

Josephine Pryde *lapses in Thinking By the person i Am*

CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco 5 May – 1 August

We all know that Random International's *Rain Room* (2012), drawing crowds most recently at MOMA, and Carsten Höller's slides, two of which are currently installed at the Hayward Gallery, signal the end of days for art. Or at least that's the established view among the cognoscenti. Hands-on experiences in art galleries, the argument goes, turn the brain off.

Josephine Pryde's exhibition at CCA Wattis is both interactive and intellectual. In fact, it might be understood as a distinctly ironic send-up – *there's a little train! And you can ride on it as it choo-choos around the gallery!* – of those kinds of fun, participatory artworks that get families queuing at the museums.

Pryde's train, a realistic 1:10 scale model of a Union Pacific freight locomotive pulling two graffitied boxcars, is not a happy engine. Titled *The Hungry Messenger* (2015), it can be operated to trundle at a sedate pace from one end of a U-shaped track to the other, before it reverses dolefully back again. A concealed speaker emits

engine noises and whistle blasts. For visitors who choose to sit on the pads atop the boxcars as it completes its Sisyphean journey, it is a confounding and bathetic experience.

While riding, viewers roll by a row of 19 evenly spaced photographs, each showing a woman's hands touching something. The pictures are cropped to remove heads, so they might show one woman or many, Pryde or a model. In about half of the images, the object being handled is an example of touch-sensitive technology: smartphones, tablets, or – in two pictures – a touch-sensitive, dimmable lamp. These are interspersed, as titles such as *Gift für Mich, Galerie Neu Christmas 2014 (I)* (2015) explain, with photographs of hands holding gifts to the artist from her dealers.

To force connections between these discrete artworks would be crass and disrespectful. Pryde is a subtle and evasive meaning-maker. However, to the meditative passenger, certain rhythms make themselves felt. The notion that

touch, in our present technological moment, is itself a form of thinking – or seeing – is suggested in these (untouchable, glazed) photographs and then complicated by the touchable and old-fashioned train, one that itself has been touched by the spray cans of imaginary, miniature taggers. In this the train becomes a conveyor of language, a hulking, primitive message-board that sends words to their unseen destination.

To ride *The Hungry Messenger* is to surrender control, just as receiving gifts, or slick photographic images, or information from a smartphone all require certain kinds of surrender. Pryde's photographs seem to allude to those states of mind in which, through opening ourselves to one kind of data, we find ourselves letting in another kind instead – moments such as gazing out a train window, looking at the landscape, scrolling through emails, while thinking about something else entirely.

Jonathan Griffin



lapses in Thinking By the person i Am, 2015 (installation view).
Photo: Johnna Arnold. Courtesy CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco