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Immaterial Matters

rosenclaire at Goodman Gallery

By Michael Smith
04 March - 24 March.

Galleries should know by now that no-one falls for words like 'mash-up' or 'remix' anymore. What was once an über-self-conscious ploy to harness the last vestiges of MacLuhanesque medium-y/message-y hipness is now totally transparent as flimsy conceptualising.

So when I saw that the gallery had described 'Immaterial Matters' by artistic duo rosenclaire (Rose Shakinovsky and Claire Gavronsky, SA expats residing somewhat fashionably in the ether between Florence, Johannesburg and Cape Town), as a 'remix' of work from various recent shows in SA and abroad, I expected the worst. I was presently surprised to find otherwise.

rosenclaire
Gesture, 2007. video, William Kentridge drawings, mini-vacuum cleaner, vial of charcoal dust Dimensions variable.



rosenclaire
Sign of The Times: Beware of falling stocks 2009, Chromadek, Dimensions variable
Image courtesy Goodman Gallery

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Claire Gavronsky
L'avanguardia non si arrende mai (The avantgarde never gives up) 2011, oil on canvas, 102 x 83cm
Image courtesy Goodman Gallery

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Like Johannes Phokela and, I guess, a host of global painters from John Currin to Kai Althoff who harness the uncanny power of the anachronistic, rosenclaire locate much of their output somewhere between temporal zones. But this is more than trendy bandwagonism: paintings that look like they emerged straight from a fevered Victorian imagination are somehow less threatening, and can thus be far more subtle in deconstructing the highly coded world of contemporary art than cans of shit or platinum skulls in guarded rooms.

The faux-hippie claims of their statement aside (it's all 'stock market mentality' this and 'rampant commodification' that), the work ends up walking its talk: in *Gesture* two charcoal drawings donated by William Kentridge for the purpose are vacuumed up with a toy-sized power-vac: a small vial of charcoal dust exhibited on a plinth between the pair of ruined works and the evidentiary video becomes a miniature raised middle finger to art's investment allure. A knowing retread of Rauschenberg's erased De Kooning's drawing all those years ago? Sure. A sharp and necessary comment on the unabated feeding frenzy that is the contemporary art market? Absolutely.

And the jibes just keep coming. In Gavronsky's *L'avanguardia non si arrende mai (The avant garde never gives up)* a young girl holding a skipping rope proudly sports a 'tache and goatee culled from Duchamp's *LHOQQ* – the system co-opts the revolutionary gesture. A series of ink daubs on vintage paper, also by Gavronsky, perfectly channels Hogarth-era cartoon satire, but takes art's capacity for pretension as its concern: a carny figure disappears into painterly gestures in one of these, *Struck by the magic of abstraction while undressing*.

The genius of rosenclaire (and this is by no means a new tactic: genre-hopping is as old as *Screamadelica*), is their resistance to a definitive style in an age when the artist's style is like the chain store's logo: an assurance of quality to the bearer of the poised credit card. This is undergrad-level art market theory, and you're probably expecting a quote by Naomi Klein any moment now. But in the hands of this pair it really works. So prolific is the duo's output, and so polished are the results, whether custom-made road signs (*Sign of the times: Beware of falling stocks*), tiny photographs visible only through magnifying glasses, bronze sculptures, or cut-out paintings, that just when you think you have a handle on them, they shift. Kind of like the secondary market, then.

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Venue

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