

This is Tomorrow Magazine

Gayer, John: *Academy of Tal R*

19 January 2018

this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

Museumpark 18-20, 3015 CX Rotterdam, Netherlands

Academy of Tal R



Title : Academy of Tal R Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

Date(s) : 14 October 2017 - 21 January 2018

Credit : Aad Hoogendoorn

Academy of Tal R

Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen

14 October 2017 – 21 January 2018

Review by John Gayer

The term 'Academy', which we now apply to institutions that provide higher education, pursue advanced research or dictate professional standards, derives from the name of

the garden where the philosopher Plato once taught. Its inclusion in the title for this mid-career retrospective, Academy of Tal R, effectively twists and undercuts the word's meaning. One step into the galleries packed with Tal R's hauntingly dreamy, very personal and richly polymorphous iconography signals a most freewheeling outlook. Though he tends to work in series and employs intermittently recurring motifs, his subject matter, compositional arrangements and application of materials evidences an approach that is anything but doctrinaire.

Tal R's career to date encompass painting, collage, kinetic and non-kinetic sculpture, artist books and furniture that reference Fauvism, 1980s German expressionism, outsider art and Lucas Samaras' fabric 'Reconstructions' produced in the 1970s amongst others. Of note is the ways in which his output embodies movement and represents space. Works such as 'Deaf Institute' (2016-2017), a maze-like structure of cramped hallways lined with dozens of tall pictorial panels, and 'Habakuk' (2016), a series of massive, semi-abstract depictions of railroad freight cars painted over a substructure of thickly layered, vertically oriented sections of narrow fabric, relay impressions that are filmic or suggest zoetropic flickering. In contrast, 'Lords of Kolbojnik' (2002) and 'Adieu Interessant' (2005-2008) focus on depicting radial flow. The visual detritus – cut-out paper patterns, erotica, reflective beads and stickers, fragmented drawings and more – concentrated at the perimeter of the canvases make for mesmerizing visual explosions.

Spatially, the work is more intriguing. Take 'House of Prince' (2000-2004), which suggests a giant mosaic or sculptural relief. Its nearly 200 panels (or tesserae) alternately project forward and recede. Surfaces covered in bottle caps, light bulbs or string further amplify this disparity. Then, in the large main gallery multiple independent paintings set out on two tiers of rails propose an arena that virtually envelopes the viewer. The arrangement complicates reading the work as it forces the eye to track horizontally, up and down, and zigzag across the space in the assessment of diverse subject matter. What, for example, is one to make of 'De Bay' (2000), a cartoony quartet of casually posed penises engaged in conversation that is situated below 'November' (2015), an Odalisque, next to 'Moon' (2014), a modestly scaled immodest view of a female's back side, or one place away from the mysterious landscape 'Aerodynamik Sun' (1999)?

At times Tal R deploys thin washes of colour to create ghostly scenarios, a quality that informs both the presentation of his sculpture and the 'Habakuk' series of paintings. Cloistered in a crepuscular space brimming with jingling, clanking and listless movement, his lumpen figures are spotlit, which highlights their odd features and overstates them by casting immense shadows on the walls. Surprisingly, one of these walls – a temporary support - also supports the 'Habakuk' series. Devised by curator Sjarel Ex, the translucent cladding applied over the makeshift framework permits the transmission of light and shadow. Viewers in one space, therefore, are made aware of the other space and vice versa. This feature mirrors and augments themes of memory, longing and occurrences born of the imagination or coincidence that course through this retrospective and makes this provocative show just that much more interesting.