

Art Review:

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In Romanian artist Ciprian Mureșan's first US solo exhibition, I caught myself thinking about E.H. Gombrich's 1960 art history classic *Art and Illusion*, an unfashionable book that could very well have appeared in the show alongside other volumes featured in the artist's pedagogically themed films and sculptural works. Addressing the question of style and mimesis, Gombrich recounts a little-known German artist's memory from the 1820s about a group of fellow art students—friends—out sketching in Tivoli. Each one was bent in youthful earnestness upon the faithful and objective rendering of the landscape. But when comparing their finished sketches, they discovered that, rather than displaying the objectivity of straightforward imitation, he works revealed immediately apparent individual styles, readable like each of their personalities.

The five artists featured in Mureșan's short film *Untitled (Monks)* (all works 2011) seem to succeed where their German predecessors did not. Playing the part of novices in a scriptorium, they are also engaged in a task of mimesis with pencil and paper. But rather than a scene from nature, these artists are drawing pages—image and text both—from Western art books, featuring artists such as Piet Mondrian, Joseph Beuys and Susan Hiller. The ironic negation of the modernist investment in the authentic mark, although a well-worn aspect of postmodern art, is addressed here anew through a post-Communist lens.

Mureșan came of age in the wake of the 1989 revolution, an adolescent at the time of the Ceausescu's violent demise. His brand of *ostalgie*—a German term meaning nostalgia for the Communist East—is filtered through the wry humour of postmodern trickster Martin Kippenberger. Indeed the most intriguing work in Mureșan's exhibition also serves as a touching homage to the late German artist. *Untitled (Kippenberger)* is a hypnotic ten-second animation featuring 120 unique graphite drawings of Kippenberger's 1994 installation *The Happy End of Franz Kafka's 'Amerika'*. The individualized style of each drawing, although clearly traced from a reproduction, becomes a rhythmic shimmering in tones of white and grey.

As with the facsimiles produced in *Untitled (Monks)*, the individual drawings used to make this time-lapse film are also displayed in the exhibition. But the fact that they do not appear on the checklist suggests that they are more like artefacts, remainders from the final works.

Style has become a vehicle for political reflection here. This is not the authentic autographic mark that surprised the nineteenth-century German students (an issue that must have seemed newly relevant to Gombrich with the meteoric rise of Abstract Expressionism in the 1950s). Instead, Mureșan knowingly aligns mimesis with the capitalist ideology of individuality. His drawing style is a demonstration in mannered facility that declares the emptiness of the individual mark. The drawn artefacts from the aforementioned films, as well as those used in the sculptural work *The Doomed City* and the film *The Invisible Hand*, look like exercises from a 'how-to; drawing textbook. This only serves to highlight Mureșan's ironic reflection on capitalist modernization as training in imitation for former Communist artists, *ostalgie* notwithstanding.

- Siona Wilson