

ARTFORUM

East German military facility, consists of a rotating platform topped with a ramshackle wooden structure covered in dusty detritus, paintings and drawings with obtuse Wagnerian references, images of Hitler, and film projections that envelop the space and the viewers exploring it. Schlingensief's forays into semiparticipatory installation art were surpassed, however, by his fully participatory, partially scripted reality-TV shows, all of which aired on German networks. *Freakstars 3000* (2002), for example, played on the most exploitative tendencies of talent-seeking shows such as *American Idol* by casting exclusively physically and mentally handicapped "contestants." They undeniably appear to have had great fun shooting the six episodes of the series, but it is never clear whether we as viewers are laughing with them or at them. Who, exactly, is in on the joke?

Moral ambiguity and bad taste are equally in evidence in one of Schlingensief's most ambitious projects, *Please Love Austria—First Austrian Coalition Week*, which took place in June 2000 as part of the annual Vienna Festival. Directly adjacent to the Vienna State Opera, three mobile homes (a replica of one was on view at KW) were set up crowned with banners proclaiming FOREIGNERS OUT! The homes functioned as the 24/7 living quarters of ten or twelve (purported) asylum seekers; in the style of *Big Brother*, two people were voted out by the public each day and "deported." Organized in response to the xenophobia of recently elected far-right politicians, the action engendered incredible rancor from the entire political spectrum. In a documentary film about the project that was shown at KW, an embattled Austrian politician yells at Schlingensief, "I won't be acting in your play!" It was better than any line the artist himself could have scripted, highlighting the crux of the work and its much larger point: Art, like politics, has no limits, and everyone is implicated in the inhumane treatment of others, whether one chooses to participate actively or to attempt to avoid culpability as a spectator on the sidelines.

Opera Village, Schlingensief's final project, begun in 2010, shortly before his death, was presented at KW in the form of scale models, preparatory drawings, and documentary film and photographs. A true *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the village, located in Laongo, Burkina Faso, is an evolving community conceived by Schlingensief, with living quarters, a school, a clinic, and a theater, all designed by Burkinabe architect Francis Kéré. By his own admission, Schlingensief wanted to spend his last days building something of importance to serve as his memorial. But the apparent sincerity and naïveté of *Opera Village* are difficult to reconcile with our image of an artist whose work was so often crassly manipulative and cynical, and whose politics would have rendered unimaginable a project with such discomfiting neocolonial overtones. Perhaps by design, *Opera Village* functions as a question mark rather than a period at the end of a remarkable oeuvre.

—Andrea Gyorody

Anicka Yi LARS FRIEDRICH

On entering Anicka Yi's recent exhibition, one saw a light-gray wall with rectangular recessed chambers containing sculptural assemblages, stylishly illuminated and mounted on flat white pedestals. The presentation evoked the displays at a high-end store—which makes a certain sense, since the show was partly conceived in collaboration with Mari Ouchi of New York-based boutique jeweler Faux/Real. Three large compartments contained arrangements of materials such as translucent resin, trinkets, Plexiglas, and steel; a smaller one was filled with dry dog food. For all her work's superficial kinship with the collisions of store display and sculpture in work by artists such as Josephine Meckseper

or Haim Steinbach, however, Yi encourages a different mode of spectatorship by embedding her art in a narrative that invites personal, affective involvement.

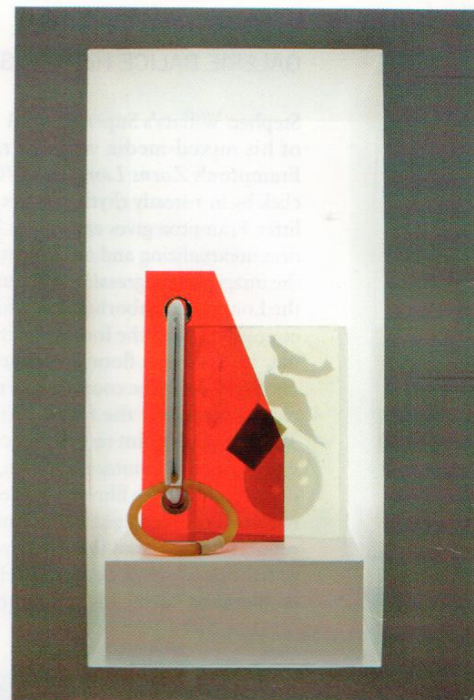
A text written (with artist and writer Jordan Lord) for the occasion played a crucial role in leading the viewer toward an emotional and psychological relationship with the works on view. Anchored in the idea after which the show was titled, "Denial," the text is a dizzying accumulation of information and ideas regarding, among much else, memory, time, loss, absence, separation, koans, couples therapy, forensics, and cryonics. Fragments from the story of a past relationship are entangled with questions such as "how can [an object] . . . be in denial of its own movement toward death?" against a background of speculation about how to deal with being denied—the unsolved conundrum of desire in the face of loss.

In this light, the works in the show could be seen as miniature dioramas of estrangement and connection, proximity and distance, presence and absence. In *It Only Takes 20 Minutes to Shift the Blame* (all works 2013), the couple of inches between a steel ball and the rest of the assemblage seem metaphorically vast; the objects cast inside the adjacent block of translucent resin and glycerin soap could be read as representing an absorption of one material into another, while a brass ring around a Plexiglas cylinder evokes yet another kind of intimacy. In *The Easy Way to Quit New York*, by contrast, all the materials are in physical contact with one another: A rubber bracelet loops around a stainless-steel shower handle on translucent red Plexiglas, which in turn leans on a block of object-filled resin. Printed on the steel handle, a text simultaneously guides, disrupts, and transforms the reception of the work: DO WE NEED COUPLES THERAPY?/NO WE ARE COUPLES THERAPY.

The objects in the show thus coalesced into a dizzying, desperate mix of Eros and Thanatos, with upscale consumer fetishism brought head-to-head with the personal sadness that comes from (both future and experienced) loss, at whose furthest extreme is death. On the exhibition's opening night, two heads made of ice were in the gallery, one in a refrigerator and one on the floor, melting at different speeds, yet both still, inevitably, disappearing. The melancholy of this work, *Forensics & Cryonics (What I Would Like to Be If I Wasn't What I Am, Issue #2)*, was inexorable; afterward, a water stain remained, barely visible, on the gallery floor.

The exhibition thus performed several of the interlinked aspects of denial in the text. Yet this attitude of negation seems both dependent on and mistrustful of its own affirmative opposite, however temporary and ephemeral—but as what? As mirage, as nostalgia, as form, as presence, as fetish—or, more concretely, as chromed sphere, as dog food, as love story? It's an unanswerable question. As Yi and Lord's text states: "Even if I were to peel away the layers of visual information to try to locate the mystery, I would find some image that cancelled out or replaced, that spoke in contradiction of the truth embedded there."

—Alexander Scrimgeour



Anicka Yi, *The Easy Way to Quit New York*, 2013, Plexiglas, stainless-steel shower handle, vinyl tubing, glycerin soap, resin, petri dish, paper, wax, fish-oil capsule, 11 1/4 x 8 3/4 x 7 3/4".