

BRENT GREEN, KLARA KRISTALOVA, AND RUBEN OCHOA

SITE SANTA FE
1606 PASEO DE PERALTA, SANTA FE

Whatever. The hardest art reviews to write are the ones where you neither loved nor hated the art in question.

The current show at SITE definitely doesn't suck. On the other hand, it is without a doubt not at all amazing. In a reversal of the all-too-ubiquitous group-show trend wherein disparate art is desperately forced into a single thematic box, the work presented here hangs together quite well and all that would be required is a similarity-linking title to pull it off as one of SITE's tighter group shows. How 'bout something like: *Zombie Art*.

As we all know art exemplifies the trends of its time and the work here is utterly indicative of a culture in deep decline. Post-modernism, for better and worse, has successfully driven a stake through the heart of avant-gardism, and the recently popped auction-house bubble in contemporary art delivered the final death blows to any true experimentation or cutting-edge creativity in the visual arts. Of course the arts are only a microcosm of the larger reality, and commodity capitalism, with its enthusiastic encouragement of unchecked materialist greed, has obviously killed all sorts of aspects of the living soul of Western Culture.

The good news is that in mythological systems worldwide death will always be followed by resurrection or rebirth, but not before the soul wanders through the half light and hellish realm of some sort of underworld. This is the world we now inhabit, culturally, economically, spiritually, and intellectually. In this sense, the zombie art of Ruben Ochoa, Brent Green, and Klara Kristalova resonates with our current darkening disharmonies.

Ochoa's work is the most successful in this regard with its metaphors of deconstruction and foundational disintegration. Large rectangular blocks of the building's actual cement slab rise up on spindly rebar legs like giant animated spider creatures threatening to run amuck, exposing the desert earth underneath. They are not so much living as they appear instead to be "undead." Ochoa hangs his justification for his particular brand of Gordon Matta-Clark type interventions upon loosely defined concepts of class conflict in which architectural boundaries (in this case the floor) become symbolic of class divisions or socio-political demarcations of territory. The evil cement (i.e. industry and upper class oppression) that separates us from the earth (i.e. nature and the underclasses) will eventually rise up and bite us in the ass, he seems to say. This is an oversimplification of his message, but the attempt to make it explicit for the sake of argument may prove helpful.

Ochoa's preliminary drawings included using the rebar (one of his favorite materials) that he assumed he would find reinforcing the SITE slab to raise up the monster blocks of cement. When he actually sawed through he found that the floor had no steel reinforcements of any kind whatsoever. He then had to bring in a fabricator to drill and glue rebar into the blocks to realize his dystopian vision of menacing revolution. There is indeed a satisfying sense of anxiety and unbalance in the installation on a purely formal level, but unfortunately the reading on the basis of class conflict becomes mere wishful thinking. If only the underclasses actually had the structural strength to rise up as Ochoa imagines. In fact, part of our current cultural hell is that, despite all reasons to do so, there seems to be very little in the way of proletariat uprising as banker-thieves, corporate-cannibals, and wealthy politicians wipe their feet on all of our faces. Ochoa is guilty of an intellectual romanticizing of the underclasses and theorizing about revolt that is as old and tiresome as Marxism itself. At my most cynical, I see this piece as an appeasement of the deserved guilt of the wealthy SITE Santa Fe board members who commissioned it, with Ochoa in the ineffectual role of co-opted court jester to the king. Whatever.

Brent Green's videos and sculptural installations and Klara Kristalova's sloppily slumped surreal ceramics don't even attempt to engage with the culture at large but instead retreat into already overworked realms of essentially inaccessible personal associations that bring moments of identification or empathy from the viewer but ultimately collapse into insignificance. Their art is the art of the stay-homes, and shut-ins who don't even have Ochoa's *huevos*.

Green's work is a prime example of avant-gardism in the grave. He is obviously—and with much more confusion and far less spooky beauty—sucking his artistic lifeblood from filmmakers Tim Burton and Terry Gilliam that it is scary indeed. Is this half-cooked version of hillbilly "outsider art" really the best our world-class *kunsthalle* can offer? Stay home and watch *The Nightmare Before Christmas* again instead of wasting your time on Green's lame time-consuming amateur videos. The SITE literature comparing him to Wagner and Faulkner would be laughable if it weren't so pathetically sad and mistaken. Has anybody over there actually read Faulkner? Burton animates a rich part of our visual cultural galaxy, while Green only serves to show how peripheral and meaningless our zombie art world can become. Whatever.



Ruben Ochoa, *hummin'... comin' at cha...*, concrete slab, rebar, dirt, 2009
SITE Santa Fe Commission. Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects

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