

Mathias Poledna

November 10 – December 23, 2004

Opening Tuesday, November 9, 7.00 to 9.00 pm

In his first solo exhibition at Galerie Meyer Kainer, Los Angeles-based artist Mathias Poledna will present a new film installation as well as a simultaneously-produced short film which will premiere as part of a special screening at the Austrian filmmuseum.

Poledna's work is informed by historical research, by archives and collections. In it he shares and develops his interests in the histories of avant-garde cinema, of modernism in architecture and design, of the intersections of popular culture and art, and of the post-conceptualist critique of institutions. His recent projects have taken the form of minimalist filmic reconstructions and stagings that suggest ephemeral moments from 20th century history, often-times from popular culture, an essential dimension of which is their spatial experience.

His new work, the 16mm loop installation "Version" (2004) follows this interest, however, rather than focusing on one particular period it evokes a whole range of often-times contradictory historical moments and aesthetic practices. It thus resembles a Rorschach pattern as it tests our relationship to historical memory and experience, to our experience of images in general.

At the center of "Version" is a film sequence of approximately ten minutes, shot in black and white, and showing a group of actors in a dance-like performance situation. Filmed without sound in the semi-abstract setting of a Los Angeles studio-stage, the scene unfolds in tightly framed shots. For the most part mere fragments of the performers' bodies are shown which lends them a quasi-sculptural presence. Their movements shift between vernacular, apparently improvised dance-moves and a few, extremely minimal choreographic patterns that undercut the seemingly unstaged character of what is happening. In the background of this initially simple scene a wealth of associations unfolds, ranging from Eadweard Muybridge's and Etienne-Jules Mary's movement studies in the late nineteenth century, to experimental films of the 1920s to 60s, to developments in minimalist aesthetics at the intersections of sculpture and dance in the 1960s.

"Poledna's methodological and formal aesthetic investigations into the relationship between subjectivity and the archive turn these into objects of an extremely stylizing art, without ever denying the nascent tension between timelessness and historicity. By reducing narrative moments to the structure of the loop and by systematically refusing to satisfy expectations of a realistic representation of history, he exposes himself to the charge that he dissolves the historical in the aesthetic. In fact, however, Poledna's installations react to a crisis in the concept of history and the precarious status of the historical "event," which they take as their point of departure. " (Tom Holert)

In contrast to "Version" which is shown exclusively as installation in the context of exhibitions, the short film "Sufferers' Version" (2004) is conceived specifically for one-time presentations in a movie theater or other filmscreening location. The film is based on footage created during the shooting of "Version" and is, in this way, itself a "version". Its title refers to the genre of music that accompanies the scene, a Jamaican "Sufferers' Song" by Junior Delahaye, recorded in the late 1970s and first released in the early 1980s. In a single static take, the film shows a minimally-choreographed dance fragment, that equally suggests a rehearsal scene, a camera test, an experimental setting or a musical revue broken down to its most basic components. "Sufferers' Version" will be shown on November 11 at the Austrian Filmmuseum at 6 pm in a special program together with "Meditation on Violence," a film by Maya Deren from 1948.

In the gallery's first room, a work is displayed which refers to individual aspects of both films and, to the same extent, creates distance to them. Presented in a vitrine is a small collection of records and covers by the US label Folkways, which during its existence from 1948 to 1986 produced more than 2,000 sound recordings, ranging from traditional ethnic music, spoken word, and folk music to scientific and documentary field recordings. The label's intention, according to its founder, Moses Asch, was to produce an encyclopedia cataloguing the "entire world of sounds."