

LAURA BARTLETT GALLERY

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NINA BEIER LONDON

Nina Beier's practice is like an extended version of Chinese whispers: each work undergoes a process of transmission and mediation that results in fragments, snippets, and oblique echoes of what might have been the starting intention. In *What Follows Will Follow*, Beier presents a series of wall-based modified found works that attempt to contain both their starting and ending points—a set of narrative closed-circuits [Laura Bartlett Gallery; September 16—October 23, 2010]. *Portrait*, 2010, comprises five frames holding various bits of cloth—denim, cotton, slight variations of black and dark blue—that turn out to be the work jeans, socks, shirt, and jacket worn by the framer on the day he made the frames. A similar circular trail is left in *The Broken Ear Restored*, 2010, a poster of the cover of Hergé's 1945 Tintin episode *L'Oreille Cassée* torn to small pieces and reassembled. Slanted but still recognizable, the reconstituted image forms a neat analogy, mirroring the graphic story's own narrative arc, which follows a stolen South American "sacred tribal object" of "no intrinsic value" through a series of copies and forgeries, and ends up with its repatriation to a Belgian museum of ethnography where the smashed original is patched together. For the most part, it seems that Beier is happy to retell the winding, knotted parable of the snake eating its own tail, leaving us to ponder on its curious symmetry.

The stand-in is a recurring figure in the show as Beier gives us parts to reference another, absent whole. Printed after images culled from an image-bank, two photographs present body parts: the extended, torch-bearing upper arm of the Statue of Liberty sprouting from a café roof and a giant foot sculpted from marble. The series *Closing Arguments*, 2010, is a set of posters that each advertise an exhibition of posters, whose frames are sandblasted to evoke the crystalline appearance of stained glass. *Same Old Same Old*, 2010, a verbal recounting by gallery staff to visitors, also appears in the exhibition's checklist. My version, however, is pulled from the press release: a short paraphrasing of a scene from Lewis Carroll's novel *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, 1893, in which a mysterious foreigner boasts of his nation's achievement of a map exactly to scale with the country itself. Deemed unpractical, the country came to

serve as its own map. Drawing on this synecdoche, Beier pushes at the artwork's metaphorical capacity, questioning what we can glean from the shard. More precisely, though, she suggests that even if an artwork simply represents, relocates or is identical to something, it still carries—as artwork—the latent and portable potential of metaphor.

The gallery's basement space is scruffy and unswept. Here, the gray pigment of *Dust Painting*, 2010, clings to our shoes to make footprints on the stair's reflective metal surface. But the piece does not produce a sense of self-reflexive action or an awareness of our own movements. Instead, our body disappears into the ghostly presence of the bodies implied in the photographs and clothing elsewhere in the show. Beier seems to have taken on both the conceptual critique of the artwork and the poststructuralist critique of the author, while managing the feat of making discursive work that does more than sound good on paper. Her work, though, still relies on presence—the anchor of the physical—to then speak of its opposite. Each piece is uncertainly in the present, hovering between the past tense—as document and trace—and the conditional tense—as a body that could be represented by this object. Ultimately, *What Follows Will Follow* offers a self-portrait of the contemporary artist as a set of diffuse sites of engagement, a cumulative assemblage of producers, mediators, and consumers amongst which *things happen*, but from which meaning is absent and endlessly deferred.

—Chris Fite-Wassilak

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Nina Beier, detail of *What Follows Will Follow*, 2010, print on demand posters, frames, 42.4 x 33.4