

Dirk Yates

Inside Out

Peter Alwast's installation *Working Like a Tiger* attempts to diffuse the formal experience of viewing works in a gallery. The construction of three free-standing walls of clear plastic, stretched over stud timber - much like canvas stretched over a support - makes it possible to view more than one work at a time. Mounted on the plastic, the fronts and backs of works are made visible along with the movements of spectators in the gallery. An ochre coloured horizon line encircles the white gallery walls, while the works mounted on the plastic combine images of birds in flight, fireworks, MRI scans and other temporal motifs that denote limitations of human perception.

The constructed plastic walls create spaces that are acutely more intimate for viewers to consider the work. Clear silicon drawings of bodies denoting conventions in developing perspective, are over-laid on many of the works and are best viewed in these immediate spaces. Viewed in reproduction (for example, in the exhibition catalogue) or through the slightly opaque walls, this detail becomes invisible. The viewer's perception of individual works material information alters depending on their physical relationship with the work. This places an emphasis on the viewer's position as determining the margins in which the work is perceived.

The plastic walls also act like a hinge, where public and private spaces, fold in and out of one another. While allowing the observation of other spectators in the gallery, the constructed walls also act as two-way mirrors, reflecting the viewer's own position. The installation heightens the viewer's awareness of their own subjectivity in reading the works and presents the possibility of further readings from others present in the gallery. Every aspect of a work's formal presence is exposed by the multiple viewpoints that the installation affords the viewer. The viewer is able to judge their own appearance as well as that of others, in relation to the works.

The ochre horizon line that encircles the gallery walls is visible to viewers at all times. The unadorned, single-tone landscape acknowledges the abstract nature of the gallery and its separateness to the 'outside' world. The context of the gallery provides the viewer with an apparently autonomous space in which they may examine the gap that exists between the limits of human perception and physical reality.



Rather than acting as self-contained works with meaning concreted in their material forms, the works implore the viewer to find meaning between the signs that they contain and their environment. The installation acts as a metaphysical account of human perception. Laboriously worked upon, repeated and layered, the symbols and images present in the works hold a stronger tie to their existence as signs than their final reproduction at the hand of the artist. This, coupled with the significance of the works' relationships with the abstract nature of the gallery, dematerializes the work and places it at the service of the viewer's mind.

This dematerialization serves to place the works as a set of fluid concepts, rather than static signs filled with predetermined meaning. These fluid concepts allow the viewer to place their own context onto the work, and as if they had made the markings of the artist, the viewer can form their own decisions for why these signs are placed together in the context of the gallery. The meanings of the signs now exist beyond the control of the artist and are dependent upon the conceptual relationships that the viewer forms.

The difficulty in writing about this work lies in the fluid state in which the installation suspends the work. Moving between notions of perception and materialization, public and private spaces, the work is constantly folding in and out of itself making it difficult to give an objective account of how a viewer may navigate the space. This is of course the strength of the work - the inability to give a definitive account of the work that is beyond an individual viewer's own perception.

The installation acts as a system of pure relationship where a viewer may consider their role to be essential in fulfilling the expectations that the artist places on the work. Alwast positions his audience as the motivation for presenting the work in such a manner. The viewer is imbued with the role of developing possible readings into the work, rather than deconstructing the artifact that the artist has left behind in the gallery.



Peter Alwast
Installation view of *Working Like a Tiger* (2003)
Courtesy of the artist and The Farm