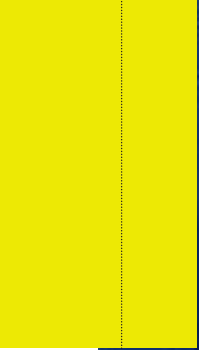


Andro Wekua

Camden Arts Centre / December 2008 — February 2009

File Note #37 Andro Wekua *My Bike and Your Swamp*



Daniel Baumann

Reasons to like it or not

(and a poem by Anne Sexton)

What can one say? This much at least: it's about mental states and it's about the spaces they generate and one can't be astonished enough at their forms, colours and presentations (the colours are stunning). Now, the spiritual world and its translation into form is not one of the great themes of our time, a time that defines itself garrulously and acquiescently through global developments and crises. As if that were everything and the exploration and presentation of the interior world with its particularly social conflicts were not one of the great challenges to art. But there is a serious risk of failing here: it takes daring, and nobody wants to crash on the rocks of trash and sentimentality.

And so we stand in a state of rejection, fascination, lack of orientation and enormous pleasure in front of formulaic images, arrangements of objects and combinations of materials, which catch us, so to speak, off balance. We don't want to have anything to do with terror, theatricality, beauty and mastery of material, or, more specifically, with a scantily clad girl sitting back-to-front on a motorbike (*My Bike and Your Swamp*, 2008). That is all too obviously a metaphor for being in transit, forward, backward, future, past and perhaps you know Iggy Pop's song *The Passenger*. But look more closely, and that is the trick that kills, mastered so perfectly and mercilessly by Wekua's works, as if they were spider webs; the way a seductive interplay of materials and colours makes us look closer, so that we are captured by details; the way they directly open up a space that seems to be romantic but in reality is tough and unrelenting.

In the case of *My Bike and Your Swamp*, it's the figure of the girl and the black motorbike. The girl sits there with her eyes shut, as if carried away, and so totally immersed in herself that the world outside her might not exist at all. She is scantily dressed and her mouth is exaggeratedly pink in colour, as if she wants to be someone she is not,

or as if she is someone she doesn't want to be. She seems to be at home in herself and completely lost. But this impression of being lost is not simply due to the fact that she is sitting back-to-front on the bike. Her body has closed down, it is opaque and paradoxically her hair, her eyelashes, her shirt and her shoes, the only things about her that are real, seem to be a masquerade. The motorbike itself is rigid, it is a model screwed down on a base, so that the only living thing about this girl is her self-absorption, something inaccessible to us. Perfect introversion looks like this: no more time, no more external world, only oneself. Warmth has withdrawn into itself and we stand in front of it as if behind glass. It is a totalitarian and self-destructive urge and people are willing to accept the absolute's rule of terror for its sake. *My Bike and Your Swamp* is an encounter with this extreme form of longing and with the idea of the interior world as an irresistible undertow, like the song of the sirens that lures seamen in order to kill them. In such a case, proximity is as total as absence.

Mental spaces cannot be shown. They can only take on the form of stages, which constantly send a signal: everything that happens here is authentic, and yet only an image; it is genuine and yet only a reflection (like art). Distance is therefore the decisive thing, the girl is not us and the interior space has become a salesroom and the battlefield of religions.

The Fury of Sunsets

By Anne Sexton (1928–74)

Something
cold is in the air,
an aura of ice
and phlegm.
All day I've built
a lifetime and now
the sun sinks to
undo it.
The horizon bleeds
and sucks its thumb.
The little red thumb
goes out of sight.

And I wonder about
this lifetime with myself,
this dream I'm living.
I could eat the sky
like an apple
but I'd rather
ask the first star:
why am I here?
why do I live in this house?
who's responsible?
eh?

Daniel Baumann is a freelance curator and writer living in Basel; the curator of the Adolf Wölfli Foundation, Museum of Fine Arts Bern; and established an ongoing series of exhibitions in Tbilisi, Georgia in 2004.

Text translated from German by Nelson Wattie.

My Bike and Your Swamp (Yesterday) #8 2008 / Photo-collage / 30 x 20 cm





My Bike and Your Swamp (Yesterday) #11 2008 / Photo-collage / 30 x 20 cm

Design: James Goggin (Practise) & Sara De Bondt
Print: Xtraprint, London

Andro Wekua (born Sochumi, Georgia, 1977) lives and works in Zurich and Berlin. He attended the National Art School of Sochumi (1986–1991), Gogebashvili Institute, Tbilisi, Georgia (1993–4) and the Visual Art School, Basel, Switzerland (1995–99). Recent solo exhibitions include 'Lady Luck', Gladstone Gallery, New York and 'Sunset', Le Magasin CNAC, Grenoble, for which he curated, with Daniel Baumann, a group show 'I Love the Horizon' (all 2008). 'The Hydra Workshops', Hydra, Greece; 'Interlude', Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich and 'Wait to Wait', Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam (all 2007) and 'I'm sorry if I'm not very funny tonight', Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2006). Recent group shows include 'Shifting Identities', Kunsthaus Zürich and 'Carnegie International', Pittsburgh, (2008). Andro participated in the 4th Berlin Biennale and was also included in the group show 'Painting Architecture' organised by Le Plateau, Frac Île-de-France, Paris and Camden Arts Centre, London (both 2006).

Reading List

Films

- Ridley Scott *Alien* (1979)
- Abel Ferrara *Bad Lieutenant* (1992)
- Sergei Paradjanov *Color of Pomegranates [Sayat Nova]* (1968)
- Georges Franju *Eyes Without a Face [Les Yeux Sans Visage]* (1959)
- Martin Scorsese *Mean Streets* (1973)
- John Cassavetes *Opening Night* (1977)
- Charles Laughton *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)
- Tengiz Abuladze *The Plea [Vedreba]* (1967)
- David Lynch *Twin Peaks [The TV Series]* (1990)
- Dario Argento *Phenomena* (1985)
- Rainer Werner Fassbinder *Querelle* (1982)
- Andrei Tarkovsky *Stalker* (1979)

Books

- Nikolai Gogol *Dead Souls*
- Fyodor Dostoevsky *Demons*
- Samuel Beckett *Murphy*
- Marcel Proust *Swann's Way*
- Thomas Pynchon *The Crying of Lot 49*

Music

- Kino: all of their albums
- Morton Feldman *Rothko Chapel & Why Patterns?* (New Albion Records)
- Tangerine Dream *Ricochet* (Virgin)
- Felix Profos *Kammermusic* (MGB)
- *Goodbuy, Babylon* (Dust to Digital)



By The Window (film still) 2008
16mm transfer to BluRay / 8.30 mins

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and Gladstone Gallery, New York



Cover: *My Bike and your swamp (yesterday) 2008 / Installation view De Hallen, Haarlem / (Variation 1 of 4) / © the artist Photo: Gert Jan van Rooij / Courtesy Michèle Didier, Brussels*