

JOHN ISAACS

ARE YOU LIKE ME FULL OF HOPE AND FULL OF FEAR

"...and some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth, and the round world itself but an empty cipher...."

Captain Ahab from Moby Dick by Herman Melville

In his second New York exhibition at Feigen Contemporary, John Isaacs presents a typically eclectic yet conceptually coherent body of new works, including prints, sculpture, and film.

Impossible Dreams, a series of found newspaper cuttings of newspaper articles about protest, forms the backdrop to the exhibition "are you like me full of hope and full of fear". These news cuttings from newspapers around the world have been produced by Isaacs himself, using photographs he took at peace protests in London. With "impossible dreams" Isaacs offers a utopia in which polemical thinking has vanished to be replaced by a whimsical open ended world - YES and NO become maybe. As in the heroic fantasy of Rodin's Thinker - eternally locked in meditation - Isaacs dreams of a world in which thought precludes action, in which the theme of protest melts away from the dialectical to the everyday emotional landscape of the individual elevated to the societal.

Reflecting these protest images, "what is it that there is something and nothing", a sculpture of a half peeled potato, continues the theme of the inconclusive, frozen in time, the everyday action is either half started or half finished, incomplete. "it is for you that I do this", a sculpture of a large pointing hand severed from the body, takes a more violent, direct road to the polemical. The action of pointing represents for Isaacs a violent denial of accountability, it is not just physically, but metaphorically, the way in which individuals and societies refuse to look inwards at the "self", but focus on the "other". The scale of the hand which rests on it's plinth as though tumbled directly from the body, and frozen in it's gesture, imbues it with the power of the absent figure, an absent God, or Leader, the wax hand combined with the title places Isaacs

ironically as both the creator, and saviour, he is of course fully aware that he is no David slaying Goliath.

The imposing and bloody sculpture of a severed shark fin knowingly stands alone as a cultural icon of fear which like the pointing hand, has again been subjugated by the artists will, and controlled. However the title “everyone’s talking about Jesus” directly reminds us of the power of irrational belief, and of course the fear which at present subjugates the people of the world to flee from terror, both real and imagined. That Isaacs offers up the beast slain is in the end no real salvation, for of course there are plenty more “fish” in the sea, it is more a recognition and reminder of the fact that fear is both a very real and imagined phenomena, one could link the propaganda of fear which Spielberg conjured up in JAWS to Bush’s present narrative of a fear of the unknown.

Another sculptural work, “I know this world...but it isn’t the way I know it...it doesn’t behave the way I was told”, a truncated tree made from plaster modelled and painted to resemble faeces, stands sadly as testimony to an over consumed ecology, that the by product of consumption becomes the very material of it’s re-formation. Lit with a few meagre bare light bulbs from each severed branch it stands like a tragic lighthouse incapable of offering any further guidance and safety.

“I used to think I could change the world”, a highly polished bronze sculpture of flabby leg, is reminiscent in it’s inflated form and reflective surface quality of the iconic Koon’s Bunny sculpture, yet in representing the effects of consumption rather than the consumer object itself, it brings the reality of the consumer world into the present day. The seductive quality of the sculptures surface runs contrary to the thing it represents, causing a mental stasis in the viewer as the brain tries to reconcile the two opposing emotions of seduction and repulsion.

This notion of stasis continues in the back room, where Isaacs presents a 15 minute film, “let the golden age begin – the cyclical development of stasis”. The films quality, shot on location in a Californian oil field in the wide screen format, is reminiscent of old Cowboy Western movies. Yet the impressive desert landscape is devoid of people. Archaic looking machines cover the land as far as the eye can see, oil pumps unceasingly and rhythmically going through the motion of extracting oil from the earth. Isaacs documents their movements to show them as they are,

objects that look like something from our technological past, crude machines doing a crude job. As we watch them we can't wash our hands of them, we are all implicated, yet we are powerless to stop them. The hypnotic quality of their incessant movement, is like the open road itself, seductive and ever moving, but after a while one begins to feel a fear creeping up ones spine...what if the movement where to stop.