

Exhibition Guide

Lutz and Guggisberg *Impressions from the Interior*

28 May – 20 July 2008

First and Second Floor Galleries

Impressions from the Interior is the first exhibition of work in the UK by Swiss artists Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg. An ongoing partnership, since 1996, the nature of their working practice provides a key to the whimsy we encounter here. An observation made by one of the pair will generate an idea for the other, resulting in a to-and-fro that ensures that they are at once producers and critical viewers; their own first audience.

This generative process is particularly evident in *Library* (2007), an installation that resembles the room of an avid bibliophile. Furniture, standard lamps and shelves create a familiar atmosphere, whilst a closer scrutiny of the books suggests something absurd. Libraries symbolise thousands of years' worth of knowledge, accumulated and ordered with a view to some kind of collective heritage. Lutz and Guggisberg have a lightness of touch as they play off such an idea, exchanging real books for cleverly designed wooden dummies. Complete with dust jackets, the authors' names and cover blurbs, these are deceptively similar to the products of actual publishers; it is the text that exposes them as fakes. The name of an author on one book makes an appearance elsewhere as a character in a novel; a blurb printed on one spine refers to the title of another and elsewhere, the artists make oblique references to their other works. Our routes of enquiry through this installation are seemingly endless – layer upon layer of meaning creates a maze of possible meanings in which we are able to lose ourselves.

The notion that everything is connected to everything else is explored further in the work from which this exhibition takes its name, *Impressions from the Interior* (2008) a photographic essay. Consisting of 30 prints, the images, created using photographic processes more akin to lithography, are exquisite in their detail and clarity. An extraordinary series, the photographs were taken over a considerable period of time in an idiosyncratic exploration of both interior and exterior space. In *The Final Rest* a graveyard stands exposed amongst the mountains but the occupants

are unable to enjoy the view; a sign proudly offers not only candles for sale but also angels in a cluttered shop; and Jackdaws features a group of expectant birds waiting within a vast, empty landscape, conjuring up in our minds countless scenarios that might occur.

In the midst of these photographs, capturing instances of oddness, a group of small burnt clay figures appear to be pushing a massive gallery wall around on its axis, moving it out of its usual position. The figures, endearingly referred to as “Tonies”, (derived from ‘Ton’, the German word for clay), epitomise Lutz and Guggisberg’s do-it-yourself aesthetic. They appear hastily formed, with just enough distinguishable character for us to identify with them. They appeal to our subconscious – as if having materialised out of a strange dream – caught between everyday reality and fantasy, but still obviously rough clay sculptures.

Upstairs, the artists’ philosophical sense of humour – whereby true words might be spoken in jest – is very much in evidence. *Wash the World* (2007) is a video installation that features a wonderful combination of cartoon-like sequences. The linking story is that of an engineer, whose laboratory is concerned with reversing apparently irreversible phenomena, thereby protecting and repairing the planet. On monitor screens we witness waterfalls spectacularly un-spilling water, whilst a nuclear power station sucks exhausted vapour back into itself. By challenging the basic laws of nature, Lutz and Guggisberg suggest an ecological concern, reminding us of a probable reality through overemphasised fiction.

Another video work, *Man in the Snow* (2005), is a faint video projection on a lit white wall, in which a looped image of a silhouetted figure endlessly trudges through a blizzard landscape. He has neither a starting point nor an obvious destination but struggles regardless against the elements. It is a filmic cliché – romantic, funny, all-too-familiar – made poignant through its knowing under-production. The image is bleached, but then subtly integrated into the wall, as if to suggest the effort required to traverse the boundary between this dedicated art space and the world beyond. In this sense, the *Man in the Snow* could not be more artful, and yet it constitutes an acknowledgement of why a cliché is just so; there is no escaping the fact that human life (irrespective of art) is not easy-going.

Nearby is *Rifles* (2007), a cramped installation that conveys the illusion of a gun maker’s workshop. Dozens of roughly hewn wooden guns are stacked around a bench, the place for the assembly of these lethal weapons, an activity in response to perceived threat.

Population (2007) likewise engenders feelings of distress with tragicomic overtones. In this work, approximately 200 burnt wooden birds reveal the violence of their creation, having been subjected to the searing effects of a blowtorch. Their blackened, dysfunctional appearance signifies post-apocalyptic mutation and distress, but they are also ridiculous. They are, at once, Walt Disney creatures, Hitchcock's Birds, and harbingers of an envisaged apocalypse. They have an ancient, primitive quality, ironically in light of the fact that they are made from cheap mundane packing crates. This improvised recycling exemplifies the essence of Lutz and Guggisberg's artistic proposition, ingenious and unpretentious, unashamedly funny in response to difficult questions.