

Art Review:

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'It's easy to say that the displacement in my work reflects my personal life - but everybody has it' - Bharti Kher

MARCH 2010

**The Berthe
Morisot
Scandal:**
Impressionist
legend
confesses

Myself isn't
really
that good!

Ben Vautier:
Show-off,
sex maniac
and egotist

Cory Arcangel:
Between the
artworld and
the Internet

Athens:
Where dogman
goes,
we follow!



THE
FUTURE
Now!
GREATS

ISSUE:
what
artists
are
interested
in
today

BHARTI
KHER

IT'S NOT ABOUT HER, IT'S ABOUT YOU



Michael Samuels

Villa du Parc Centre d'art Contemporain, Annemasse

18 December – 27 February

If you were to compress the space and furniture of an office in the same way that, say, the French sculptor César once compressed cars, perhaps you'd end up with something approximating the works of Michael Samuels: a table overrun by objects, desk lamps inserted in drawers themselves fixed by clamps, the whole assemblage tangled up with various frames and boxes, or with built-in neon lights, or various disjointed platforms. These structures are, however, not damaged by a process of destruction which is indifferent to them, but are instead dismantled or carefully sawed by the artist, then finely glued, reassembled and condensed into slim structures. As with César's compressions, there is no question of utility here; what is present is the détournement and repurposing of objects that stylistically hark back to a similar historical moment, to the 1950s and 60s, and the rise of consumer society, which would become the critical focus of so much of the Pop art and Nouveau Réalisme of the time. A bygone era is thus frozen in the elegant equilibrium of these dismantled furnitures. It's an equilibrium which is the product of a human ingenuity that delights in the assembly of improbable forms as a kind of precarious game.

In the midst of recognisable objects, colours start to become organised, between the contrasting surfaces of red, yellow or blue Formica, reddish wood and illuminated boxes, created either by a green bulb or by neon mounted under plastic strips. If the furniture's colours are deployed without modification, the lighting elements, by contrast, offer varying intensities, especially with the use of changing LEDs. In all these structures, square and yet dynamic, it's easy to see echoes of the work of the Constructivists: Tatlin, Pevsner, Gabo and Moholy-Nagy are evoked and replayed in controlled bricolages. If art history reveals itself through these various references, however, it does not cast a shadow over the homespun brilliance of Samuels's sculptures, made up of carefully selected objects gleaned by the artist from eBay.

Graphic, chromatic, abstract, these creations float in space without being completely detached from their narrative power and concrete presence, in which feet are there to stabilise, lamps to illuminate, clamps to assemble. There's something here close to the world of the theatre: it's as if stage set and backstage are both presented equally, special effects are part of what is there to be discovered and the actors are none other than ourselves, the spectators, who move around these sculptures, trying to understand, to enter into the story told by the structures themselves, as well as by the past story these objects contain. Faced with this inspired DIY, the viewer can only be swept up by the strength of this suspended chaos and a virtuoso momentum which is as surprising as it is elegant. *Karine Tissot*



Fiune, 2009 (installation view, Villa du Parc Centre d'Art Contemporain, Annemasse). © the artist. Courtesy Rokeby, London