

GALERIE ANDREA CARATSCH

PRESS RELEASE

JOHN M ARMLEDER – Again

August 30 – September 27, 2008

Again, aka *Kronenhalle*, is the latest exhibition by John Armleder, drawing on a radical system of displacement, delegation and sabotage of the legitimacy of the status of creator.

This series addresses at random questions of the *ready-made*, the hand of the creator, the signature, the exhibition space or even the very subject of the exhibition, the identity of the object on display, displacement or transfer and also the oft-revisited theme of de- or recontextualisation, of adaptation or appropriation and of *déjà vu*.

Some of the artist's better-known past works have already addressed this precise debate.

One might mention a series of *Furniture Sculptures*, for example. A 1987 piece (FS 172) (ill. 1) is the result of a visit to an antique shop, where the artist ended up buying one of the two shelves displaying more than 25 second-hand chairs, in order to arrange the furniture in the same way in a neighbouring gallery. Another similar shelf remained visible in the antique shop. In this spirit, and even more closely related to *Kronenhalle*, the artist exhibited a faithful copy of a fitted changing room with mirrors from the New York tailor Brooks Brothers, *uptown*, in a *downtown* gallery (FS185, 1988) (ill. 2). So the replica could be seen at the same time as the original. The intensifying argument of the mirrors surely represents an ingenious touch of pleasure added by the artist. The three standing rolls of carpet (FS 234, 1990 – with Sylvie Fleury) (ill. 3), are remnants, sold off in a shop visited by the artist as he was acquiring other materials for an exhibition. Just as his son Stéphane suggested the piece from Brooks Brothers to him because it seemed that the object already (*pre-production*) looked like one of his works, the artist took to heart the remark by Sylvie Fleury, who pointed the rolls of carpet out to him as being one work of his exhibition. Here, as the artist put it, he had finally produced a work in which he had no part in. It had not been his idea, he had not made it. Other pieces result from similar working methods. Having spotted a bench at the entrance to a museum covered by a jumble of children's clothes during a school visit, Armleder later ended up acquiring the bench and exhibiting it in a neighbouring museum under a pile of clothes of the same type and adding two skateboards underneath, as in the original situation (FS 237, 1990) (ill. 4 & 5). By a sort of ironic verification, the piece was then acquired by the museum that had originally owned the bench and where, in a flash, the work was conceived. Other *Furniture Sculptures* are made according to these principles, such as those reproducing the interior architecture of the American diners of the fifties (FS 196, 1988, for example) (ill. 6), or arranging a jazz drum kit on a base ready to be used or, instead, as it is displayed in a shop window (FS 168, 1987) (ill. 7 & 8).

No doubt even more radical were Armleder's interventions, such as that held at the Museum am Joanneum in Graz in 1991, where for one sculpture he simply moved the usual bench provided for visitors, placed parallel to the wall of the hall. All the artist did was to push it very slightly, imperceptibly in fact, to a diagonal. A wall label indicated the work in the proper way, despite which the visitors still searched for it all around. On the day following the preview, the cleaners straightened the bench out as usual. The wall label remained. At the artist's request, the curator did not intervene again. In the catalogue of the artist, this work is registered in those two variants. Armleder has been creating pieces of this kind since the end of the sixties.

In 2008, John Armleder has produced three major pieces of this type; a monographic exhibition was devoted to each.

John Armleder: Jacques Garcia at the Swiss Institute in Paris (on the initiative of Nicolas Trembley, 18 May to 28 September 2008) gave him the opportunity to put a long-held plan into action: to invite a creator to produce an exhibition with complete independence and no particular instructions, the results of which would ultimately bear the signature of John Armleder. In this case, a decorator and interior designer with a stylistically emblematic signature were invited to take over the *white cube* at the Centre's gallery and convert it to his design. Jacques Garcia had the required finesse to adhere completely to the concept, delivering a bourgeois interior that was more "Garcia" than "Garcia". The definition of creator crumbles as it sticks to the surfaces leading to its very depths. If some saw in this presentation a complete version of the *Furniture Sculptures* characteristic of John Armleder, others sank into the sofas of the lounge to await the expected petits fours from Ladurée... Others even asked what floor the Swiss Institute was on, believing that they had stumbled into the private apartment of a collector of photographs by Helmut Newton and Araki, and paintings by George Condo or ... John Armleder. The critical interpretation of the work, the exhibition and the site of the exhibition in general, intrinsic to the event, presented itself without the slightest prompt. It was up to the visitor to decide its scope. The complicity of the artist with his past, influenced by John Cage and close to Fluxus, is thus more clearly on display than any theory on the deviance of the spectacle (ill. 9).

