

whitehot | September 2008, BAD MOON RISING Special curated by Jan Van Woensel

BAD MOON RISING Special
Curated by Jan Van Woensel

Artists:

Vanessa Albury / Diana Artus / Richard Ashcroft / Elena Bajo / Kelie Bowman / Gregory Bradford / Olaf Breuning / Bettina Cohnen / Body Count / Emily Coxe / James De La Vega / Liam Everett / Lonnie Frisbee & David di Sabatino / Tony Garifalakis / Charlie Halsey / George Hennard / Annegret Hoch / Pamela Jue / Paulus Kapteyn / Richard Kern / David Matorin / Clayton Patterson / Job Piston / Luther Price / Lee Ranaldo / Max Razdow / Yoji Sakate / Jan Serych / Marie Snauwaert / Philippe Vandenberg

Music:

Glass Ghost <http://www.myspace.com/glass1ghost>

Friday September 12, 2008
ISCP: 1040 Metropolitan Ave
Brooklyn, NY 11211
<http://www.iscp-nyc.org>

Review by Matthew Ladd

On September 13th, the vigorous and ecumenical talents of independent curator Jan Van Woensel brought BAD MOON RISING Special to Brooklyn's ISCP (International Studio and Curatorial Program), a one-night exhibition of works that ran the gauntlet from painting to collage to installation, video, and graffiti. The ISCP's narrow warren of gallery spaces—carved out of a former warehouse—proved a decisive advantage for such an eclectic show; each room seemed a gallery complete in itself, and those who were intent on, say, Philippe Vandenberg's small cluster of quietly disruptive paintings (think Francis Bacon in miniature) didn't seem bothered by the live music down the hallway.

Incidentally, the musicians included Lee Ranaldo (who generally plays as loud as he wants). So it's worth mentioning that BAD MOON RISING is the name of Sonic Youth's second studio album. Of course, it's also the name of that Creedence Clearwater Revival song in which John Fogerty warns us that the entire country is about to go to hell. All of this may or may not matter. Suffice it to say that a song about anxiety—that creepy feeling that whatever's about to happen, it won't be pretty—is as fitting as any for a show whose works included, among others, a line of gleaming rifle cartridges and a painting of a man getting strangled by a giant rabbit.

The graffiti performance, which took place outside, offered a surprisingly serene approach to the works in the ISCP gallery proper. Charlie Halsey, the artist, spent roughly an hour spraying a bright geometrical design onto a large slab of plywood, and swaddled it in a cartoonish white cloud, eventually stepped back and walked away. A few minutes later, artist Elena Bajo approached and within ten minutes had erased half of the piece with a roller soaked in gray paint. It was painful to watch. But the strokes with the roller seemed methodical, almost thoughtful, as if erasing the piece were just as important as creating it.

Inside, the intensity grew. Tony Garifalakis's stark, glittering lineup of rifle cartridges, each etched with a single letter, gradually spelled out the famous statement "THAT WHICH DOES NOT KILL ME MAKES ME STRONGER," transforming cliché into an effective (and effectively troubling) fusion of irony and sincerity. In this context (as in Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, where it originally appeared) it was a sentence whose tone one simply could not pin down.

Van Woensel exhibited one of the most powerful pieces right on top of two of Garifalakis's poster works: a small Gregory Crewdson-esque photograph by the Swiss photographer Olaf Breuning, which captured a delightfully surreal *mise-en-scene* of sweaty rednecks, black-denim-clad hipsters, dancers in waist-high pantyhose and face paint, an obese man in a green sweater (his head swallowed by an oversized rubber alien mask), and a few ragged children who looked like they'd just wandered off the set of *The Grapes of Wrath*, everyone slouching on cinder blocks or leaning up against corrugated aluminum walls like a post-apocalyptic circus troupe waiting for the bus. The photograph was set in a background of painted black paper, isolating it, as it seemed to demand.

No less surreal was Luther Price's silent video projection, a montage of black-and-white footage that, one can only guess, was culled from the dustbins of a 1950's B-movie soft-core studio. The projection chiefly featured a wasted Bettie Page look-alike, possibly transsexual, in various states of undress, lounging on a floral bedspread, turning to the camera with an expression of bland shock, as if rehearsing a particularly titillating—or violent—scene. Price's video tended to veer toward the sort of faux-vintage footage that always seems to be playing behind the band at punk shows: white-faced actors scurrying like insects around the set, the camera's foggy fish-eye. But it maintained an edge.

The exhibition was not all edge, of course. A subtler investigation of anxiety came in the form of Marie Snauwaert's glossy photographs of women posing in wedding dresses. 'Posing' may not be quite the right word: Snauwaert's brides were remarkably plain looking, the glare of the camera catching every wrinkle and vein. A few of the women frowned or scowled; others appeared merely uncertain. Most were middle-aged. Snauwaert's take on the marriage institution may not have been overtly subversive—it didn't seem to argue that getting married is any worse than not—but it was honest and sophisticated.

More risky was Lee Ranaldo's installation "Paperbox," which occupied most of the vestibule at the gallery entrance. I'm inclined to think that the piece couldn't have worked as well on its own: the galleries of well-intentioned curators are stocked with pieces on 9/11, most of them either driven by angry political screeching or (decidedly worse) a desire to console or forgive. But "Paperbox," a series of floor-to-ceiling columns of painted text in which the artist recalled the weeks surrounding 9/11, tried for neither and therefore succeeded. For all the contrast of cramped black words on white walls, it was a quiet piece, and every time this reviewer walked through the vestibule, there was another cluster of people reading the whole thing from start to finish. It wasn't redemptive—who in his right mind expects good art to *redeem*? Its popularity at BAD MOON RISING, however, supported the notion that, as we live in an increasingly anxious age, we're frequently drawn to art that manages, regardless of its medium, to reflect that feeling in a form that we can recognize.

Curated by Jan Van Woensel, Bad Moon Rising is an ongoing project launched at Silverman Gallery, San Francisco in December 2007. The project Bad Moon Rising Special was a one night only event organized in the framework of ISCP's Picture Parlor series. Bad Moon Rising 3 will open in January 2009 at Boots Contemporary Art Space in St. Louis, MO.

<http://www.b-a-d-m-o-o-n-r-i-s-i-n-g.blogspot.com>

<http://www.icpabackstage.blogspot.com>

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