



Faculty of Liberal Arts & Sciences

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Arnaud Maggs: Les factures de Lupe. Susan Hobbs Gallery. Toronto

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GUNILLA JOSEPHSON Video still from *(Loco)motive* 1999

This survey exhibition includes eight videos, six installations and a sound piece produced in collaboration with Eve Egoyan. In the video *Venus Hedda* (2001) we see only nose and mouth, moving tantalizingly close to the camera, projected at an elongated angle high on the wall. We see the mouth again in *Wild Raspberries* (1998) as it plays teasingly with fruit matched in colour to her lipstick. Hedda's full figure emerges in *(Loco)motive* (1999), where—projected upside down on the ceiling—she rocks and swings on a rococo couch. Working like a train engine to gain momentum, she strains to leave the seat but never quite succeeds.

Red latex casts of this very couch, which evokes Josephson's memory of the solemnity of her grandparents' house in Sweden, are part of a work entitled *Don't breath don't think don't move don't blink* (1998) and also appear in the video *Meat Madonna* (2000). In the video, the figure peels the latex off the couch and wraps it around herself, playing with it as if it were a dancer's veil. The heavy material is a burden and the dancer struggles with it until, finally victorious, she stands on the couch with the "skin" beneath her feet.

This video's mating with material contrasts sharply with Josephson's recent *Crashbangsmash* (2001), where, instead, we witness the deliberate, arduous process of a hand taking an axe to a white wooden bench and destroying it. A further contrast is provided by *Happy Baby* (2001), in which a disturbing character called "Pious Woman" appears. Oddly monstrous in black, she sits playing with soap bubbles, waving her fingers in the air, with a frighteningly vacant look.

The video works are aptly juxtaposed with the installations. *Strange Brew* (2001) shows Hedda tangling with chairs, romping and stomping across the furniture, opposite an ornate mirror. She is in a carnivalesque frenzy with her skirt billowing indecently. It is paired with an installation entitled *My Drawing Room Furniture* (2001), which consists of a heap of four beautiful chairs, latex casts and a sofa, and *My Dinner with Hedda by Louis Malle* (2001), a wooden table that contains a gap through which towers a huge pile of 150 dinner plates.

Hedda's house is an amusing place where Josephson has us linger, but at its centre are chaos and schizophrenia.

CORINNA GHAZNAVI

Arnaud Maggs



We cannot create life, but we can suggest it. A few cloth scraps, some pocket litter, a battered notebook are all we need to hint evocatively—even convincingly—at someone's existence.

Writing, in this context, works better than photography. Record-keeping, no matter how casual, has a quasi-judicial status. Once written down, names, addresses, records of petty household transactions all seem to prove that this person or these people existed. A photograph only shows us what someone looked like, but the right piece of paper tells us who they were, where they lived, even what their job was. Word and photograph together, though, surpass either form taken on its own.

This combined persuasiveness drives the intrigue of Arnaud Maggs's images of detritus from late 19th- and early 20th-century France. His newest project in this series, "Les Factures de Lupé," shown this spring at Susan Hobbs Gallery in Toronto, comprises two large works of 36 photographs each. One of these pieces, *Recto*, shows invoices from



ARNAUD MAGGS *Les Factures de Lupé, Recto*
(1 of 3) 1999/2001 36 fuji crystal archive
photographs 51 x 41 cm each

the 1860s of purchases by the Lupés, an upper-class couple from Lyons. *Verso* depicts the same bills from the back, in an arrangement mirroring that of its companion piece.

The Lupés were not extraordinary and their receipts are unremarkable. Only the accidental discovery of their papers in a flea market prompted Maggs's interest in their finances. Judging from the evidence, as we almost instinctively do when presented with it in this way, their life was comfortable but not astonishing. Like many, they went to restaurants and bought furniture, jewelry and clothes.

Banality notwithstanding, we pore over these images, front and back. After all, these are photographs of written documents. In their detail, they must have something to tell us. So we inspect them obsessively, though they never divulge any family secrets.

The futility of this obstinate looking points to another aspect of Maggs's historical French projects. The images in each series depict the same subject from subtly divergent perspectives. In "Les Factures," for example, each photograph presents a slightly different view of the Lupés' existence. One

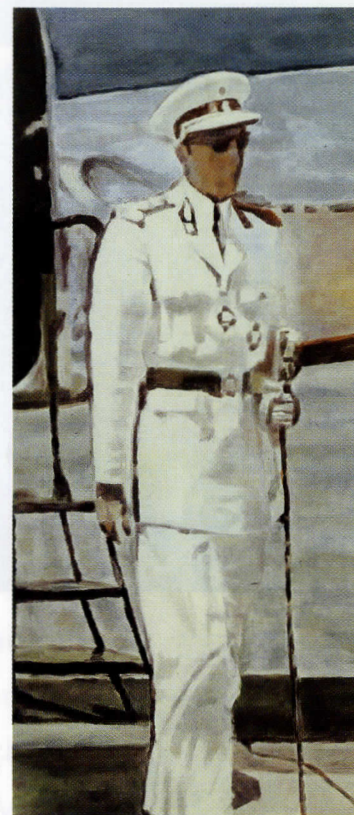
shows us where they ate, its neighbour tells us where they bought furniture, and so on. This working method speaks quietly of a hope that if one picture will not explain this family's life, perhaps two, five or 36 photographs will.

Our sequential looking plays out this hope. We stand a few inches away from the work, examining every bill, front and back, in a pursuit of significance, becoming more inspector than beholder.

This search for meaning is not all that holds us, however. There is also Maggs's incomparable colour. Like all of his projects related to the France of a century ago, it is paradoxically both lush and washed out. The lighting obliterates shadows and mitigates the discolouring effects of age, dust and water. Paper scraps become palettes from which Maggs produces colours subtly different from anything we have seen before. These striking hues distract us from the daily business that produced these papers and draw our attention instead to their unassuming beauty, which Maggs has found hidden in plain view.

CHARLES REEVE

Luc Tuymans *Mwana Kitoko* 2000
Oil on canvas 208 x 90 cm
Courtesy David Zwirner Gallery, New York



country to account for its repressive colonial past and its responsibility for Lumumba's death. On the day that the biennale opened, Tuymans's installation and its affront to national decorum was front-page news back home.

Topicality is not the usual companion of painting, but Tuymans had converted its remote, reflective arena into a means of lending new *gravitas* to his subject. The stories meant more turned into paintings, into objects where their dark contradictions were condensed into something simultaneous and alive. Tuymans painted, and, in painting, brought Lumumba back to life.

His point was to kill him again—with undeniable Belgian hands. The most compelling painting in the series is *Reconstruction*, based on a TV documentary reconstructing Lumumba's execution in January 1961. He paints the black limousines, their headlight beams, the ghostly whiteness of the tree under which the young prime minister was shot. It's a distant, withholding view, unemotional, except for its nighttime colour and broken paint handling. Tuymans has mastered a rough representational style. There's a bluntness to his images but it is a bluntness with an allegiance to fact. It is how he demonstrates that painting has no problem living up to the muddles we have made. — Richard Rhodes

Out There ◀◀

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