

VALIE EXPORT

VALIE EXPORT: METANOIA
Charim Galerie, Vienna
27 January – 3 March

Musicians do it all the time. In the later years of a successful career, even once-edgy bands (say, AC/DC, Led Zeppelin or Depeche Mode) will release a boxset – a collection of classic songs neatly reordered and packaged in a plastic vessel, with a snappy title and featuring new tracks or remixes. This is what Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT (the all-caps name dates to 1968, when Waltraud Hollinger adopted the pseudonym) appears to have done here. The set in question, called *VALIE EXPORT: METANOIA*, consists of 29 DVDs of videos dating from 1966 to 2010 and includes some of her groundbreaking work, like *TAPP und TASTKINO (TOUCH CINEMA)* (1968/1969/1989), in which EXPORT toured Austria wearing a small model of a movie theatre around her naked upper body, asking strangers to reach in and touch; and *Restringierter Code* (1979), a performance involving the interactions of a baby, a dog and an adult human.

A multitude of monitors forming, roughly, a semicircle around a high table in the centre of the gallery's first room displays all the films in the *METANOIA* boxset, with one video being specially featured in the front of the room on each day of the exhibition's run. On the table sits *METANOIA*'s clear Plexiglas box with one rounded side, the title emblazoned in thick black capital letters on the removable lid.

It's described as 'an independent piece of art', but the box is the least interesting thing in the exhibition. EXPORT remains a pioneer of feminist performance art, and here she shows an impressive array of performance videos, experimental films, structural movies and video poems, most on short loops of a few minutes. The works have been remastered, and it is fascinating to see how pieces from different decades (such as the lovely silent film *Selbstporträt mit Kopf*, 1966–7) interact on screens large and small. Eight monitors display the video of the day in multiple. The day I am there it is *Hauchtext: Liebesgedicht* from 1970, a 'breath poem' in which EXPORT exhales increasingly slowly and deeply for about two-and-a-half minutes, each screen tinging the black-and-white film a pastel colour, a result of the vintage monitors' distortion.

The show could have stopped here and been a rather fabulous miniretrospective. But no. EXPORT also displays a few works that feel like those bonus remixed tracks you never really listen to. Five pieces originating in 1973 but finished in 2011 or 2012 dot the gallery's rear two rooms. *Geometrisches Figurationen in Dünenlandschaft* (1) and (2) are black-and-white photographs of dune landscapes with wooden geometric sculptural elements mysteriously sticking out from them; two similar photographs were shown in a dark, blocked-off back room, where a red laser traced geometries on the images and floor. The laser show is so divergent from the films that one simply wonders... why?

Another question: why exhibit a boxset-as-art now, just as the same films are screening at MoMA in New York (which recently acquired a good number of EXPORT works)? Artistically and as an object, the compilation feels superfluous or distracting. Even financially it doesn't seem to make sense: the set was available at Charim in an edition of 29 until March 3 for less than €10,000 (the price has since risen to €25,000). In the end, *METANOIA* appears to be a strangely commercial product that cheapens rather than adds value to EXPORT's seminal oeuvre.

KIMBERLY BRADLEY

CLAIRE FONTAINE

Claire Fontaine:
M-A-C-C-H-I-N-A-Z-I-O-N-I (Machinations)
Museion, Bolzano
3 February – 13 May

If you've ever taken self-defence classes, you may know the feeling: you understand exactly what you're supposed to do, but you're still not doing it. Unless the brain commands an aggressive response and floods of adrenaline are released, violence can be paralysing. I guess the video *Situations* (2011) by 'ready-made artist' Claire Fontaine (founded in Paris in 2004 by Fulvia Carnevale and James Thornhill, who define themselves as Fontaine's 'assistants') plays along a similar edge. It appropriates a DVD course of street-fighting techniques and restages it in a white cube, using actors: a stout instructor demonstrates how to hit, punch, kick, choke and head-butt a potential antagonist in a couple of

moves, as if it was the easiest of tricks. He talks directly to the viewer, with a hint of ironical detachment, and closes each scene with a self-confident: "End of the story!"

The moral seems pretty clear: either understand the situation and act, or be a victim of it. By caricaturing the conceptual devices of art-by-instruction, from Duchamp to Kaprow to Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Do It* project, *Situations* also questions what an 'appropriate' reaction of an instructed art public should be. By offering practical advice, it tests the value of art, and in particular that of 'political art' – as Claire Fontaine's work is often framed – for its viewers. Is the mere fact of learning something on a theoretical level enough to assure us we'd be able to do it, or does it rather absolve us of the urgency of actually doing something about it, in the face of conflict?

Situations is here put in dialogue with a large, central piece, around which revolves the entire exhibition: *Untitled (3 x 3 Vinyl Foam)* (2012), a modular structure made of blue gym mats, like ersatz tatami, which visitors are welcome to use, possibly for practising their belligerent skills. This works as an ironic homage to the floor pieces of Carl Andre, whose solo exhibition preceded Fontaine's at the museum, and whose minimal aesthetic based on reiteration and viewer-interactive dynamics are recurrent points of reference in Fontaine's practice. The layout of the exhibition (which includes 15 works from 2005 to 2012) plays with symmetry, with pieces installed on opposite sides of the same space or in fraternal-twin couples, such as the neon sculpture *Foreigners Everywhere* (Italian version, 2005; German version, 2010). Also referring to Andre are two installations titled *Lever* (Italian version, 2010; German version, 2012), made of a long line of firebricks, wrapped in reproductions of the cover of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968) – as if suggesting that perpetual reference to the same old masters of thought causes dumbness, thick-as-a-brickness.

Another godfather of Minimalism, Donald Judd, is evoked by *Passe-Partout (Marfa)* (2012), a set of lockpicks and souvenirs from Marfa, a town now almost abandoned and largely owned by the Chinati Foundation. *Untitled (The Invisible Hand)* (2011) is a Newton's cradle – that popular executive's toy of the 1980s – engraved with the slogan 'Networking' and the Lehman Brothers logo. Retrofitted with electromagnets, it never stops demonstrating that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, while endlessly perpetuating a cycle of production and waste of energy (and assets). An ominous neon sign proclaims *Arbeit Macht Kapital* (2012, the title translatable both as 'Work produces capital' and 'Work Power Capital'): how art – and obviously Claire Fontaine's art too – could subtract itself from this mechanism remains an open question.

BARBARA CASAVECCHIA



VALIE EXPORT
METANOIA, 2012 (installation
view). Photo: Wolfgang Prummer.
Courtesy Charm Galerie, Vienna



Claire Fontaine
Arbeit Macht Kapital, 2012
(installation view, Museion,
Bolzano). Photo: Ottmar
Seehauser. Courtesy the artist,
Galerie Neu, Berlin, and T293,
Naples & Rome