

YAMASHITA + KOBAYASHI

Infinity, 2006

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 VIDEO. 4'38"
 COURTESY RASCHE RIPKEN, BERLIN

Appropriately, the exhibition curators have quoted Camus saying, on the subject of modern man, that “there is no punishment as terrible as useless and hopeless labour”. Postmodern man reviews this statement, and, from within the realm of absurd humour, invests useless labour with the tasks of paving the way to the unlikely. Only he who takes practices in the absurd is capable of conquering the impossible, sentenced Unamuno. Because of these metaphysical and existentialist resonances, absurd humour might well be the very essence of humour, and the only kind which offers the human being a path towards overcoming his own condition.

The place of absurd humour in contemporary art is located at the crossroads of two events; in the first place, the embracing of popular culture by the art discourses and formats. Postmodernity, in its search for alternatives to the most rational orthodoxy, championed the recuperation of experiences related to sensory conditions (taste, hearing, smell) which, in ethnographic terms, belong to the pre-human stage. Dance (let us recall the “Club culture” explosion), song (one can’t open an exhibition without a live gig these days) or comedy, have been unleashed in order to nowadays become a part of the equally elitist but much wider perceptual repertoire of art practices. On the other hand, currently there is a manifest infantilisation of the artist’s discourse, both in form and in contents. The

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concepts of mobility, connectivity, and ubiquity, and the images of a consumers' society, inoculate a behaviourism which no-one is safe from: *Forever young, I want to be*. Physical and mental maturity are a double-edged sword. Drawing and humour, as a synonym for spontaneity and adolescence, are recurrent under this social and aesthetic pressure. This could explain the reason for the current success, in the art circuit, of the amorphous, childish drawing, an impostor of spontaneity.

Yamashita+Kobayashi work with a sense of humour which couldn't be further removed from the aesthetic of apparent carelessness. Love relationship, urban neuroses, or evasion, are some of the issues delicately alluded in their works, with a muted sense of humour which comes very close to the absurd in the sense of the realisation of an effort which precedes absolute infertility. Effort is one of the concepts that buttress the creative process of this artist couple. Pieces like *1000 Waves* (counting and enumerating the sea waves up to 1000), *Candy* (licking, over 6 months, a sweet the size of a football until it reaches the size of a green pea), are representative of the emphasis on the development of labours with a normally sterile and anecdotal objective. So much for so little in a capitalist society such as the one around is a rotundly anti-system gesture.

It took 5 days of obsessive walking to trace the symbol of infinity on the grass of a park. The path left after their stroll is similar to the so called "Desire Paths" which we draw in cities, short cuts to speed our transit, but also gestures opposed to the will of the authorities, who trace less convenient itineraries for us. On Flickr, there is a

group dedicated to compiling images of these paths (*Desire Paths*). But it was Bachelard that set a precedent to this concept, in *The Poetics of Space*, where he examines architecture and urban and domestic spaces from the vantage point of spontaneous gestures derived from use. These paths cover the Universe, he says, like our own, practised designs, calibrated to the use of our inner space.

Poetics and need are the two main elements that inform the concept of "Desire Path". Yamashita + Kobayashi fight the latter (the need) with its opposite: folly. And this act of refusing use triggers the first element: poetics. The "Desire Path" of Yamashita + Kobayashi is that of practising infinity and conquering the unconquerable.