

VALERIE SNOBECK

Simon Lee Gallery, London

Valerie Snobeck is ambitious about the reach of her art and the grasp of her audience. The American artist's first solo presentation in the UK meditated, by way of elusive analogies, on the expendability of natural resources and the iniquities of wealth distribution. While the conceptual dimension of her work was evident from the viewer's first encounter with the show's subdued formalism, its sensual qualities emerged more gradually, overturning initial expectations.

The exhibition had two main elements. The first consisted of seven groups of coloured images transferred to sheets of plastic by a process of lamination and separation. Applied directly to the wall so that to remove them would entail another act of stripping, each polyptych comprises six panels. In all but one of the sets, a single photograph is repeated, with tonal differences, on three panels, while the remaining panels feature chromatic *diminuendi* of a single colour.

Objects made up the second element. Five piano stools, collectively titled *Seeing the Breath* (2014), were placed at uneven intervals throughout the space with one adjacent to the gallery's window onto the street, as if obliquely corresponding with the outside world. On each of the stools' raised seats sat an ink-coated glass jug, assembled from broken fragments with glue and sutures. With their translucency pointedly obliterated, the jugs appeared melancholically beyond hope of ever storing contents securely. Elsewhere, leaning against a wall, was *Local/Non-Local 48* (2014), made up of 48 wooden dipsticks of differing lengths. The calibrated measurements were missing from the upper part of most of the sticks, diminishing their value for gauging depths, while the row of top ends suggested a linear graph of incremental dips and rises.

The printed panels set the aesthetic tone. These 'peels' are the product of separating a layer of plastic by hand from the poster-sized ink-jet print with which it has been thermally bonded. The peel retains a vestige of the original print on the reverse of the laminate, an area framed with fibres from the sacking on which it has been laid. The artist repeats the process twice with the same print; as progressively less ink remains, greater care and physical effort are required to yield successively paler traces of the original image.

The additional pressure required by each successive peel is as much a part of the work as the printed detail. Wrinkles multiply on the skins of later peels, registering the artist's movements at the time of making. Each six-part grid follows an identical pattern: the first peel of an image is top left; the second is placed bottom right; and the third and final pull necessitates a shift up to top middle.

Inherent in these recurrent instances of dismantling and depletion is the inevitability of exhaustion and extinction. Snobeck's choice of images is deliberate. Between 1972 and 1977 – years in which public concern about the economic consequences of diminishing global reserves went mainstream – the US

Environmental Protection Agency's 'DOCUMERICA' project invited freelance photographers to roam the country capturing impressions of 'environmental happenings and non-happenings'. The six photographs selected here reflect the broad interpretations of the mission: a boy panning for gold; a smog-damaged plant; marine algae from a dumpsite; residents of a poor neighbourhood awaiting its demolition.

Gallery information shifted the register of engagement with the works, contextualizing the photographs by giving source and time, and identifying the jugs placed on the piano stools as the Depression Glass distributed free or at low cost as tableware to North American families impoverished by catastrophic pre-war recession. By adding a further reference – to an earlier era of economic crisis – this information risked straining rather than enriching the show's hypothesis about the universal perils of poorly managed resources. But it also drew the present day into the mix; the International Monetary Fund recently claimed that the wealth gap was as wide in western economies today as it was in 1929.

With names like *Skin Tight*, *Revolving Layers* (*Tongue Kissing*) and *Those Eyes* (all 2014), the peels communicate the symbiotic continuity between man and his natural surroundings, perceived as integral to a sustainable society: standing apart is not an option. The artist reinforced this view with the exhibition's title – 'Le monde, le continent, la France, etc..., etc..., la rue de Bizerte, moi!' (The World, The Continent, France, etc..., etc..., Bizerte Road, me) – a comment made by Gilles Deleuze in the section of his *Abécédaire* (a series of interviews filmed between 1988–89) in which he reflects on the priorities of the political left. With this comment, the philosopher placed himself firmly in the lineage of everyday political responsibility, reaching from the distant horizon and eventually down to him.

MARTIN HOLMAN

1
Valerie Snobeck
Go Down with Flower, 2014, peeled
prints and burlap on plastic,
2.9 x 2.9 m

2
Burak Delier
Songs of the Possessed, 2014,
video still

3
Lorna Simpson
Momentum, 2010, HD video,
installation view, 2014

