgeois Modernism. They critique how Western capitalism took on Modernism as a bourgeois myth of liberal progress and freedom. However, in both its domestic and institutional context, it remained isolated from the oppression and war employed to enforce this mythology, be it the Cold War or the War on Terror.

Consequently, certain works incorporate icons and objects of the war on terror and extremist violence into Modernist form - bringing them to the home front. Bottles, for instance, first reading innocently, displays a chorus-line of Scandinavian modern glass bottles. But a Molotov cocktail rag sticks out of one of these bottles. This designer weapon seems more likely to be paired with a flambé dish than thrown by a street revolutionary. So begins Marman and Borins' juxtaposition of apparently incompatible terrorist-connected violence and Modern design.

Marman and Borins' unexpected pairings illustrate how ideology can shift within the same or similar physical forms. *Gloves, Glasses Headphones* centres on two comparable sets: found rubber gloves, safety goggles and ear plugs and a painting of driving gloves, Ray Ban sunglasses and headphones. The former arrangement would not be out of place in a Home Depot shopping cart. However it replicates the sensory deprivation kit used on Guantanamo detainees which, according to a Cold War era study by Donald O. Hebb at McGill University, leads a prisoner to a state of psychosis if worn for two days. The latter set, in the painting, is a bourgeois version of the Guantanamo prisoner's gear that was based on this study; instead of psychosis it is intended to induce pleasure via escapism and aesthetics - an effect not too far off from Modernist introspection. Marman and Borins pair paintings and sculptures that are compatible in form to again emphasize opposing poles of content: middle-class aesthetics and the violent extremes of late capitalist society. While Modernism called for us to "pull our caps over our eyes" and "plug our ears," the preservation of the niceties of Western society similarly requires a kind of sensory deprivation to dull the horrors of the war that support it. Like the Guantanamo prison, which is free of international law and its "unlawful combatants" often held in solitary confinement, Modernist space idealizes social detachment.

By drawing this comparison the artists argue that since Modernism will not resolve the gap between extremely abstracted form and real extremism, it is complicit in and not a bystander to our violent world. Marman and Borins' "critique of weapons" addresses how the mechanisms of weaponry and war can co-opt formalism as opposed to falsely claiming, manifesto-style, that formalism can overcome them. Furthering this critique, Marman and Borins base a monochromatic black painting titled *Redacted Painting* on a censored document, the horizontal abstract bands patterned after blanked out lines of text, a reference strengthened by high piles of paper reproducing the painting's abstract image. The redaction is the edited-for-public documents on torture whose obscuration is comparable to formalism's painting over of content to emphasize its preference for form. The pieces succeed resoundingly in their introduction of the exhibition's central theme that by preventing a liberation of the political by such willful blindness, Modernism is,

therefore, best exhibited discretely, yet closely situated to politics, to draw attention to its very failure to liberate politically.

If the 'set' of the exhibition title, or the conceptual set-up, is in the first gallery, *Falling Water* (a reference to Frank Lloyd Wright's iconic 1934 house, *Fallingwater*) is the exhibition's shocking punch line in the second, centring as it does on a waterboarding table resembling a Modernist desk. The desk piece faces away from the gallery entrance and, like the paintings in the first room, is backed by a theatrical flat. The desk includes a rectangular platform filled with water as a visual reference to the platforms in the other room. Its overall design merges various iconic furniture designs by Gerrit Rietveld. Behind this are three hard-edged abstract panels, which while suggesting Rietveld's solid-colour rectangle designs, actually appropriates De Stijl compositions, as well as a colour scheme Marman and Borins implemented in *Project for a New American Century*.

Falling Water rides on an absurd, irresolvable schism between domestic bliss and excruciating torture highlighted by a watering can that is obviously not intended for houseplants. The piece takes the isolated world of mid-century domestic Modernism, placing the dystopic violence of the public realm so close to it - right at its doorstep - that its disingenuous isolation from the reality of war reads in retrospect to be as shocking as the violence Marman and Borins threaten it with. Countering another kind of isolation, the artists connect the piece to the rest of the exhibition, and by proxy, to the exhibition space. A painting mimicking *Falling Water's* colour/form configuration faces the sculpture, and a smaller painting that is a variation hangs adjacent to it - a reversal of the panel painting. Finally, a black-and-white relief sculpture of the waterboarding table minus the panel painting hangs behind the wall flats of *Falling Water*.

Falling Water is as hilarious as it is disturbing, carrying a comedic tone established at the exhibition entry by *Bottles* and other paintings. *Falling Water* conveys humour on several levels, beginning with the title, with its implicit wordplay between falling water and waterboarding. The title and the piece conceptually recall Freud's seminal 1928 essay, "Humour," in which Freud views a joke as a comfortable release for expressing discomforting unconscious thoughts. In *Falling Water* discomforting violence rears its head amidst comfortable surroundings. Furthermore, the piece reflects a definition of humour by a practicing comedian, Steve Martin. Martin observes, "Chaos in the midst of chaos isn't funny, but chaos in the midst of order is." In addition to their anarchic infusion of chaos, Marman and Borins and apply - remarkably - a fourth level of humour: the standard fish out of water sitcom plot (i.e., *The Addams Family*) by placing a torture table in a domestic setting.

