

Monday, March 16, 2009

Boiler @ Pierogi

"Boiler @ Pierogi." *Semperars.blogspot.com*,
March 16, 2008.



The gallery with the bar-none tastiest name (Pierogi) opened an annex, the Boiler, on March 7. Located on 191 North 14th Street in Williamsburg, Boiler is part of that genre of art spaces that have the smell of cement, earth, and hardwater that people are most familiar with from their basements, or, if they live in New York, where they (might) do their laundry. Other fine examples include the most recent Whitney Biennial's use of the Armory Building's nooks and crannies, and PS1's moist bottom floor. If it's leaking and smells like mold, it's a hot place to display and promote art.

Boiler's location is particularly wonderful for its adjacency to Gutter. Who doesn't want to view some art and bowl a few? Boiler showcased three works: Tavares Strachan's *The Distance Between What We Have and What We Want (Arctic Ice Project)*, Yoon Lee's *JFK*, and Jonathan Schipper's *215 Points of View*.

Strachan, who is soon to show at the ICA in Philadelphia, transported a 4.5 ton ice block from the Arctic, storing and displaying it in a glass-walled freezer. The project obviously invokes thoughts about global warming and ice-shelf melting, and it not without a touch of irony that

the freezer is solar-powered. Though here the sun keeps cold that which elsewhere it melts, and thus a balance between freezing and melting appears to be maintained, the containment is still a futile process, with the situation being somewhat analogous to the misguided attempt to cool an apartment by leaving open a fridge door.

Formally, the ice block seems quiet and dare I say it, mysterious, with various cracks and colors ranging from blue-black to cerulean. It entrances and beckons like the ocean. Possessing an obvious unattainable beauty (the two so often being intertwined), it rests safe in its container.

But the project is more than just a conceptual gesture visualizing both distance and the loss such a displacement symbolizes, for flying above the freezer are Strachan's self-referential flags modeled on those flown by Arctic explorer Robert Peary. This is a signal to issues of authorship and identity. It is no coincidence that Strachan's piece is reminiscent of Marc Quinn's series of [Self](#) sculptures (begun in 1991). In Quinn's work the artist's visage, molded out of his own frozen blood, is contained in a freezer. The self for Quinn is contingent and momentary; it holds together only due to its surroundings and circumstance. Pull the plug...and the self disintegrates or rather, it melts like ice.



Tavares's references to the negotiation of self are more oblique, although on one level, pull the plug on the Arctic and we're all gone. To tease out the nuances of Strachan's work one must engage in the pursuit of history and the telling of stories (Strachan's titles themselves are nearly tomes): Peary claimed to be the discoverer of the North Pole, but whether or not he was remains an issue for debate. Another man, Frederick Cook, was most likely the actual discoverer; his overshadowing a story all its own. This claim to authorship and how certain people or places are overlooked in history is what makes the ice block a signifier of the social. Strachan, from the Bahamas, transported the ice block there and displayed it for children (overlooked art appreciators). The Bahamas, an island often overlooked for being anything other than a beach spot becomes in this movement the prime recipient of Strachan's art. His movement draws attention there instead of immediately to the New York art world. Subsequently, the block was further displaced to New York for the Boiler display. Here, a screen next to the freezer gives weather measurements in the Bahamas, quietly

inserting this alterior narrative of an other place, another environment into Brooklyn, reminding us to not just look into the ice but outward to the world.

Strachan's cold heraldic block (with its literal heraldic flags) signals the entanglement of self, nation, and environment.

Soon...thoughts on the two other works at the Boiler, those by Lee and Schipper.



Top image: Boiler

Middle: Detail of Strachan's work with Yoon's reflected in the glass.

Bottom: Michael Hall, Stamatina Gregory, Tavares Strachan

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