The Position We’re In
Hamish Fulton
Kent Monkman
Guido van der Werve

July 1 - September 2, 2016

The Position We’re In presents works by Hamish Fulton, Kent Monkman, and Guido van der Werve. Each artist employs a cause-effect of where and how their body, or image of it, appears in their practice. The exhibition invites viewers to consider political ramifications, extrapolate and empathize an experience, and de-puzzle anomalous contexts. Each artist operates across disciplines and media to realize their work.

Guido van der Werve studied visual arts at the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam but equally employs his previous training in classical piano, industrial design, archaeology, and Russian in his practice. Van der Werve creates ambitious video projects inviting viewers into his sublime, romantic narratives. Here, the artist shares his fascination with the historic quality of Steinway pianos as he strives to attain one.

Nummer Zes is about desire and scale, about the things we wish for feeling too big for our wallets, homes, or hearts. The artist pursues the piano, but he can never quite possess it, only play upon its keys. The film suggests a wider contemporary cultural malaise, in which the grand emotions experienced seemingly so easily by the 19th century Romantics seem impossible to access in our own age for more than a few fleeting moments. And yet, van der Werve still searches them out, because, really, what else is he to do? He has said that ‘I think most artists have a way of finding their own reality, and in my case it happened to be [19th Century] Romanticism. I’m sure that if I would have lived in that time I would have been just as miserable as now’. This, I suspect, is the true punch-line of Nummer Zes’ black joke: you can change the scenography, but you can’t change yourself. All you can hope for is rainbows in unexpected places, or cosmoses opening up on your cheap lino floor.

Tom Morton

Hamish Fulton is a self-defined walking-artist. “If I do not walk, I cannot make a work of art… The physical involvement of walking creates a receptiveness to the landscape. I walk on the land to be woven into nature. A road walk can transform the everyday world and give a heightened sense of human history.”

His practice is situated in time and space, as well as, time and place. His physical works alternate between recounting and describing his walks, or, he provides a poetic report from the happening - abstracting the landscape. Fulton invites us to interpret the broader stride of his life’s work, as acts of walking can connect with a wide range of disciplines, philosophies, environmental issues, mindfulness and politics. With full knowledge of the discrepancy between his ‘action’ and the ‘works,’ Fulton creates ‘monu-tise-ments’ about the moments of pause for his endless thinking mind.

Unlike lines drawn on a map, a line walked can never be erased.

Hamish Fulton

continued →
Kent Monkman works across various platforms in his practice including painting, video, photography, performance, and installation. Exploring ‘de-colonization,’ he uses detournements, an alter ego, and revisionist histories to flip a westernized gaze. Monkman skillfully inverts the balance of power between Anglos and native peoples. He interrupts colonial heteronormativity with the pre-contact tradition of ‘two-spiritedness,’ and inverts missionary’s doctrine with investigations of religious objects.²

In the five portraits exhibited, Monkman explores the emergence of his alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle, as a performer by imagining her in different roles across time and constructing her mythologies. The photos, shot, printed and framed to emulate antique daguerreotypes, feature Miss Chief in various performance guises. Monkman traces the history of Aboriginal performance culture - more specifically ‘Indians’ performing for a European audience. The persona of Miss Chief challenges the authoritative version of history by playing the starring role in ‘period’ photographs, silent era films and romantic paintings. Through this re-imaging of history, missing narratives are explored as Miss Chief subverts the authority of the often-flamboyant artists who created images of Aboriginal people in the 19th century. With a showmanship that rivals nineteenth century artists like George Catlin and Edward Curtis, she challenges the subjectivity of their work by calling into question personal motivations, career ambitions and ego.³

Notes:

1. The invitation to consider this larger scope of his practice is from a direct quote by the artist published on the Maureen Paley gallery website.
3. Descriptions and investigative details of The Emergence of a Legend are sourced directly from writings published online by the artist on his website.