

BROOKLYN RAIL CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Spacificity

by *John Reed*

“What a Great Space You Have...” Luxe Gallery June 24 - July 29

One can be anywhere in the world, in Havana, in the American Southwest, and come up with the realization, the impossible realization, that “I’ve been here before.”

After many minutes of struggle—how could that be true? —The reality trickles to the surface. The space is familiar, but not because of a previous visit; it is familiar through a movie, a television show, an advertising campaign.

We travel far and wide, searching for sanctums. We dedicate ourselves to peaceful bedrooms, lively living rooms—all in pursuit of a satisfying individual life. But nowhere are we alone.

“What a Great Space You Have...” a show carefully curated by Marc Glöde, examines the end of individuated space, with works by six contemporary artists, as well as the artist team of Aziz & Cucher, and the artist collectives Discoteca Flaming Star and Dominique. Upon entry into the gallery, above the door, a video installation, “Great Space,” follows a series of hands opening a series of doorknobs, and passes through a series of doors. An audio voice accompanies, “What a great space you have.” The work, created by the artist collective/band Dominique, suggests a consciousness shaped by surveillance cameras—that we cannot enter a room, go to a place that is unseen. In compliment, a five-minute digital piece, by the artist team of Anthony Aziz & Sammy Cucher, extends a short hallway into a long one—a gray on gray corridor as suggestive

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of classical antiquity as corporate oblivion. More unsettling than the media interior, the source material used to collage together the ersatz space is comprised of photographic and video imagery of human skin. The interior has literally become exterior, and vice versa.

Two mixed-media installations by Nicole Cohen project contemporary Americans (of the relatively hip variety) onto advertisements from vintage interior design magazines. The subjects interact with mod furnishings—sit, wander, chat—the ghosts of their own consumerism. The ease with which the figures integrate with the ads is disquieting; the serenity of surrendering to style. A grouping of prints by Bettina Allamoda, “Memorabilia Pattern,” explores pop culture and high culture, and the intersection between. A Jackson Pollock is put into service as a room divider, while images of Clement Greenberg’s living room and Frank Sinatra’s music room exemplify spaces that are neither private nor public—rooms that are simultaneously elegant and crass: culture exemplified, and culture denied.

Installations by Albrecht Schaefer work to inhabit the possibilities of this new multi-space. In “Noguchi split” (#5 and 6), Schaefer unravels the staple Noguchi lampshade to reveal new potentials for design. Karen Kimmel, taking on the traditional Japanese form of Ikebana flower arrangement, brings the aesthetics of nature in harmony to mall America. With artificial flowers, set to delicate effect on stages of artificial wood, Kimmel perfects a still life of disquieting immortality. We look forward to a future not of biology, but of injected resins—and we find it beautiful.

Igor Mischiyev, in “Eileen Gray,” reproduces, on sofa fabric, an interior created by designer and architect Eileen Gray. By removing the sofa fabric from a design context, Mischiyev personalizes an impersonal architectural element; in the use of the Eileen Gray interior, he makes public an element that was meant to remain in a private home. Works by the collective Discoteca Flaming Star draw any visitor into a direct interface with the question of what space is common and what is reserved. A found rug, painted over, as if in dirt, declares in stenciled script: “And doubts and exaggeratioandamnesia.” A second rug makes two statements: “And the lost remnants / memory destroys.” The only way to read the statements is to stand directly on the carpet, disrupting a viewer’s assumption that the art must not be touched, and creating

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a wrinkle in the space of the gallery. To stand on the rug, is one still in the gallery? Or has one entered a space more specific to the artists who created it?

Anchoring “What A Great Space You Have,” is a reexamination of Ellen Harvey’s seminal “New York Beautification Project.” From 1999-2001, forty small oval Hudson River School-style landscape paintings took up residence alongside graffiti in public spaces throughout New York City. The works brought into question whether it was the graffiti, or the graffiti culture and aesthetic that the establishment found objectionable. Perhaps, the works seemed to suggest, public spaces were indeed the right place for artistic expression. By moving Harvey’s project back into the gallery, the discourse on public art extends itself to a more rarified venue, but one that nevertheless assumes that place and price validate creativity.

Marc Glöde’s thoughtful summer meditation on space runs counter to the typical summer showroom of most galleries. Arrive, meander, pay attention; you’re not where you think you are.