

Coverology

Elodie Pong

27 May – 2 July 2011

Opening 26 May 2011, 18hrs

The exhibition *Coverology* finds its starting point in questions related to the individual and collective impact of books as repositories of knowledge and meaning, and furthermore, as objects. The works in this exhibition interrogate our relation to books: we collect them, we hoard them, lend them and pass them on. Over time we disassociate from some, others we keep throughout our lives; in our private libraries we store books that we have never read and keep lists of those we would like to read. Nevertheless, some of them we know well, as they are presumed to be cultural canons and quotes drawn from them are omnipresent in our daily interactions. Our personal libraries outline our intellectual interests, our education and our lifestyles. In short, they represent one's habitus, image and a certain awareness of the construction of one's identity.

For this project, Elodie Pong focuses not merely on specific literary works and their contents, but particularly on the surfaces of books and their titles. The neologism - Coverology - could be the science of studying „book covers“, the jacketing of books, or generally the packaging of things. The English term inscribes the ambiguous verb „to cover“, which at the same time alludes to our age of appropriation and our culture of references. Therewith it calls upon the diversity of distribution of these assumptions, and, in doing so, the specific object produces a world full of relations and analogies.

Elodie Pong has already broached the issue of role models and references and the way literature engages with these in our present world. For instance in the 70 minute film essay *Contemporary* (2011) and the video installation *After the Empire* (2008). In both pieces, icons of our contemporary history and pop culture meet. Performances and dialogues, through quotes and self-written texts, create connections to our present time, and expressions of its essence.

The works on display in *Coverology* are a result of Pong's continuous examination of the contemporary. The artist's interest in book titles manifests itself in two different ways in the show: as a series of digitally produced paintings and in the presentation of an installation with three videos. The walls are covered with equally sized white canvases, each of which have book titles printed on them in black letters. The works, „non-unique unique pieces“, invoke Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. They exist in between Wade Guyton's works that explicitly pretend to be traditional paintings („they act like paintings“) and Christopher Wool's „word paintings“. Pong extracts titles from their original context from a wide variety of books, such as *Nacht, Tag und Nacht*, *Love Thy Symptom As Thyself* and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. Through accentuation and juxtaposition, she initiates a game of recognition and memory for the viewer. But perhaps new readings of the phrases will occur and an aphoristic understanding of the titles will emerge. The movement of signs from one context to the other, from one field to the other is encouraged. The juxtaposition of titles might indicate a „horizontalty of things“ in our world, which allows endless combinations and overwritings of meaning.

The three videos *Tableau*, *Sculptures* and *Ersatz* (2011) present books as objects in relation to people and contain different variations of performative actions. Three protagonists are featured in the staging with the books, all of which are white without any titles, with identical formats and blank pages. The attitudes, images and situations in the works have a theatrical character. Only *Ersatz* contains dialogue. The word „Ersatz“ seizes the idea of exchangeability and the surrogate, which in colloquial speech always has a negative connotation. The two actors, who are placed in an intimate situation in the bedroom, spin a pictorial dialogue with this particular word, and the scene reminds us of abstract theatre. A discourse about the idea of replaceability is developed, while „Ersatz“ becomes a linguistic prefix and is attached to several words. Using an abstract and artificial language, the negative neutralises itself in favor of a more poetic meditation. In *Tableau* and *Sculptures* the actors use books as sculptural props in conjunction with their poses and figures, which mimic sculptures and actions in a kind of „tableau vivant“. Piles of books become pedestals for the performers to practice their balance and postures on. One could think of Walter Benjamin who wrote about the relation of collectors to their books in his text *Unpacking my library: A Talk about Book Collecting* (1931): „All things remembered, thought, conscious become base, frame, pedestal, closure of his possession“. In Elodie Pong's work they become allegories for a myriad of forms and interpretations.

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Elodie Pong

Exhibitions (selection):

Centre Dürrenmatt, Neuchâtel, CH, Mother's Tankstation, Dublin, IR, Jones Centre for Contemporary Art, Austin, TX, USA, Galerie Zink, Berlin, DE, ZKM Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, DE, Emil Filla Gallery, Usti nad Labem, CZ, Galeria 23 y 12, Havana City, CU, Kunsthau Zurich, CH, Lu.C.C.A. Lucca Center of Contemporary Art, Lucca, IT, Kunsthalle Lugano, CH, The Lab, Dublin, IR, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK, Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, PL, Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz, LI, Helmhaus, Zurich, CH, Kunsthalle Mulhouse, Mulhouse, FR, City Gallery Wellington, NZ, The Kitchen, New York, USA, Occurrence Centre d'art et d'essai contemporains, Montreal, CA, Kunsthau Baselland, Muttentz, CH, The Nunnery Gallery, London, UK, PAC Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milano, IT