Marman and Borins' pairing of the oddly unrelated is as Surrealist as it is humorous since it echoes Surrealist writer Comte de Lautréamont's ideal of "a chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella" for raising the irrational amidst the structured consciousness of the everyday. In doing so, Marman and Borins assert that the Surrealist and later Automatist/Ab-Ex notion of truthfully pouring out the unconscious is not only, as most now realize, impossible; it is, moreover, potentially dangerous. Gary

Kibbins rightly contends in a provocative discussion on irrationalism in art that some unconscious acts cannot be realized and others simply should not:

> "What is that shudder one feels when hearing that the ultimate Surrealist act is to shoot indiscriminately into a crowd? It means, among other things, that we know that the Surrealists won't - because they cannot - simply embrace the unconscious and the irrational" (230).

He continues:

> "Repression is absolutely vital. We would not survive the complete 'liberation' of unconscious contents or irrational impulses. Such liberation ... could only be so in a world that can never come to pass. For the most part, liberate the nice or just naughty irrationalities and repress the really nasty ones" (231).

While waterboarding and sensory deprivation arise amidst the material world of Modernism in Marman and Borins' exhibition, the artists neither propose nor perform direct radical action. Ultimately, mixing extremism to the point of endangering safety and even life with contemporary art will "embrace" irrationality.

A case in point of how the irrationality of actualizing extremism can fail to produce radical art is a 2007 art work, or really incident, in which an Ontario College of Art and Design student, Thorarinn Jonsson, created a bomb scare at the Royal Ontario Museum as an art piece, planting a fake bomb with an attached note reading, "This is not a bomb," an obvious reference to the oft-reproduced Magritte painting, *The Treachery of Images* (1928–29). Perhaps Jonsson's piece can read in theory as a radical commentary on the failure of Modernism to act beyond representation; whatever the case, in practice, it fared deplorably: Jonsson neglected to check what events at the museum would coincide with his bomb hoax, resulting in the shutting down of an AIDS fundraiser. Marman and Borins remind that effectively politicizing art does not involve the unpredictable realm of the irrational; instead of emulating the strategies of cultural revolution, so to speak, they imbue their work with deconstructive not destructive political content.

Their political charge, conversely, draws attention to the lack of it in some current work that revises avant-garde form to be free of social address, an über-mannerism that artists of the likes of Banks Violette, to name only one, have undertaken. His spit-and-polish Modernism is a sealed but empty shell. While Marman and Borins also present a hermetic formal cohesiveness, which bears a comparable surface slickness, they use it as fodder for satire. They refer to this formalism as an overt "tyranny of cohesion," whose impenetrability becomes stressed even further when the powerful weapons of late capitalism are ominously pushing to get in but to no avail.

Formal abstraction as an autonomous temple or in Violette's art, template, when segregated from the public realm, comes with a set of problems as acute as those surrounding the public surfacing of destructive actions. The question remains, Kibbins points out: "If irrational impulses are acted on, but only 'in representation,' then what is being liberated?" (231). Such is the damned if you do, damned if you don't quandary of Modernism that dates to Surrealism yet is still valid: the everyday, which needs the progressiveness art is supposed to represent, remains separate from art's representations of radicalism. By referencing Surrealist irrationality and by implication how it is

unrealizable, Marman and Borins highlight the impossibility of a fusing of form and politics – but without removing either the former or latter from the exhibition frame.

This impossibility of merger was problematic to the Surrealists' seeking to bring art and poetry into everyday experience. What was worse was that the notion of art of any movement amiably merging with everyday life became increasingly unrealizable from the forties on, with Marxism manifesting itself as a totalitarian regime and the ensuing Cold War. The idea of bettering the social seemed as dream-like as a Surrealist painting. Serge Guilbaut recounts how,

> "For the intellectual left that had participated with high hopes in the discussions of the thirties, the explosion of the bomb and the postwar climate destroyed whatever hopes they may have placed in science and democracy. By the same token they rejected Marxism, which for many of them had offered the only way out of the crisis" (108).

With diminished hope of bettering the real, Surrealism and subsequent movements - Automatism, Ab-Ex and later, post-painterly abstraction - rather than externalizing, could conveniently remain internalized in the artist's hermetic unconscious. As Robert Motherwell commented in 1944, "Now artists especially value personal liberty because they do not find positive liberties in the concrete character of the modern state" (81).

Borduas' 1948 call to cover eyes and ears epitomized that zeitgeist of inwardness. At the same time though, he held an arguably contradictory belief that self-expression could result in social progress. In *Refus Global*, the Automatist manifesto, he called for a split from the church, and amusingly, a damning of the "French-Canadian toque" (28), a cap, which despite Modernist refusal, remains popular not only in Quebec but across Canada. Here Borduas' performative that Modernist painting would rally against provincialism demonstrates how formalism can, as Frederic Jameson observes, take on new "ideological messages [that are] distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the work" (76). While aware that the autonomy of abstraction could take on outside ideological meaning, Borduas and the Automatists failed to acknowledge that the nature of such meaning was vulnerable to the pressures of time, place and vested interests.

