

Christoph büchel's simply botiful: overview and analysis



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Christoph Büchel. SIMPLY BOTIFUL

11. 10. 2006 – 18. 03. 2007

Hauser and Wirth

Cheshire Street

London

Above the entrance to Christoph Büchel's 'Simply Botiful' there is a 'Hotel' sign. Entry to the new 'Hauser and Wirth' space in Brick lane is made by walking past a dusty reception. Following this, gallery attendees are apprehended by an attendant with a clip board, who asks guests to 'sign-in', before taking their coats and bags. If you read carefully the documents that you are signing, it turns out that you are waiving your rights to sue, should you suffer damage to clothing, or to yourself during your tour of the exhibition. The reasoning behind this becomes clear as you proceed.

Very quickly it is apparent that we are in a Hotel style mock up. ^[1] Once one has ascended the stairs into the main 'gallery', they are confronted with a hallway packed with small make shift beds. Taking the first door to the right (as most attendees will be inclined to do) one finds themselves in a room that seems a little out of place. It appears to be the study room of someone deeply interested in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology: The walls are covered in early naïve-imperial pictures of native persons and unusual animals, whilst a vitrine lies full of bones, clay pipes and other artifacts. In one corner resides an imposing Analysts chair. The association here makes one think of a long line of artists and writers that have dealt with psychoanalysis and <https://assignbuster.com/christoph-bchels-simply-botiful-overview-and-analysis/>

analytical ideas (such as Dali), yet there is another element to Büchel's work. Far from merely presenting psycho-analytical ideas in a pictorial form Büchel actually throws the gallery viewer on themselves, pushing them into a personal analysis of their situation.

In this first room one can hear the sound of loud (but distant) Thrash Metal music that appears to come from inside a wardrobe, on the near side of the room. Those more curious will find that in the wardrobe, behind a couple of mangy suits there is a small hole, rising about 2 feet square from the base of the wardrobe. Those more curious still will climb through the hole, not even sure of they are allowed, or supposed to do so. It is in this sense that:

' Büchel's complex installations force his audience to participate in scenarios that are physically demanding and psychologically unsettling.' [2]

On entering into the wardrobe the individual finds themselves in a room, with a small bed, some bags of discarded children's toys and a burnt out motorcycle in a glass cabinet. The music becomes much louder - pushing the boundary of what is safe to listen to.

Emerging from the cupboard again, one must take the chance that a small audience has amassed in the first room, and will be watching you as you crawl on hands and knees back into the relative normalcy of the analyst's office. Aspects such as these give the show a performative element, as each gallery attendee becomes entertainment for others:

' He explores the unstable relationship between security and internment, placing visitors in the brutally contradictory roles of victim and voyeur.' [3]
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Other rooms on this first floor quite clearly point to this space being a brothel (ostensibly). Porn magazines, crumpled bedsheets, red lights and condom packets litter three more bedrooms and suggest an uneasy seediness. Upon entering these rooms, one feels like an intruder and is put in the position of literally feeling like both victim and voyeur. In a sense, this is the trick that conceptual/readymade based art plays. Duchamp's 'Fountain' (made under the pseudonym 'R. Mutt') – an upturned urinal that he attempted to exhibit in an open exhibition in 1917 taunts the viewer. It is art, because the artist himself says so:

'Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it.' [4]

Yet the viewer of a ready-made is left in the position of feeling 'duped'. Believing such pieces to be credible artworks involves a certain leap of 'faith'. Each person must make this leap, aware that others are watching (thus they are a victim), but they also make this judgement over the artwork as the 'voyeur'.

Büchel's semi-readymade, constructed from found objects in a converted warehouse gallery takes this a step further and really challenges the viewer: The viewer is challenged into questioning whether what they are looking at is art, and into considering their role within the artwork – as participants in it. In this sense, the gallery attendees become 'readymades'.

