
frieze

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Owen Kydd

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Owen Kydd, *Seat Cover*, 2013, video on 24-inch display screen

At first glance, some of the videos in Owen Kydd's recent exhibition 'Color Shift' resemble photographs as much as video art. The vertical orientation of the screens and the relative absence of movement or obvious static gives them a stillness that feels as much like light-boxes as videos. Momentarily, however, some intermittent or slight movement becomes apparent. The effect is uncanny – as if a detail from a still photograph has come to life.

His video *Retail Composition 2* (2012), for instance, depicts a spare arrangement of objects such as shelving brackets, a plastic bag and an accordion-like paper bell, all arranged on pegboard as if

in loose imitation of a derelict 99-cent store. The use of an implied grid, casual composition and basic, painterly markings (spray-paint, a brushy yellow spot and black magic marker drawing) suggests an analogue equivalent of a Photoshop project – similar, in a way, to his digitally constructed images nearby.

A tissue paper ‘bell’ sways ever so slightly on a loop, while a dangling string makes the most miniscule of movements, and a piece of blue plastic shopping bag flutters occasionally. As a signifier of the idea of a ‘moment’, a bell might be too obvious, except that this one is silent and the ‘moment’ that it signifies is perpetual and ongoing as opposed to a diminishing, momentary reverberation. Strangely, although it is self-consciously a studio contrivance it feels more like the mundane yet formally composed scenes which a street photographer such as Lee Friedlander or William Eggleston sought to capture. Similar to Andy Warhol’s ‘Screen Tests’ (1964–66), Kydd’s work defines video’s relationship to photography in terms of its nominal difference (movement), however slight, while his glacial looping updates Warhol’s embrace of relative stasis for the age of the animated GIF. In this context, even the tiniest of movements become an unlikely source of tension and visual interest.

Another work here also deals with the dichotomy of slick presentation and humble materials more directly. *Composition Warner Studio (on Green)* (2012) is a slow-motion loop of a black plastic rubbish bag cut into a single sheet and stapled to an outdoor wall in bright sunlight. Slowing down the flurry of movement gives each flutter and crease of the bag the weight of a discrete event. The bright highlights on the bag’s surface give it an air of contradictory permanence and solidity – not unlike the quasi-metallic sheen of silken fabrics in an Ingres painting. This elevates the essentially humble material in way that feels ironic given the relative expense of the sleek HD monitor and artifice of Kydd’s re-presentation.

Other videos here were collaged together digitally to arrive at similar effects. *Serpentine* (2013), for instance, is a somewhat glitchy and arbitrary digital composition – as if the various layers have not yet been convincingly arranged. A woman stands fidgeting in front of a rectangle filled in with a digital gradient effect. She curls and uncurls her fingers ever-so-slightly around her mobile phone while a chair floating above her shifts infinitesimally. These tiny movements are almost jarring amidst the otherwise familiar digital collage format and thus create a slippage between watching, waiting and looking that becomes almost meditative. This phenomenological quirk is one that Kydd – abetted by contemporary video technology – seems uniquely situated to explore. And, while a few of his videos feel a bit under-cooked (more like studio experiments than fully fleshed out works) this is, nonetheless, an impressive debut.

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