Marman and Borins underscore just how ripe modern art and design are for manipulation by "distinct ideological messages." Ab-Ex's forward-looking imagery and self-expression were perfect icons for Quebec intellectuals' push to free the province from the conservative conformity of the Roman Catholic Church, but they were also almost tailor-made for representing American-pie individualism and progress, a combination the American government could and did easily exploit hegemonically throughout post-World War II Europe. The domestic space of suburban American homes, likewise, became ready-made propaganda during the Cold War. Two instances illustrate the United States' export of domestic architecture: in late forties, post-war Germany, the Office of the Military Government held exhibitions of prefabricated homes, advanced household technology and suburban planning; a decade later, a modern kitchen was exhibited as part of the 1959 American National Museum in Moscow and was even credited as a significant step in pulling away the iron curtain.

The next decade, the core emptiness formalist painting arrived at through Reinhardt and others meant radicalism had to posit itself outside of discrete form. Still, the Modernist references and iconography lingered, for only one example. In work including Daniel Buren's idealistic analysis of his incorporation of Modernism into the real was indicative of the revolutionary zeal tied to abstraction: "Perhaps the only thing that one can do after having seen a canvas like ours is total revolution" (388). While he made this statement shortly before the 1968 Paris riots, Buren's predicted revolutionary response to placing formal, serial designs in the everyday failed to transpire. Nevertheless, it did effectively reflect the radical zeitgeist of a tumultuous decade while its failure to realize itself marked the beginning of the stirrings of the very long post-modern hangover of the 20th Century *fin de siècle*.

Now well into the new century, Marman and Borins' revisionism of the art of the 20th century still remains relevant. Why? Clearly, the mechanisms of Modernism persist visually alongside references to its iconoclastic past. It is also important to consider the current revival of art that references the Modernist avant-garde not only in New York but also in Europe by artists such as Tobias Rehberger, work which often relates, as does Marman and Borins' in this and other exhibitions, to interior design. Liam Gillick, a long-established but contemporaneously relevant artist, is equally crucial to take into account because of his introduction of late Modernist aesthetics to a public context through his "functional utopias." Gillick notes that his goal is to produce functional utopias as site-specific panaceas "to the dominant ideologies that control and alienate our relationships and circumstances" (154). Gillick's approach to utopianism relates to Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopias: utopic spaces existing amidst the real. Certainly though, finding or constructing small functional Others within the late Capitalist quotidian does seem - well - a downer following the revolutionary drive of 20th century Modernism. As Marcus Verhagen observes, "Gillick's attitude to utopianism is so guarded that there is no telling it apart from a busy, garrulous resignation" (57). An even more direct retreat from idealism is a glut of current art expressing an unrealizable longing for a "truly alternative" culture of resistance that has now passed. Exemplary is Jeremy Deller's reenactment of the Thatcher era, violent 1984-85 coal miners' strike*: Battle of Orgreave* (2001). Further, Hadley and Maxwell appropriated a clip from a 1978 Sex Pistol's concert when Johnny Rotten taunts the audience by saying, "Ever get the feeling that you've been cheated?" In other words, the anarchic punk rebellion was fun at first yet quickly failed. We are still in the gloomy aftermath.

Such art represents what can be considered the "re-set" part of the exhibition title, of how, as Marman and Borins say, "the manifesto writing movements have settled in our collective minds" despite the failure of their ideals to come to fruition. It is this contemporary paradox, this need to look back but to forget the past's shortcomings that Marman and Borins wittily call the "amnesia of the present." They indicate that the ideals of the artistic manifesto are too often re-enacted with weak hope or bitter nostalgia, re-setting what did not work in the first place.

Such revisionism differs greatly from the deconstructive approach Marman and Borins take to revisionism. They address the question of what to do after Modernism rather than

performing patchwork repairs with tiny utopias or reading perpetual eulogies for it. Marman and Borins assertively and mischievously take apart Modernism to illustrate how in early 21st century art, ideals of 20th century Modernist revolution re-set themselves repeatedly. Play, reset. Play, reset. Ad Infinitum. Marman and Borins succeed in their goal of “making an exhibition mirror the way things are rather than the way they should be.” In other words, they tell it like it is. To call their work refreshing is as much an understatement as modernist manifestos are, in retrospect, hyperbole.

However, this stalemate may paradoxically be a hopeful springboard. The political acts Modernist manifestos called for may have failed, given the irrationality of putting them into effect through art. This failure of Modernism’s “critique of weapons” should, nevertheless, not culminate in ongoing, empty parrotings of formal avant-gardisms. Daniel Borins and Jennifer Marman argue clearly and cogently that the dissonance of reality is a provocative, political alternative to them.

Earl Miller

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