



WHICH WITCH IS WHICH? AND/OR SUMMERTIME ST. LOUIS

In “What is magic? And/or DST: There is a theory and cruel (10 translations),” his catalogue essay for *Which Witch is Which? and/or Summertime*, Ajay Kurian, the exhibition’s organizer and one of its featured artists, begins with philosopher Bruno Latour’s simple yet telling metaphor of the “black box” [White Flag Projects; November 6—December 18, 2010]. Like the flight recorder hidden away in an airplane’s bowels, the black box’s opaque surface hides a cache of messages. Sight alone cannot reveal its secrets. Latour’s metaphor and its airs of uncertainty resonate with the exhibition title. *Which Witch is Which?* refers to a children’s novel published in 1989, where identical twins Ella and Emma attend a party dressed as witches, deceiving both the readers and the other characters in the book with their precocious, tongue-twisting disguise.

In this exhibition, each work is its own discrete black box. In fact, the list of artists featured in this show might give some reason to ponder the relationship between their works: Leigh Ledare’s grainy, sexualized photographs of his mother stare across the hall from Darren Bader’s plastic haircombs strategically affixed to the wall. The relationships between the artworks in *Which Witch* don’t reveal themselves in the blink of an eye. Instead, the exhibition requires viewers to supplement their visual toolbox by wandering through the gallery or doing a little bit of research.

Erin Shirreff’s works explicitly reveal the visual’s inherent failure to represent the real. Shown in the White Flag library, her single-channel video *Ansel Adams, RCA Building, circa 1940*, 2009, captures a melancholic, almost otherworldly light as it slowly traverses the surface of Adams’ photograph—after which it is titled; another “which witch” moment. The video is a montage of photographs of Adams’ photograph, tracing the slow dance of shadows across its surface as light shifted throughout the day. Shirreff has referred to her works as “hybrid scenarios” and her appropriation plays off the subtle perceptual shifts inherent to mediation. Also on



view, Shirreff’s *Signature* photographic series, 2010, renders its subject—sculpture of some sort—ahistorical, out-of-place, and peculiar. Here, a fold cuts down the middle of her black-and-white prints, transforming the abstract geometric sculptures into even stranger compositions while denying any reasonable attribution of scale, color or material.

Leigh Ledare’s photographs star a nude, wrinkled, yet still gorgeous, woman in various erotic poses. In *Mother Tied to Catch 22*, 2002, a man and woman are strapped together at the waist, both wearing ambiguous facial expressions in a scene of sexual encounter. This singular image fails to divulge what has taken place. We need to expand our interpretative resources beyond sight alone, as it fails to give knowledge. I would be hard-pressed to think of another exhibition that would courageously juxtapose Shirreff’s *Signature* series with Ledare’s *Mother Tied to Catch 22*. Ledare’s human subjects could be no more different from Shirreff’s non-human ones. However, if we recast each image as a black box, we realize that they both reveal the opacity of the visual and the documentary shortcomings of photography.

Regardless of medium, many of the works in *Which Witch* rely on their physical, tactile qualities. *VICINATO 2*, 2000, a low-fi recording of a conversation between a long list of well-known artists—Liam Gillick, Douglas Gordon, Carsten Höller, Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, and Rirkrit Tiravanija—was shown on a bulky black monitor, another black box. A throwback to a bygone era of video art, this monitor seems colossal in comparison to the sleek flatscreens that line gallery walls today. In contrast to the heaviness of *VICINATO 2*, Darren Bader’s *Friend*, 2010, consists of four thin plastic combs—the type of grooming tool that you can purchase at any corner drugstore—securely attached to the gallery walls.

The metaphor of the black box also stresses that context, rather than content, informs our perceptions and opinions of any single thing. *Which Witch* fore-

grounds the experience of circulation, premised on the coexistence of different things—human and non-human actors alike who act upon and influence each other. All of the exhibition’s elements are interrelated in this way: the works shown in the gallery, the architectural space that contains them, the catalogue essays, and the visual documentation of the exhibition. An exhibition is no mere framework, invisible skeleton, or solid and steady axis connecting each artwork. Rather, the exhibition becomes another work—not only is it itself a construction, but it also inflects the meaning of each of the artworks as they coexist for its duration. This embrace of translations and oscillation between contexts is humorously emphasized in the *Krazy Kat and Ignatz* comic strip that introduces the exhibition checklist. Krazy Kat is confounded by the fact that he exists both in real life and as a cartoon printed in the newspaper, to which Ignatz replies: “Because fool, how could it be aught were it not thus—you answer that.” And to that, Krazy Kat cannot answer because, as the works in *Which Witch* describe, confusion is the only answer.

—Corinna Kirsch

2010, purple extension cord, Styrofoam packing material, roofing tar, photo frames, bamboo furniture, wooden fragment, plastic, fluorescent yellow bug light, and hardware, 29 x 42 x 18 inches [courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York; allation view of *Which Witch is Which? And/Or Summertime*, left to right: Liam Gillick, Leigh Ledare, Ajay Kurian, Tamar Halpern

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Leigh Ledare, *Personal Commission*, 2008, c-print, 22.375 x 14.875 inches [courtesy of White Flag Projects]; channel video installation [courtesy of the artist]