

ANDREA BUTTNER

HOLLYBUSH GARDENS, LONDON
7 MARCH - 13 APRIL

'Shit space' sounds as offensive as it might be absurd, but just such a notion applies to the works of German artist Andrea Büttner and their location in the pensive surroundings of Hollybush Gardens. Behind the heavy doors to the first floor unit in East London, the walls are painted, from the floor to as far up as the artist can reach, in a dark chocolate brown, a detail that could be mistaken

for poor maintenance or an unforgiving attempt to create a dark morose cube. Clay panels are pressed against the join of the floor and the windowed wall – rectangular forms repeated over and over, a living, breathing work.

For the inattentive, Büttner's works might be misconstrued as misfits; it takes careful inspection to find a reasoned philosophy. On the other side of the gallery an aging black speaker is located up against the exhibition wall, from which emerge the melancholic vocal tones of the artist reading from the diaries of German artist Dieter Roth. Büttner repeats particular paragraphs of private humiliation from Roth's memoirs as a gesture of shame, and as the gallery suggests in its literature, there is a kind of devotional reappropriation of Roth's original work.

Suspicious of galleries, Roth would often transform the locations of his works in order to identify with them anew. This has not been lost on Büttner: Roth appears to have inspired her stylised works, endowing them with a simple sophistication that is more German than English. A photo-print on the scale of a blackboard is pinned to the left of the monitor; Büttner's mother and father are photographed standing on what appears to be a makeshift table inside a bandstand, one of them waving out to the audience. The monitor presents a short film of Carmelite nuns in Notting Hill, who film themselves during their daily routine of prayer with a video camera supplied by Büttner. A woodcut of two nuns is pinned on the gallery's opposite wall, further along from a sign that reads, 'I believe every word you say'. Who believes whom, and what are they saying?, we ask. This particular thread of an established belief system and a statement of belief make for a sensitive juxtaposition of works.

Büttner breaks away from grandiose objects and paintings with works that are fanciful tales of 'shit-flinging' and 'mud-slinging', and like Roth, she critiques the value of the art object and the ambition of the artist. This overwhelming simplicity makes for a slightly dull visual experience, but the sense of there being nothing to engage with is actually at the very centre of Büttner's practice. The artist engages in a remoteness of emotions. Borrowing from Roth and Kippenberger, Büttner manages an economy of ideas that has the audience profit from her playfulness. *Rajesh Punj*



Andrea Büttner, 2008
(installation view).
Courtesy Hollybush
Gardens, London



Aaron Young, *Burnout (Menace)*, 2008, rubber, glass, wine, acrylic on aluminium, 244 x 366 cm. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging. Courtesy the artist and Deitch Projects, New York

SUBSTRACTION

DEITCH PROJECTS, NEW YORK

29 MARCH - 24 MAY

The title of Deitch Projects's latest group show, *Substraction*, is aptly layered with references: chiefly to the New York substrata, both social and architectural, which these artists explore in their paintings, paintings that revisit – and exhume – some of the processes of New York School artists of the 1950s and 60s. An interest in the physical process of making work prevails, in the movements and gestures that lie at the heart of Abstract Expressionism and Actionism, but suffixed with added violence and underworld glamour. Composed, phonetically, of 'subtraction' and 'extraction', the exhibition title suggests a potentially violent approach to painting; and duly, some of the works on show have been attacked in the process of their making. Nicola Vassell, curating the show, explains that the work draws on 'sub or low influences... the tougher, darker and dangerous. Think subway, subwoofers and subprime.' Those with work on show – Rosson Crow, Sterling Ruby, Dan Colen, Aaron Young, Elizabeth Neel, Kristin Baker – are the cream of hot young NY- and LA-based artists, lending the show, in addition to these dark influences, the cachet of youth and cool.

In Young's works, seediness is built into the canvas, where materials used include wine and glass. His works are also the aftermath of brutal happenings, which involve motorcycle gangs running screaming tyres over the aluminium-backed canvases. Strips of exposed metal glint through layers of dark paint, while serpentine forms, created by the tyres, writhe in the murk. Young's approach to the canvas is almost territorial; his pieces call to mind areas of the city staked out in skidmarks and broken glass.

