

Be Here Now at the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center
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The Atlanta Contemporary Art Center recently opened the exhibition *Be Here Now*, curated by its outgoing chief curator Stuart Horodner and featuring work by Sandra Erbacher, Mike Black, and Andrew Boatright. The show comes at a timely moment due to the institution's changing of the guard and its recent hosting of the 9/50 Summit. As opposed to what ACAC claims as the show's intention and concept (general site-specificity), what this show has the potential to bring to the table is a materially-based institutional critique. However, this is not the politically motivated and charged institutional critique work of the 1980s and 1990s which was recently staged as the survey *Take It or Leave It: Institution, Image, Ideology* at the Hammer Museum. Rather, the work of *Be Here Now* takes the perceptual experience of the gallery institution's material and architectural infrastructure as a starting point. A particular kind of site-specificity.

The exhibition statement urges the viewer to "be present and sensitive to the conditions that surround you." To my understanding, this should be a given in today's contemporary art viewing context. We should know by now that the gallery itself is a site that comes with a set of material, fiscal, political, social, cultural, etc., etc. conditions. Some of the work in *Be Here Now* has the potential to spark an elevated discourse about the contextual nature and function of art and the exhibition of art. However, I'm not so sure ACAC provided the viewer the best framework to experience the work. What is prioritized is a general site-specificity and use of materials. However, as we've learned from Miwon Kwon, this kind of work has detached from place, and specifically in the context of Atlanta's contemporary art, has lost much of the power of potential. Most of the work isn't actually site-specific, meaning, it is not explicitly using ACAC's materiality and history as impetus. Instead, most of the work is a response to the overall institution of art, art history, and art presentation. What I'm more interested in with *Be Here Now*, as opposed to sculptural installations that are "site-specific," are some of the ways in which the three artists' work talk to each other and also how some pieces respond specifically to their art historical forebears.

Sandra Erbacher's work in the show offers the tightest conceptual take of the infrastructure and interior of a museum gallery. We could trace to Lawrence Weiner's 1969 work *A Square Removal from a Rug in Use*, which follows from his 1968 *Statements* to Erbacher's choice to use carpet as material for her *Resistance Weave* (Assedic 2041). Cut into the wall-hung carpet is "Anarchy," an interesting choice of signifier in regards to the whitewall gallery context and the work's title – Assedic can stand for ASSEDIC, the French labor organizing body, Association pour l'emploi dans l'industrie et le commerce. The issue of labor is also important to the installation *Hardware*, a screw with a diamond wedged into the screw head drilled into the wall at an awkward height. Talking with Erbacher, she describes how her work explores the "elements that retreat into the background of a museum." This statement aptly describes the process of cutting into the carpet, the inset sculptural work *Inside Out*, the use of leftover tiling from ACAC's bathrooms for *On a Clear Day*, and the placement of *Hardware*.

Some of the more interesting moments in the show come from the relationships created between Erbacher's and Andrew Boatright's works. Dividing the two artists' installations is an obtrusive wall that, on one side, holds Erbacher's *Resistance Weave* (Assedic 2041) and, on the other, *Hardware*. The perplexing placement of this wall works well with the aberrant height of *Hardware*'s installation – a deviation from the standard 60 inches from center. Boatright's *Title d'Arc*, a presumed homage to *Tilted Arc*, cuts through Erbacher's installation, and his "flare" piece, *Untitled*, composed of carpet and a vertically-placed log topped with a rock-looking plaster object creates an almost confusing experience: Who's work is this? Is this carpet

Erbacher's contribution or Boatright's? Next to *Untitled* is Erbacher's *Monument*, which taken together evoke a sense of the pathetic, the anti-monument, and the "bland and ordinary." But, let's not forget Boatright's *Untitled* that pulsates in the corner. We can look at this object's attempt to push through or escape as a movement towards Erbacher's impossible exit of *Inside Out*.

Boatright's other sculptures in *Be Here Now*, with an aesthetic of the grotesque, play with art historical traditions. The contrapposto that is prominent in *The Inner Experience of Wholeness* evokes Vesalius' anatomical drawings. Boatright describes his process as being directed by the "armatures" he constructs and the choice of materials – I would consider this an experiment in anatomy: what is possible for the underlying structures and the flesh that covers them.

It seems that ACAC missed out on a few opportunities that would have provided a more intriguing contribution to the discourse concerning the whitewalls gallery as institution and site. Some of the presented works have a visually and conceptually satisfying relationship to each other while others are in want of a tighter cohesion. At times, it seems that previous works by the artists weren't thoroughly considered. I'm thinking in particular here of the glaring absence of Erbacher's *You know she's a little bit dangerous* which was recently on view at the Chazen Museum of Art in Madison, which is a sculpture with audio that is a response to an institution's duct work.

Mike Black's installation for *Be Here Now*, *Disregard #12*, also responded to duct work, though, I would argue, maybe not as successfully as Erbacher's. Something about the starkness of his gray monumental sculpture doesn't easily jibe with his more colorful and playful work he produced for Dashboard Co-Op's Boom City in 2013, *Disregard Series #1*. By using PVC piping, *Disregard Series #1* created a sense of a living network of arteries in the vacant and abandoned building in which it was located. I would have liked to see *Disregard #12* activate the life of the building's air circulation. [1] The question becomes, in keeping with the art historical references of Boatright's and Erbacher's installation, is this a sort of throwback to Minimalism?

What Black does offer to the show is his more playful *Disregard Series #13* located outside the building. In order for the viewer to notice *Disregard Series #13*, she has to look out the window that is located in Erbacher's partitioned section of the show. Moments like this, when Boatright's *Tilte d'Arc* cuts through the middle of the floor, Erbacher's carpet hangs on the wall, and Black's blue gutter twists and turns are visible through a glass partition, is when *Be Here Now* has the potential to provide the viewer with a renovated notion of exhibition installation and institutional critique.

It is unclear what ACAC is trying to tell us about how we look at or experience art. The language of *Be Here Now* mimics an almost Buddhist-inflected mantra of presence. The explicit metaphysics of presence could have made Derrida gasp. What this dilemma provides for us, though, is a meditation of the temporality of artistic process and the history of exhibiting artwork. The contextual nature of each artist's previous work and exhibition history becomes prominently apparent as a site of concern in this exhibition. Because the show evokes the contemplation of presence and absence, past and present, the missed opportunities become almost overwhelmingly shocking.

[1] At the time of publishing, Mike Black's *Disregard Series #12* is a functional ventilation system.