

Baronian_Francey

2 rue Isidore Verheyden 1050 Bruxelles Belgique T+32 2 512 92 95 F+32 2 512 7108

baronianfrancey@skynet.be www.baronianfrancey.com

Sophie Whettnall's new works at le blanc and Baronian-Francey Gallery

*There are more things in heaven and hearth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
Hamlet, I, v, 166-167*

Üpland and **Echo** are the titles of the two shows that Sophie Whettnall is presenting simultaneously at *le blanc* (le beau local d'art contemporain) and at the Baronian–Francey Gallery in Brussels

Even though their difference, both shows are conceived as representations of other possible worlds, both dealing with the consciousness of escaping the clichés that constitute our imaginary of day-to-day life.

The installation “*Üpland*”, that occupies the space of *le blanc*, presents us a sort of magic realm, in which the confrontation between the world of nature and the world of work acquires a floating magic of rhythms and light. The installation recreates a fantastic landscape of rocks and waterfalls, reminiscent of Nordic atmosphere: Üpland. Wave-like soft rocks are spread around in the space serving as unexpected resting places for visitors, who are thereby given the possibility to submerge themselves in the daydream vision of waterfalls – as a fanciful chill-out made by an imaginary nature. This is in fact the construction of a fictive nature obtained with low-tech means and almost “do-it-yourself” devices. The use of a backlight system and the movement of the waterfalls, reminds us of the kitsch landscape décor of a Chinese restaurant. They convey here instead, thanks to the unusual big scale of the installation, a magic atmosphere, a make believe, toy-like all-embracing paradise. As the artist says: “a playground for grown ups”.

In front of it, three videos run simultaneously showing workers walking on a scaffolding, distributing ice blocs and collecting garbage. Here “work” is represented almost as a choreography: again, as in the representation of nature, the sense of reality fades into a daydream-like atmosphere.

The same aim of representing complex reality, an opposite, though complementary, character characterizes the show at the Baronian-Francey Gallery. Here the search of the artist follows a different path: not into a magical world, but into a world of personal intensity and ethical decisions. The whole show is conceived by the artist as a variation on the same theme: violence. All the works exposed, the video "Random Fight", the 16mm film "Shadow Boxing" and the slow-motion video "Desk Peace", confront us with different interpretations on violence, approaching the theme from different point of views/attitudes. In "Random Fight", the image of the artist fighting against herself conveys a universal feeling: the psychological conflict every individual has within himself. The pursuit of ethical coherence is expressed by the refuse of violence in "Shadow Boxing", the first film shot by the artist. Here a woman, the artist herself, suffers a strong psychological struggle: she is continuously attacked but refuses to strike back. Her attitude though is not a passive one but implies all the internal strength that such a refusal requires. The decision to show only some scenes of the film in loop in several monitors spread around the gallery reinforces the psychological intensity of the work. In "Desk Peace" instead, the same woman is on the point to hit back, but whether she will or not remains an unknown to us. We don't see it we can only imagine what we would do in her place...

All the works exhibited at *le blanc* and at the Baronian-Francey Gallery are concerned with reality and the position of the self in it. Even though they create opposite atmospheres - daydream-like at *le blanc*, personal intensity at the Baronian-Francey Gallery - they are nonetheless complementary. The works point to a complexity that does not end in the works themselves but echoes respectively in each other. There is the same desire, almost a nostalgia for harmony and coherence in both shows. They acquire significance in their never-ending play of resonance, reminiscent of other possibilities for us to be in this world.

Anna Cestelli Guidi

Üpland

le blanc - 8.09 > 30.10.2004

Wednesday – Saturday > 11am - 18pm

Echo

Baronian-Francey Gallery – 8.09 > 2.10.2004

Tuesday-Saturday > 12am - 18pm