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Hans-Peter Feldmann: Shadow Play

Belfast Exposed 22 October to 20 December

Hans-Peter Feldmann's *Shadow Play* was originally shown in 'Fare Mundi' curated by Daniel Birnbaum at the Venice Biennale in 2009. The work captures a sense of the artist's practice dating back to the late 1960s, a practice which combines found photographs, including imagery from advertising and amateur snaps, magazines and private albums. Feldmann has been labelled a collector, a treasure hunter, an avid hoarder; he has an archivist's greed for imagery and is engaged in an archaeological pursuit of the everyday object.

Feldmann's exhibition at the Belfast Exposed gallery consists of this single work. The gallery is painted dark grey apart from one wall, which is white. Between the viewer and the white wall is a barrier of approximately 20ft of wallpaper-pasting trestle tables mounted with a sequence of intensively handmade lights constructed from coffee and biscuit tins – which we are warned 'get very hot' – with the wiring

Hans-Peter Feldmann
Shadow Play 2009



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and sockets on display. The spotlights illuminate nine square wooden platforms. Each platform, approximately a foot apart, bears nine found/handmade objects, toys, souvenirs and ornaments, including: a Pez sweet dispenser, a nodding rottweiler, Snoopy, a gun, the Eiffel tower, open shears, a Tyrannosaurus Rex, a weather vane, Cindy, Goofy, cupids and fairies. Each object sits on an individual mount and some are placed on top of small wooden poles, a nod to the shadow puppet tradition that dates back some 2,000 years to the Han Dynasty. Each platform rotates and is set up with a shared set of formal characteristics: a central object surrounded by a set of eight smaller objects. There is a thoughtful and considered repetition of objects that creates relationships and acts to build narratives between the separate platforms.

In between these carefully arranged platforms, the remainder of the table is a mess, strewn with detritus: plastic bottles, work gloves, bits of roughly broken wood – the bits which weren't used to elevate the coffee-tin lamps – staple guns, Stanley knives, masking tape, pliers, a hammer, all left by the installation team. The incongruous nature of the detritus creates a tension; it is as if the exhibition hasn't opened yet or that there wasn't enough time to clear up – we have been invited to view a work in progress. Feldmann makes no attempt to hide anything; in fact the opposite is true, he purposely invites the viewer to consider the whole of the process, the nature of its construction, the re-presented assortment of objects and their fleeting sequential illusions – the works' inherent transparency engages with an understanding of the artifice of representation.

As each platform slowly revolves, carousel-like, the shadows of the objects are cast against the white projection wall. These shadows weave in and out of each other, with each of the peripheral objects vying for dominance, merging into one another in perpetually shifting combinations before fading again. The figures and objects appear to introduce themselves, have brief encounters, and then travel on their individual journeys, creating both a magical and unsettling world. The shadows' enchanting dance is accompanied by the hypnotic sound of the motors powering the revolving platforms. The eye is pulled between the objects on the table, the fleeting narratives on the projection wall and the mechanics of the process laid bare. As time spent with the work passes, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify which element of the installation is most prominent. The only resting place for the eye is in the no man's land between the tables and the projection wall. The exhibition visitor is restricted from this area – denied an alternative view and the opportunity to become part of the shadow play. The tension between these elements brings the work together as a whole.

Shadow Play provides an insight into Feldmann's fascination with finding euphoria in the banal and the mundane. Through the considered presentation of the sets of everyday objects he has collected, Feldmann makes tangible the process of constructing representations of the world around him. A world where the simplest of interventions – the use of a spotlight – can transform the everyday object into an illuminating set of characters that populate fleeting and fragmented grand narratives, encouraging engagement with the artifice and multiplicity of representations and associations that their interactions create. ■

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