

frieze

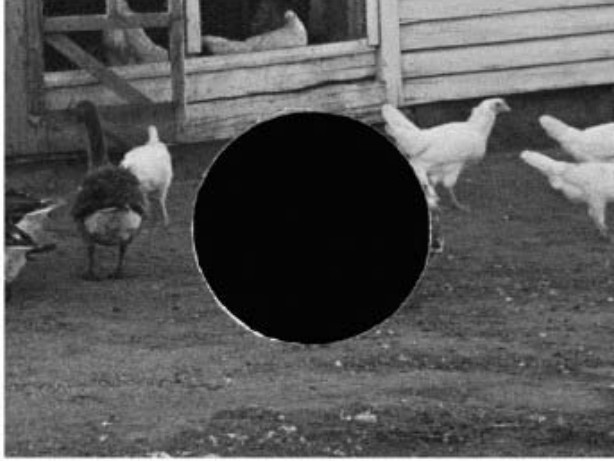
Matthew Brannon, Marcel Broodthaers, James Lee Byars, William E. Jones

David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA



'Matthew Brannon, Marcel Broodthaers, James Lee Byars, William E. Jones' (2009), installation view, David Kordansky Gallery

The group show format induces socialization among individual artistic personae. It can help define predecessors, successors and peers; it stokes marketable egos; it streamlines style; it is a curatorial plaything. 'After innovation - the critical deluge; after the deluge - fashion; after fashion - the group show,' wrote Lucy Lippard in 1967. The pattern that Lippard defines doesn't necessarily dilute group shows when they aim to corral trends, though, for it can take a keen eye - even an artistic one - to assemble an exhibition such as the one currently showing at David Kordansky Gallery. The show even forgoes a salable thematic title, depending solely on the strength of work by James Lee Byars, Marcel Broodthaers, Matthew Brannon and William E. Jones.



William E. Jones, KILLED (detail, 2009)

With ten pieces from four artists spanning 40 years (1969-2009), conceptual pings and formal resonances abound in the gallery. Is this a tethering of generational affinities or just a six-week celebration of well-delineated influences? Byars and Broodthaers, both dead, are recently conferred grandfathers-of-us-all, progenitors of good-humoured Conceptualism. Brannon and Jones, both younger and 2008 Whitney Biennial artists, keep the parade rolling.



James Lee Byars, THE WORLD FLAG (1991)

In the March 2008 issue of this magazine, FRIEZE asked Brannon, 'What do you like the look of?' and his answer was, 'Conceptual art.' What DOES Conceptual art look like? The question is stylistic rather than epistemological; passive, self-aware, cheeky and slick are adjectives that come to mind. Precise, simple gestures and secret smiles proliferate, and Broodthaers' text-based, vacuum-formed plastic signs - three of which, dating from 1969-72, are in this show - are, in this sense, classic Conceptual designs.



Marcel Broodthaers, PORTE A (1969)

Jones also embraces the language-saturated approach by 'automatically' illustrating 21 sonnets by the Victorian poet Algernon Charles Swinburne with imagery culled from the Internet (ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE'S SONNETS OF ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS (1590-1650) AUTOMATICALLY ILLUSTRATED, 2009). Swinburne's verses are wistful and lush, and the illustrations include half-nudes, Iggy Pop, antique sculpture, film stills and more, all organized into a freely associated grid form - the Conceptualist's method PAR EXCELLENCE cut with Surrealist scissors.



Matthew Brannon, THE PRICE OF ADMISSION (2009)

Michael Werner 4 East 77 New York New York 10075

'Designer Conceptualism' is here celebrated by Byars' *THE WORLD FLAG* (1991), 13 feet of draped and fringed gold lamé, which nicely complements Brannon's *THE PRICE OF ADMISSION* (2009), a modernist-inspired couch with several small white splotches screenprinted onto its black cushions. The white spots are paint splatters, or constellations at night, or cum stains—all residues of burning heat, long gone. It's funny to think of the Conceptual project as something other than philosophically engaged and aesthetically austere, even as decorative. Perhaps it's fine to do no more than read a poem or masturbate on a couch - even in a group.

Jason Foumberg