

Pablo Sigg LTD LOS ANGELES

In his 2010 essay “Tuymans, Loyola, Leibniz,” Mexico City-based artist Pablo Sigg describes painter Luc Tuymans’s canvases as involving a “suspension of the surface that is separated from the depth and weight of matter.” The same could read as a description of Sigg’s own *Anemic Cinema*, 2008, a pivotal work in the younger artist’s solo debut at ltd los angeles. One of seven works on view, *Anemic Cinema* takes its title from Duchamp’s 1926 film of the same name and uses as its base content footage from the 1973 movie *The Exorcist*. Digitally dissecting a nine-minute clip wherein two priests purge a girl of the demon that possesses her, Sigg vertically elongated the frames and then traced each onto an all-white ground to produce a ghostly facsimile of the original. The effect is of a film divested of recognizable context, and—with no setting, sound, or cinematographic detail—the actors are diminished into mere outlines; exorcised empty shells, their nearly invisible gesticulating bodies are suspended in a looping void.

Though much has been written about the spectral nature of film, Sigg’s *Anemic Cinema* efficiently demonstrates the medium’s fundamental character as a trace of the visible, a stand-in for the presence of a body, an immaterial doubling that shows reality to be possessed by the non-present. Underscoring his metaphoric intentions, Sigg included in this show *The Swedenborg Room*, 2011, which recounts, across a five-panel text piece, Emanuel Swedenborg’s experience of a supernatural vision at an inn in London in 1745; the work invokes Beckett, Deleuze, Foucault, Loyola, and, of course, *The Exorcist*. The appearance of this CliffsNotes guide to thinking about the exhibition was somewhat off-putting, bordering on gratuitous didacticism even as it acknowledged that the presence of language can compromise an artwork.

Text aside, the exhibition’s conceptual conceit was lucid and only strengthened by the two other videos on view—*Room*, 2009–11, and *What an Excellent Day for an Exorcism*, 2010; a small, model-like sculpture also included in the show further focused Sigg’s use of the *The Exorcist* as a tautological frame for the conditions of cinema. But it was the film installation *134 Exhibits*, 2009–10, that most deftly complicated the artist’s reading of representation via moving image in its clever summoning of the apparition of painting. The work is a large,



freestanding cube with one open wall. Projected inside is a nearly forty-three-minute-long fixed medium shot of Tuymans under hypnosis listing from memory an inventory of his paintings, (including the book, the exorcist, the angel, Dracula, the room). The Belgian artist’s slow monologue is as difficult to place as it is unsettling, at times even improbably seeming to provide a description of Sigg’s artwork.

When a subject is possessed, she is forced to cede control of her own body, yet during hypnosis, control is willfully surrendered from the outset. In this work, we not only watch a hypnotized painter, but one who is also, unwittingly, acquiescing to the weight of film and to the power-trippy, clinical fascinations of the young artist. In Sigg’s hands, Tuymans’s image becomes a filmic document, and his paintings are transformed into (reduced to?) language alone: aesthetic transubstantiation or simply erasure? And just as Tuymans so often draws on film for the figures that populate his paintings, Sigg implicates Tuymans himself as the subject of a film. The work is a cerebral portrait that speaks to the inversion of representation, to the authority of the artist, and to art itself as both memory and specter.

—Catherine Taft