

Shimabuku  
PRESS

Flash Art  
Summer 2016

REVIEW: SHIMABUKU, THE SNOW MONKEYS OF TEXAS  
by Eli Diner

## John Miller

Richard Telles / Los Angeles

"Sometimes it's hard to keep up the facade of 'being a person,'" reads a PowerPoint slide in John Miller's exhibition "Relations in Public." This work, *Reconstructing a Public Sphere* (2016), introduces an autobiographical bent to the show, otherwise comprised of a straightforward continuation of his grisaille, Dibond and Gatorfoam cutout paintings of pedestrians. The PowerPoint charts the artist's move to Battery Park City right before 9/11, and recounts the confused public space of the neighborhood in the aftermath of the attack. The area became a tourist magnet, while spatially it was marked by public artworks bizarrely abutting somber memorials to the tragedy.

Battery Park is home to one of the highest concentrations of public art in the world, from Fritz Koenig's damaged bronze sculpture *The Sphere* (1971) to Martin Puryear's steel *North Cove Pylons* (1995). Unlike Maya Lin's 1982 *Vietnam Veterans' Memorial* or Peter Eisenman's 2003 *Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe*, the park is a space that intertwines memorialization with real estate development and riverfront leisure space. According to Miller, "fantasy and memory collude against remembrance."

Miller makes clear that the show's street portraiture, an extension of his decades-long "Middle of the Day" photo series, owes something to sociologist Erving Goffman's notion of "intention displays": "The individual makes himself into something that others can read and predict from." The show's five painted groupings of pedestrians, parents and poorly camouflaged Europeans are cropped out completely from their Battery Park City surroundings, leaving only a range of casual, jocular and wandering expressions.

If, as Miller puts it, "a photo eradicates memory," then in the removal of his bystanders from their urban context, he questions the kind of self-redaction necessary for participation in mediated public spaces.

by Darius Sabbaghzadeh

## Shimabuku

Freedman Fitzpatrick  
Los Angeles

Simple pleasures and little marvels have long preoccupied Shimabuku. Favorite subjects include food and animals. While the work often both documents and prompts a roving international itinerary, he brings a quirky poetics—rather than Romantic enthrallment or anthropological scrutiny—to investigations of nature, travel and local customs. A quiet and comic re-enchantment of the world.

The titular subjects of "The Snow Monkeys of Texas," the artist's first solo show in the U.S., are the descendants of macaques imported from Japan to a Texas ranch, in 1972, as exotic curiosities. His emphasis, however, is not so much on the extrinsic as on adaptation—how subsequent generations, raised far from their natural habitat, have made a home amid the dust. They eat cactus. They've Americanized, he says.

In the video *Snow Monkey Chow*, 2016, a still shot frames a pickup truck, its bed filled with boxes of bananas and bags of carrots. Over a couple minutes, monkeys come and go, devouring the produce and jostling with escalating physicality. Amid the ruckus, we catch glimpses through the back window of the truck, where the faces of a couple men can just barely be made out—a partial image that seems to distill Shimabuku's concern with the mysteries and pleasures of traversal and encounter.

The centerpiece of the exhibition is *Do snow monkeys remember snow mountains?*, 2016, a twenty-minute video that, again, consists of an unmovable shot in which monkeys come in and out of frame. Here the action centers on a heap of crushed ice that the artist deposited in a stretch of arid landscape. The monkeys pace around the pile, picking at it, eating shards. We witness the social—and power—dynamics of this primate community play out around the strange and diminishing mound of ice. It's mesmerizing at times. Yet the simple video simultaneously encourages and undermines anthropomorphic allegories of atavism and memory, displacement and defamiliarization. For all we know, they've seen ice before.

by Eli Diner

## The Natural Order of Things

Museo Jumex / Mexico City

Entering Museo Jumex, a pulsating arteriek with a robotic female voice on a black monitor, designed by Dexter Sinister, introduces "The Natural Order of Things."

This complex presentation of Colección Jumex adopts a taxonomic approach to reflect on the museum as a repository of knowledge and power as well as on the art collection as a process of accumulation in late capitalism. A number of works address the exhibition's thematic. Adriana Lara's *Art Film 1: Ever present yet ignored* (2006), shot within a fictional art exhibition, signals the ideological crisis underlying the social function of art objects and the exhibition as a site of consumption. Casting the spectator as artist and the therapist as curator, Pedro Reyes' *Museum of Hypothetical Lifetimes* (2011) invites the viewer to illustrate her personal life as an exhibition by choosing and positioning objects in a scale model of a hypothetical museum.

Architects Pedro & Juana impose a cruciform Palladian layout onto the architectural fabric of the building. Spanning two floors and subdivided into eight "orders," the exhibition construes over 100 works into thoughtful critical configurations while drawing attention both to the international scope of the collection and its receptiveness to art produced in Mexico after the mid 90s. In the manner of artifacts, the objects are identified by numbers and posted in open dialogue with the interpretive wall text, a brilliantly edited postmodern roller coaster in which Karl Marx and Michel Foucault, Colin Rowe and Antonio Gramsci, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Adolf Loos, among others, converse in a non sequitur of quotes.

However ambitious these constructs might aspire to be, instances of artworks resonating with one another are rare. Despite the reference to fictional classificatory strategies such as those of Marcel Broodthaers or Claes Oldenbreg, the exhibition lacks the lightness of touch and lyrical "insincerity" that characterized those artists' ingenious parodies of the museum as institution.

by Silvia Sgualdini

From top:  
John Miller  
Untitled (2016)  
Courtesy of the Artist and  
Richard Telles Fine Art,  
Los Angeles  
Photography by Marten Eider

"The Natural Order of Things"  
Installation view at Museo  
Jumex, Mexico City (2016)  
Courtesy of Museo  
Jumex, Mexico City  
Photography by  
Matz Bornowky

Shimabuku  
Snow Monkey Stance (2016)  
Courtesy of the Artist and  
Freedman Fitzpatrick,  
Los Angeles

