



HELI KONTTINEN HELSINKI

The process of opening the door to enter a storefront on busy Uudenmaankatu street lets us escape the incessant noise of traffic and roadwork and be re-introduced to the realm of the playground. Inside, our eyes are drawn to two large projections of children playing. On the wall, we see a host of joyful faces filmed at close range by a tracking camera. Below it, we catch a bird's eye view of the playground on the floor. The children run to and fro, gather periodically, and then disperse. As it is late in the day, long shadows give clues as to what they are doing. The video images instill a sense of freedom. A window box overstuffing with flowers, the pleasant drone of the soundtrack, and the half-light of the gallery soothe us. As we survey the gallery's contents, we become aware of a woman in a lab coat watching us.

At this point, we learn that Heli Konttinen's *The Research Centre of Ordinary People* actually exists to gather data [Galleria Huuto; June 23—July 12, 2009]. The assistant invites us to take a series of tests with Maria Engel, who heads the research group of the Humontologic Society of Finland. The tests, which follow the principles and methods of scientific inquiry utilized by psychologists, have been designed to examine the influence of culture on the development of moral intelligence. Engel's Playground Theory proposes that the experience of four-year-olds informs adult behavior. She has stated, for example, that one of her concerns involves the incidence of bullying in the workplace. The study focuses on the subjects of Finland, Sweden, and Bali—societies noted for their high degree of well-being.

The request to take part in the tests ends many's exhibition experience. To go further demands courage and a willingness to give up our sense of control. The process begins with the completion of a brief survey that asks us to rate how well we know ourselves and whether we share the values of the people around us. Subjects then move into the gallery's second room where the artist—in the guise of Engel—carries out the examinations.

Pipechess, 2009, consists of a series of Rorschach images. The volumetric traits of these photographs of crumpled tissue paper structures challenge us in the making of associations. In *Blink, Blink*, 2009, people's faces flash before our eyes. From these briefest of glimpses we are to determine each person's profession. The third and final test takes us to the level of a four-year-old. Following the so-called M. Engel method, participants must visualize their dreams in a small sand-box on the floor.

From its disarming introduction, the exhibition rapidly changes tack. We move from reveling in the unfettered realm of childhood to reconsidering our values, the ways in which we judge others, and the things we most desire. Here, *Blink, Blink* stood out as the most unnerving task. In ascertaining the profession of men and women from various ethnic groups and social classes, I became shamefacedly aware of the unreliability of first impressions and the way prejudices, insecurity or past experience might influence my responses. At the same time, I thought of looking at art, making snap judgments, relying on instinct, and the rethinking that develops out of this activity.

Following the exhibition, the results of Engel's tests will be analyzed by a psychologist. The conclusions Konttinen draws from the analyses will eventually be translated into artworks. Much of the science we encounter on a day-to-day basis exists as facts taken out of context or promotes unusual discoveries. Konttinen sidesteps the phenomena of incomprehensible data and headline-grabbing stories and directs our attention to a common foundation. Her work throws light upon the ethical aspects of established behavior to reveal its idiosyncrasies. This makes her project a fascinating experience.

—John Gayer

RICHARD GRAYSON LONDON

The less you know about Richard Grayson on this occasion, the better. *The Golden Space City of God* is one of those exhibitions that reward Art & Language's infamous Spectator A, who goes straight to the art without reading the wall text, much more than Spectator B, who clings to the press release [Matt's Gallery; May 13—June 28, 2009]. Without too much context, the screening space, a makeshift community-center-type church hall, becomes the setting for an initially ambiguous video installation. On screen, a twenty-six-piece choir takes up pre-arranged seats and embarks on a forty-five-minute musical journey, which takes them from present-day earth to the eponymous Golden Space City via the Rapture, the ascent of the Antichrist, and a host of familiar tropes from Christian eschatology. If you had read the press materials, you would know that the text for the libretto, composed by the multi-talented Leo Chadburn, is based on the teachings of The Family International, formerly known as the Children of God cult.

But part of the pleasure of watching the video comes from uncertainty about its origin. The narrative begins with a description of financial chaos and political turmoil all too easily recognizable from recent events. The ensuing establishment of a new age of peace grounded in a single-currency, world-government utopia initially sounds like a typical left-wing fantasy: the artist's casting of the Antichrist as messenger might even suggest that Grayson is trying to rehabilitate him as a kind of communist anti-hero. The appearance of the Mark of the Beast—in the form of identity chips implanted into people—again overlaps Christian paranoia with widespread suspicion of surveillance technologies. But by the time we are told about the ascent of the righteous, with their amazing new powers and awesome bodies, we're already pretty sure that these are not views held by the artist, the language having degenerated into teenage comic-book fan-boy argot. Nevertheless, without knowing much about the identity of the singers, we begin to look for clues as to their affiliations in their t-shirts,

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Heli Konttinen, installation view of *Let hundred blossoms bloom*, 2009, flowers and box, 243 x 74 x 52 cm (courtesy of the artist; photo: Heli Konttinen & Niina Tanskanen); Heli Konttinen, installation view of *The Research Centre of Ordinary People*, 2009 (courtesy of the artist; photo: Heli Konttinen & Niina Tanskanen)