

Ralf Brög: xf part 4: JB (canonic)
Drop City, Newcastle
5 - 28 November 2014

Review by Tom Hopkin

For its inaugural exhibition Drop City presents the fourth part in a series of works by Ralf Brög. 'xf part 4: JB (canonic)' (2014) distils Brög's practice to an architectural intervention, appropriated audio and spatial qualities, explored both physically and aurally. The concern for multi-platform and cross-media approaches in the communication of art is of paramount importance to Brög, and the audio in this work is an appropriate and canonical locus point.

The "JB" of the title refers to John Baldessari and within the space we hear his dislocated voice singing Sol LeWitt's '35 Sentences on Contemporary Art' (1969). Baldessari's rendition of LeWitt's theory is sung with deadpan formality to the tunes of popular and familiar songs. Consequentially, Baldessari playfully distorts the already hazy boundary between practice and theory in conceptual art, and the relations between text, audio, video and object. In this presentation of the audio from 'Baldessari sings LeWitt' (1972), Brög continues this process of redistribution with the phrases' original didactic qualities being diffused into a dialogic being.

The "xf" of this work provides the conceptual framework in which Brög's series can be viewed. The Xpanded Format (xf) is a process of interaction and transposition between different aspects of Brög's practice, taking the form of sculpture, painting, design, audio, architecture and publishing. This concept is partly embodied through X shaped modules that structure the space and house the audio. Consisting of MDF clad in under floor insulation, the open-ended form is balanced by this containing material. In previous manifestations of the "xf" series they have functioned as sculpture, architecture and support for other work. The uniformity of this object results in a continuing dialogue from one iteration to another, though operationally pliable, and standardised only within the access to material, they become a totem for this project. However, the concept exists, like LeWitt's, in language as well. This is best communicated through Brög's own mantra:

"sculpture as distribution as sculpture
distribution as sculpture as distribution

sculpture as magazine as sculpture
magazine as sculpture as magazine

sculpture as exhibition as sculpture
exhibition as sculpture as exhibition"

This, x as y as x, y as x as y, formula ushers in further concerns beyond the relationship between sculpture and other platforms. This inquiry is reminiscent of Leibniz's ontological supposition that there cannot be separate objects or entities that share all their common properties. There are evident flaws in such a statement, but issues of identity, relation and sameness are connoted.

The exhibition will also mark the launch of Brög's SITEmagazine 13: Objet Perdu. This lost object is presented in a multiplicity of forms in the publication, with the loss of knowledge following the destruction of the Library at Alexandria being the opening example. The almost utopian reverence generated when speculating about a loss such as this, finds a relationship in this case between the site, artist and artwork.

Drop City hints to the unattainable utopian dreams present in the mid-twentieth century, and Baldessari's presence marks a time where the idealistic potential of video was finding currency in this utopian field. Temporal and physical distance leaves us with little evidence of this misguided positivity, but Baldessari/LeWitt's utterances such as: "irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely illogically", hang in the air with nostalgia, portent and affection.