This summer, a new space was opened in Lugano, by the name of *Laboratorio – Kunsthalle Lugano*, a former apartment of modest size. Armleder staged the inaugural event there. Resisting any reproduction of the domestic context, he asked the people in charge to look for a pictorial site in the town. The only instruction here was to reproduce a typical and popular amateur fresco characteristic of a pizzeria, a butcher's shop or a public market. If need be, it could be adapted a little, in the same style, to the surfaces available in the gallery. The principal strategy here is indeed to "remake" in the same place – or its vicinity. In this case, the decision was made to reproduce the front of a cheese shop and a butcher's. The wall signs of these shops, emblematic of the old town, were reproduced as they were. A bunch of salami was added as a trompe l'oeil. One might almost call it vernacular painting. And once again, in the spirit of the synoptic effect of the Brooks Brothers piece described above, two audiences bustled about in front of the same representations without realising it and for different reasons; some to choose a sausage and others wondering why Armleder had taken to painting them (ill. 10).

Again (ill. 11), finally, is the result of all that. The fresco frieze that graces the main space of the gallery seems to be the only object in the exhibition – whereas the gallery is the exhibition itself. Indeed, what one must understand is that the gallery is *also* on display; its entrance corridor with the activities of the reception and secretarial staff, the people working and their “accessories”, the foyer with its white walls and absence of works, and the main space. Or even, behind the concealed door, the management office and the storeroom... For Armleder, clearly, an exhibition is at once inert and active. It is an object and at the very same time an event. The fresco echoes the painting that graces the main hall of the brasserie Kronenhalle, across the street. It is an exact copy of the design without the aged finish.

The subject, arms and sayings in Gothic lettering, is reproduced in full. As in Lugano, one of the themes is that of mural painting, a more or less ornamental covering. It makes sense as a sign or decoration *in situ*, at least in an immediate interpretation. It is a kind of giant wall label, a layout describing the history of the place itself, a comment on its function or its users. In a sense, it involves a functional pictoriality. Displaced, painted for the sole purpose of being exhibited, the fresco gains as much as it loses. It is of course an allegory that the artist enjoys. When it has nothing more to say to us, this painting takes on its full meaning. Or at least a meaning other than that which led to its creation in the first place. One might also say, on a more comical note, that John Armleder’s painting style with its abstract and geometrical reputation takes a turn here with no forewarning of the bend ahead! The choice of the Kronenhalle, whilst geographically logical, suggests itself in several ways – anecdotally no doubt, not that this bothers the artist a great deal, for the place in question is the eternal rendez-vous in this city of a certain society to which many art lovers belong, almost a site of culture and tourism, whose walls beneath the fresco in question are covered with paintings – but even more so by virtue of its quality as a pictorial object *acquired* to a point where it is invisible or catches the eye as a distraction. Indeed, in decorating there is no need to draw attention to the main subject, unlike a concert, for example, where the recital of some kind or another is always central. In fact, at the brasserie, people eat and converse, and it is in the moments of boredom that they begin to dream and observe their surroundings, which is when the décor shows its effect. If everything is taken away except the scenery, this changes everything on the menu. In fact, the menu is no longer itself. That has always been one of the principles of exhibiting. *Again* is quite clearly a demonstration of it, but also a commentary. The likely to-and-fro of the users from one site to the other will only substantiate the facts of it all the more. It will also produce the effect of *déjà vu*. This has been a recurring theme for the artist, and quite a few others, over these past decades. It is, by John Armleder’s very intention, a slippery slope onto which he throws himself for no good reason. He has long maintained that invention is not the preserve of an individual creator but the collective product of an era, a context or a culture, and that one individual will always be a fine substitute for another in order to accomplish these exemplary tasks. Nevertheless, each person cultivates a memory. Often their own. Memory itself acquires a considerable stock of available ideas. Beyond the usual task of classification and description, reproduction is a process of permanent invention supported by an aesthetic restlessness, as one can see for example in the work of Ernst Heckel, an artist who fascinates Armleder. Reproduction is a construct that involves a sense of order. Pure and simple appropriation seems to dissolve this necessity or to relegate it

elsewhere into, let us say, a theory. Here, John Armleder's work seeks to be seen as hybrid and ambiguous. It is neither a copy nor an appropriation. It is not a memory. Déjà vu is nothing here except an epiphenomenon. It is not quite a work of John Armleder, but it is not really anyone else's either. John Armleder would perhaps like it to be the work of the visitor, the viewer. But one day they will be sure to consult the organs they have extracted from the disembowelled cultural wildlife, drawing from them a meaning and reassurance of a permanent future.

So in that case it would be nothing less than a platform.

But is it entirely reasonable to see anything in it but the artist, or a painted frieze, already painted. *Again.*

(Bis)

Willy Parker, Positano 2008

The gallery is open from Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
and on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.



(ill. 1) „Furniture Sculpture 172“, 1987 woodshelf and 27 chairs, ca. 180 x 1000 x 100 cm (70 7/8 x 393 2/3 x 39 2/5 in.)