Once one has walked through the hotel, they arrive on a balcony, overlooking what appears to be a crossover between a workers yard and

scrap yard, with several iron containers, and piles of disused refrigerators. Upon descending a set of iron steps one finds themselves free to roam amongst the detritus. One container is full of broken computer parts; another is virtually empty, except for a filthy table. The overall sense one gets immediately is one of poverty – another container holds sewing machines and rolls of fabric: presumably some kind of sweatshop. There is something harrowing about this, which is compounded somewhat by images of hardcore porn pasted to the walls of one container that features nothing but a makeshift punch-bag and a seemingly empty refrigerator.

However, there is also something celebratory about Büchel's huge semi-Readymade. Gallery attendees gradually become more comfortable and rush from one container to the next, probing deeper to find unexpected treasures. The refrigerator at the far end of the above mentioned container actually features a set of steps, descending to a tunnel carved through the ground beneath the gallery. Upon arriving at the other end, one finds a huge mound of earth, with Elephant or 'Mammoth' tusks protruding from one side! How to react to this is again down to the viewer, and throughout the exhibition, similar oddities are met with mixtures of fear, excitement, awe and humour.

There is certainly a darkness inherent to Büchel's work, and a strong controversial social commentary (beneath a container lorry in the workers yard, the gallery attendee finds a secret room featuring Muslim prayer mats, Bibles and pornography). However there is also a strong element that throws the viewer upon their own resources, forcing them to question the role of art.

In a sense, this is what good art does. As philosopher Theodor Adorno

argues:

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‘ It is self evident that nothing concerning art is self evident anymore, not in its inner life, not in its relation to the world, not even in its right to exist.’ [5]

This leaves art in the difficult position of constantly questioning itself, and one way of doing this is to present the viewer with a constant need to question their relationship with the artwork. This often makes for art that appears on the surface to be tragic. Yet the way in which art can lead the viewer to question not only art, but their own confidence in judging art actually provides challenges that may have positive results. Art gives one an opportunity to really engage with themselves and their environment in way that mass consumerist culture doesn't. Adorno argues:

‘ The darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational: radically darkened art. What the enemies of modern art, with a better instinct than its anxious apologists, call its negativity is the epitome of what established culture has repressed and that toward which art is drawn.’ [6]

Therefore Büchel's somewhat twisted and tragic world actually breaks through the repressive element that society enforces. Perhaps this is one meaning that can be applied to the representation of the analysts/anthropologists office, which is the first room the viewer stumbles upon when entering the exhibition space.

Further to this, Büchel's show builds upon Joseph Beuys' declaration that ‘ We are all artists,’ (a declaration that itself built upon Duchamp's proclamation that ‘ anything can be art’):

' EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST [...] Self-determination and participation in the sphere (freedom)...' [7]

In inviting the audience to partake in the artwork as both voyeur and victim, Büchel makes evident the capacity of all individuals to fulfill a role in bringing forth societal change as artists with the capacity to designate mere objects as art. The confidence inherent in such a judgement can from thereon be applied to other spheres of life.

The success of Büchel's exhibition resides in his demonstrating the above points without over complicating things. The viewer is drawn into an interactive art space that questions constantly, without necessarily being aware that they are put into the position of having to answer complex art/life riddles. Yet, at some point during or after the exhibition something of the nature of Modern and Postmodern/Contemporary art will be made apparent to them: For an artist to achieve this is a rare skill.

Bibliography

Books

Adorno. T. W. 1997, *Aesthetic Theory*, transl., Hullot-Kentor, R., Athlone Press, London

Harrison. C. and Woods. P., Eds ., 1998, On Commitment, *Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Exhibition Press Release

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[1] For a fully detailed internet ‘walk through’ tour of the exhibition see:
http://www.ghw.ch/exhibitions/walkthrough.php?exhibition_id=415

[2] From the Press Release for ‘Christoph Büchel, Simply Botiful’. Hauser and Wirth Gallery, 2006.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Harrison C, and Woods P., Art in Theory: An Anthology of Changing Ideas, 1998, p248.

[5] Adorno. T. W., Aesthetic Theory, Transl, Robert-Hullot-Kentor, 1997, p1.

[6] Ibid. p19.

[7] Harrison C, and Woods P., Ibid., p903. Forgive the fragmented nature of this quote. The text itself is equally fragmented.