

In the group show *l'après moderne*, British curator Charles Danby unites a number of contemporary artists whose work can be seen as an elaboration of the modernist legacy. Regarding the modernist agenda rather as an unfinished project than a demarcated period in art history, the exhibition attempts to reexamine the modernist heritage by investigating how its formal vocabulary survives throughout contemporary art. Modernist visual language still inspires contemporary artists, but it apparently also leads to a number of bleak, uninspired copies.

Rather than postmodernist appropriations or pastiches, the selected works pick up some of the formal preoccupations explored in earlier Modernism. Michelle McKeown's paintings of fractals clearly stem from a modernist sensibility, yet contribute to an actualisation of Modernism's findings by integrating results of new scientific experiments. London-based Athanasios Argianas's sculptures do evoke the work of historic predecessors like Naum Gabo and Moholy-Nagy, yet easily combine these references with more contemporary sources of inspiration. Also fascinating is the work of Flore Nové-Josserand – here represented in *Corner Piece* (2007) – whose perceptual objects consist of a formal examination of colour and volume.

Modernism is at the core of Sadie Murdoch's artistic practice, not only by the use of formalist devices but also in the way she thematises the (phallogocentric) history of the movement. In her photographic reenactments, she excavates Modernism's history by drawing attention to female designers like Charlotte Perriand, Lilly Reich or Eileen Gray, who have often remained in the shadow of their better-known male counterparts. Besides *Reich in Reverse* (2005) – a portrait of Bauhaus architect Reich – she also shows *Black and White Look with Colour Model* (2008), a photograph taking the relationship of Josephine Baker with both Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier as a starting point. The photograph combines a bust of Baker with a scale model of the never-realised house that Loos designed for her. The building's characteristic black and white horizontal stripes are echoed throughout the entire picture.

At its best, the exhibition results in a contemporary approach to the modernist discourse, but it also leads to works dwelling in nostalgia, lacking any artistic relevance to, or added value for, a twenty-first-century audience. The abstract expressionist gesture paintings of Denis Stuart are the kind of works it's still surprising to see in contemporary art galleries. Bruce Ingram's totem-like tribal sculptures evoke outsider art, but look dated, lacking any sense of self-awareness. These works are kitsch, but not even in a postmodern, tongue-in-cheek way. Rather than being autonomous contemporary works, Dallas Seitz's assemblage sculptures revitalise Dadaist and surrealist sculpture, but don't quite manage to get beyond the level of homage to their sources. More convincing is the work of Karen Tang: her sculpture *Siren Stephen and His Mirror* (2008) not only refers to Surrealism but also to Art Brut, yet reveals a personal style, something many of these other artists can only dream of. *Sam Steverlync*



l'après moderne

Projet Midi, Brussels
21 September – 25 October

Hansjoerg Dobljar,
Nachtmahr (Nightmare), oil,
acrylic and lacquer on canvas,
200 x 120 cm. Courtesy
the artist and Ben Kaufmann
Gallery, Berlin

In God We Trust, 2007,
video installation and mixed media,
dimensions variable, edition of 1 + 1AP.
Courtesy Galleria Pack, Milan

Walking from the traffic-filled streets of Milan into the dimly lit Galleria Pack for Andrei Molodkin's one-person exhibition at first feels like a relief. There's a sense of calm generated by the pulsatile rhythm emitting from the pumps that form part of the Russian artist's multimedia installations, a feeling which, however, passes quickly as one realises that what is moving through the pipes and the transparent acrylic block sculptures is crude oil. 'Liquid black' is the source of the industrial noise of the traffic outside and, as the show's title, based on Slava Tsukerman's 1982 cult film *Liquid Sky*, suggests, might be the replacement, 'in the minds of people', for the once-pervasive drug heroin, or 'liquid sky'.

Liquid Black (2008) is an installation that juxtaposes the sculpted phrase 'In God we trust' with video footage of a group of Chechen commandos played on a flatscreen monitor. Chanting accompanies the images of the soldiers, though a blurred picture prevents the viewer from making out their identities. The hazy moving image has the effect of inviting us to imagine ourselves in the place of the commandos and to reconsider the seriousness of death. On the opposite wall and linked by a series of tubes to the first installation are two hollow acrylic block dollar signs titled *Double Dollar* (2008). The combination of the two installations results in a particular emphasis on connections between religion, politics, money and contemporary warfare.

In another room, the words 'Yes', 'Justice' and 'UN' appear through layers of lush crude oil on 300 x 188 cm canvases. These words are the titles to a new series of works the artist has developed regarding randomness and accident. In *United Nations* (2008) Molodkin has set up a whole series of pipes attached to pumps that when activated impel the oil through the conduit, splashing or 'painting' the canvas. This hands-off approach to 'oil-field painting' would seem to be diametrically opposed to the artist's well-known and very laboriously worked-up ballpoint-pen drawings. Yet a similar arduous process is still evident in the paintings due to Molodkin's choice to exhibit the entire apparatus that painted the paintings, and the apparent demonstration of the process by which his works were completed is a fundamental aspect to the artwork as a whole, whether it be a painting, drawing or multimedia installation.

Overall, the works in the exhibition read as denunciations of the most vital geopolitical and cultural topics of our time, and this is no less the case with *In God We Trust* (2007). Blood and oil circulate through two hollow sculpted Christs suspended – one upside down – in a clear container placed atop a pedestal. This merging of substances is captured by a camcorder and projected onto the gallery wall. The sheer scale and grouping of reds and ambers in the projected images are sublimely beautiful, ultimately seeming to declare the ease with which ideals and ideas humanity holds dear can become contaminated. *Andrew Smaldone*

Andrei Molodkin

Liquid Black After Liquid Sky

Galleria Pack, Milan
19 September – 15 November

