

ARTFORUM

“After October”

ELIZABETH DEE GALLERY

545 West 20th Street

October 18–November 22



Andreas Bunte, *O.T. (Wohnung)*, 2006, still from a black-and-white film in 16 mm, 6 minutes 40 seconds.

Playing against the operations and exigencies of the US election season, “After October”—a group show of seven European artists and a collective—is a convincing reconsideration of political art that deploys unexpected forms and their adaptable functions. What is perhaps most striking about this group of sculptures, photographs, collages, videos, and films is the way it visibly eschews the efficacy and economy of propaganda while remaining unmistakably politicized. For example, Andreas Bunte’s complex installation *Die Letzten Tage der Gegenwart*, 2006–2008—which includes two silent 16-mm films and five collages—sets up an atypically protracted dialectical montage; only through a somewhat demanding duration and translation do Bunte’s poetic texts and urban images reveal the artist’s critique of the complacency of modern bourgeois life. Duncan Campbell’s elegiac video *Falls Burns Malone Fiddles*, 2003, similarly unfolds through a carefully arranged and abstracted structure. With vague, repetitious sounds, the archival interview footage in this work, of Northern Ireland’s youth, reconstructs a portrait of desolation and alienation, as if

uncovering a repressed memory. In contrast to Campbell and Bunte's subtlety are more aggressive and tactical works, such as *First Flight (2001)*, 2005, a pair of quarters customized into compact, camouflaged switchblades by the French collective Claire Fontaine. While it's uncertain that works like this answer an ambitious call for art that can "act as a catalyst for the kind of change that rises from the ground up and stretches across well established societal divisions," as exhibition curator Tim Saltarelli suggests, this show nicely acknowledges the pluralism of social struggle and refuses a didactic or clichéd activism. In America's decidedly renewed age of hope, this approach is a welcome start toward reclaiming or redefining political meaning in art.

— Catherine Taft

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