



NONKNOWLEDGE

DUBLIN, IRELAND

Nonknowledge contends with the limits of knowledge. It brings together unconventional forms of depiction that reveal censored narratives, provide alternate perspectives, and describe the indescribable, thus proposing that artists can lead us to both sides of the knowledge divide [Project Arts Centre; September 5—October 11, 2008]. This intriguing exhibition attempts to mirror both the precepts for knowing and its opposite. It also firmly places nonknowledge within the realm of potentiality, rather than assigning a negative position. In her curatorial essay, Tessa Giblin foregrounds the philosophical lineage of her premise by noting that Georges Bataille defines nonknowledge as an uneasiness resulting from probing propositions to their fundamental depths.

Two works focus on history. Joachim Koester's photo-text work *Morning of the Magicians*, 2005, unveils the story and material remains of an unauthorized and forgotten sect. It investigates the obscure history of Aleister Crowley's occultist community in Cefalù, Sicily, which was closed down by Mussolini in 1923, rediscovered by Kenneth Anger in the 1950s, and then forgotten again. A brief textual history authored by the artist accompanies a series of c-prints, noting the bleak conditions, drug use, tantric sex, and assignment of *Les chambres des cauchemars* [nightmare rooms] to new arrivals. The images convey the difficulty experienced by the artist in finding the Abbey of Thelema. Overgrown and virtually hidden by new development, the structure is hard to locate. The caved-in roof and severely deteriorated frescoes speak for themselves.

By contrast, Matthew Buckingham's slide projection *Image of Absalon To Be Projected Until It Vanishes*, 2001, focuses on the complexity and contradictions of a national hero, the twelfth-century Danish Archbishop and crusader Absalon. While the statue proclaims his valor, we would now see him as the embodiment of cultural and religious intolerance: he was given a fishing village as a gift for his efforts and built a castle from confiscated wealth. Contending that this commemorative statue warrants symbolic de-materialization, Buckingham offers non-violent restitution. His project

inventively subverts the monument's intended authority.

Tine Melzer approaches narrative from an entirely different angle in *The Readingmachine/Lesemachine /De Leesmaschine/La machine à lire/La maquina de leer/La macchina da leggere*, 2007-ongoing. Presented on a pedestal, this multilingual mini-library initially pretends to offer a range of stories when, in fact, it offers only one. What's more, the story fills only one page, despite the fact that it is housed in various green bindings of assorted sizes. Besides the title page, the one-page story, and the occasional quote or dedication, the rest of each book is blank. But no two texts are identical, which I realized as I read all of the English volumes. Each has been cleverly rewritten. The French and German volumes confirmed the experience. The story tells of a person who is obsessed with the idea of reading, who read before learning how to walk, and who wants to read every book in existence, not to acquire knowledge, but merely to read. This person thinks the "rules of classification discriminate one book over the other" and finds it easier to read than to give up, despite the impossibility of this task. For a brief time, picking up volume after volume, I felt like that person. It was as if I knew nothing. Engaged in this senseless act, I became unaware of the world around me.

Benoît Maire's deceptively simple sculpture *L'objet de singe, négatif* [Object for Monkey, Negative], 2007, explores the relationship between the known and the seen. It consists of a vertical sheet of dark Perspex and three white stones. Here, objects and space are conditioned by reflection and extension. As such, the work demonstrates that what we know sometimes differs from what we see. Artur Zmijewski's video installation *Singing Lesson 2*, 2001, provides an aural backdrop to the exhibition. In this compelling piece, deaf teenagers sing Bach—a highly distorted musical expression if ever there was one—highlighting the limits imposed by skill and training. Despite the absence of acceptable harmony, melody, and rhythm, this poignant work exudes an honesty and sense of joy that override its musical shortcomings.

Lamentably, Zmijewski's equally gripping second work, in which a Huntington's sufferer recites a selection of Shakespeare's sonnets, suffers from its placement in the noisy lobby just outside the gallery. Maaïke Schoorel's virtually monochromatic painting *Bed*, 2005, and Lee Welch's *The Winter Journey*, 2008, two nearly empty bookshelves projecting obliquely from a wall, round out the exhibition, but add little in terms of visual or conceptual interest.

Nonknowledge shatters many assumptions, from reading and music to history. Drawing attention to the unendorsed, the contentious, the unskilled, and limits of our perceptive abilities, it re-invigorates the familiar by liberating information, which adds depth and a sense of possibility. It also reminds us that alternatives always exist. Most importantly, caught up in the disquiet of this experience, we are urged to consider both the nature of knowledge and the nature of the knower.

—John Gayer

ABOVE: Tine Melzer, *The Readingmachine / Lesemachine / De Leesmaschine / La machine à lire / La Maquina de leer / La macchina da leggere*, 2007-ongoing, books, dimensions variable (courtesy of the artist)