(ill. 2) „Furniture Sculpture 185“, 1988 with Stéphane Armleder, wood, mirrors, electrical light and two Brooks Brothers suits, 220 x 127 x 71 cm (86 3/5 x 50 x 28 in.)



(ill. 3) „Furniture Sculpture 234“, 1990 with Sylvie Fleury, Three rolled carpets, h. 228 cm (89 3/4 in.)



(ill. 4) „Furniture Sculpture 237“, 1990, Acrylic on canvas, bench, skateboards and children clothes, 400 x 100 x 200 cm (157 1/2 x 39 2/5 x 78 3/4 in.) Collection Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève.



(ill. 5) Detail of „Untitled (FS 237)“ 1990



(ill. 6) „Untitled (Furniture Sculpture)“, 2003, Dimensions variable,
Collection Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris



(ill. 7) „Furniture Sculpture 168“ 1987, Drum set on enamel painted wooden base,
Base: 200 x 200 x 15 cm, Drum set: h. ca. 150 cm (59 1/10 in.)



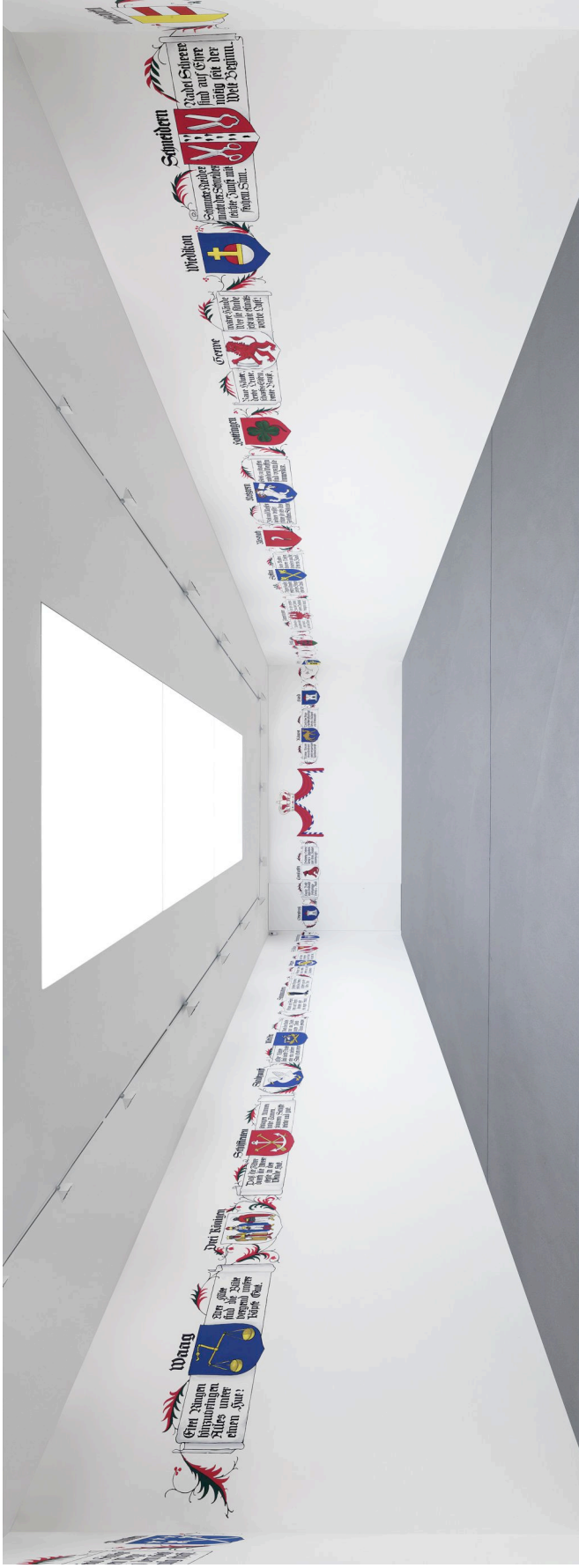
(ill. 8) „Furniture Sculpture 162“ 1987, Acrylic on canvas and drums,
82 x 400 x 15 cm (32 1/4 x 157 1/2 x 5 8/9 in.)
Collection Hubert Newman, New York



(ill. 9) Installation View, „John Armleder: Jacques Garcia“ at the Swiss Institute, Paris, 18.05. - 28.09.2008



(ill. 10) „Next Door I“ and „Next Door II“ 2008 Wallpainting, Dimensions variable. Installation view „Next door“ at the Laboratorio-Kunsthalle in Lugano, 14.06. – 13.09.2008



(ill. 11) "Again (Kronenhalle)" 2008, Wallpainting, Dimensions Variable, Installation view at Galerie Andrea Caratsch, Zürich