Colen's *53rd and 3rd (Detail)* (2008) presents a filthy topography. A canvas covered in little piles of dripped green and yellow paint resembling birdshit, it suggests the unfortunate underside of a bridge or El train. But it also presents a kind of graduated landscape, with peaks and troughs forging

a timeline of neglect. Elsewhere Sterling Ruby's colour-field abstractions reference the city's graffiti, with fuzzy layers of multicoloured spraypaint evoking years of misspelled pleas, pasted one on top of the other. But the overwhelming impression of the show is rawness, evinced in the fissure lines separating forms in Kristin Baker's collage abstractions; in the burn marks in Young's works; and in Elizabeth Neel's *The More the Merrier* (2008), where the violence of the abstract gesture is juxtaposed with an image of three vulnerable pink torsos.

These works engage with New York's rough realism – the dive bars, underpasses, tenements and graffiti parks. Naysayers might suggest these artists – practising in a much less seedy New York, and a much less seedy artworld, than their New York School forebears – are creating pastiches of the radical, down-at-heel work of Pollock or Chamberlain. The contrast between chic gallery space – and the nature of the artworld currently – and the 'sub' influences explored in the works inevitably raises questions about authenticity and the artists' qualifications for exploring them. But *Substraction* is ultimately about painting and about techniques for depiction; in this the artists succeed, capably showing both what lies beneath and what sits atop. *Laura Allsop*

COCO FUSCO: BURIED PIG WITH MOROS

THE PROJECT, NEW YORK
3 APRIL - 2 MAY

For a few years now Coco Fusco has been training her activist eye on the less than savoury doings of the US military, first in *Bare Life Study #1* (2005), in which women dressed in the orange jumpsuits now so familiar from military prisons such as Guantánamo Bay, were made to scrub the ground with toothbrushes; then in *Operation Atropos* (2006), a video in which we find Fusco and six other women 'taking' an interrogation workshop taught by former military interrogators; and then again in *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America* (2006), a performance that details the special role women have begun to play in the handling and interrogation of Muslim detainees (which Fusco identifies ironically with a new form of feminism).

In *Buried Pig with Moros*, Fusco's fascination with torture and detainment takes a decidedly historical turn. Focusing on the early decades of the twentieth century, the artist presents documents and artefacts related to the US occupation of the Philippines, during which the military had to contend with rebellious Moros and *juramentados*, fierce Islamic holy warriors pledged to kill the Christian infidels. Enter General 'Black Jack' Pershing, credited with solving the *juramentados* problem by playing upon the Islamic prohibitions regarding pigs. The story goes that Pershing captured 50 insurrectionists and proceeded to execute 49 of them using bullets dipped in pig's blood and then buried the bodies in pig entrails, a contamination that would supposedly deny the recently departed entry

into heaven. The 50th prisoner was set free, and it was 40 years before any other Moro thought to take up arms.

The execution story is, of course, a myth. In fact, the record of Pershing's suppression of the Moro resistance is a lesson in restraint (Pershing even contended with accusations of pacifism). Yet the myth, Fusco shows us, proves more enduring than fact. Along with papers and printouts that show its surprising resilience, Fusco has installed an edited version of *The Real Glory* (1939), in which Gary Cooper's military doctor figures out how to use the Moros's religious proscriptions against the natives. Hollywood returned to the theme in 1964 with *Moro Witch Doctor*, which again shows scenes of Moros brought into torturous contact with pigs.

But the central work here is *Lecture by Dr Larry Forness* (2008), an audio recording dramatising (and perhaps satirising) a lecture – purportedly delivered at the American Military University by a former Marine and military consultant – on the most expedient methods of torture. At the top of Forness's list is a dose of Scopolamine injected directly into the spine, which induces severe pain and seizures, but here too is the use of pig's blood as a particularly effective threat against Muslim subjects. What is really on display in *Lecture*, however, is the innate unpleasantness so evident in Forness's delivery, and the conviction that the information he is peddling is useful. Be that as it may, what the US needs is more men like Pershing, and fewer like Forness. *Jonathan T.D. Neil*

Buried Pig with Moros, 2008 (installation view), mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and the Project, New York

