

"AGAINST TIME" by Jacquelyn Davis

Bonniers Konsthall, Stockholm SWEDEN September 12 · November 25, 2007



Carved up like slices of birthday cake, rather like the thin and delicate wedge of the Konsthall itself, viewers really need to work "Against Time" to make it through the labyrinthine series of rooms designed by Stockholm architect Klas Ruin, presumably to break the seamless spell of most international group shows. Curated by Bonniers director Sara Arrhenius, this prolonged exhibition includes film, photography, and text, providing some twenty-odd angles from which to inspect such prismatic concerns as wasting or making time, continuity, motion and memory, and perception as the image of time. Indeed, it's almost impossible not to get distracted by all these intriguing delays and decoys, which give stopping the clock a brand new meaning.

For instance, why hang around Per Wizén's gloomy space when it's not so inviting? A large, half-lit landscape titled *The Hunt* (2002-05) sits on the wall, a solitary viewing bench nearby. But once your eyes become accustomed to the dark, the stark patch of almost lifeless forest begins to look familiar, drawing you in. Recognition time kicks in, as you skim the surface of both material and memory for the precise nuance of this chilling woodland scene. Suddenly, it's a reworking of Paolo Uccello's *The Hunt in the Forest* (1465-70), minus the royal hunters and their dogs and horses. All that's left is the four denuded trees of Uccello's foreground, with oddly scattered, now-funereal fallen branches on the ground, the entire scene bathed in an eerie, post-apocalyptic yellow light. It's at once a sub-literal rendering of the calm before the hunt, and its flash-

forward impact on the surrounding flora and fauna. The time in between zooms by in an instant, in triumphant mockery of how long it took you to get there.

Moving nearer the outer layer of the show, one encounters Ulrika Minami Wärmling's *Les Pièces Noires* (2005), represented here by three paintings from her goth series about rejection and the gaze. Moving from left to right, *The Church Lies in the Shadows* shows a brooding young man with delicate hands, a lace-sleeved white shirt and dark vest, looking intensely at someone through a purplish haze. The object of his affection is the blonde, pert peasant girl with icicle arms in *The Light Has Frozen Over*, whose bonneted head is tilted coquettishly toward him—or skeptically, it's hard to tell. The last of the trio, its dénouement if you will, is a stitched-up, Ibsen-esque pairing, *Baby the Stars Shine Bright*, a sort of sororal doll's house in crinoline and velvet. A young girl is sitting upright in a Victorian green chaise, both hands stiffly cradled, while lounging nearby is a more matronly, though similarly aged woman, who is placing a firm hand on her companion's shoulder. Serene and almost heartless in appearance, the gazes of the two do not exactly



(TOP) PER WIZÉN, *THE HUNT*, 2002-05. COURTESY THE CITY OF STOCKHOLM/ARTS COUNCIL & BRANDSTRÖM & STENE. (BOTTOM) ULRICA MINAMI WÄRMLING, *BABY THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT*, 2005. COURTESY GALLERY CHARLOTTE LUND, STOCKHOLM & LARSEN COLLECTION.

FRANCES STARK by Simon Rees

FRAC Bourgogne, Dijon FRANCE September 22, 2007 · January 12, 2008



invite disclosure, as while one stares you blankly in the face, the other seems idly waiting for the realization of her gesture to take hold. The moment is forever on the edge of shifting direction or hands—much like the clock, ticking somewhere offstage without approval or admittance. These two women are nothing more than the unsettled incident that binds them.

Of all the slices of time or cake in this show, it is Ján Mančuška's *20 Minutes After* (2006) that leaves behind the most incandescent trace. Once more, a low-lit nook presents wall text framed in steel wires and shadows, with a solitary, burnt-out light bulb dangling on a long white chord over a hole in the crumbling brick floor. The piece tells the story of a woman who receives a phone call that her father is in hospital with a stroke and then goes to a shop nearby where she speaks to the saleswoman in Russian—a language she hasn't spoken in many years—at precisely 20 minutes after she got the call. Key words have been highlighted in the installation and repeated again underneath in quick summation of the story above. It's all very mysterious, because it ends with the woman just standing in the street feeling cold. What is to be done in the full knowledge and measure of time is indeed the central *amor fati* that illuminates "Against Time," which in turn illuminates memories not unlike that of blowing out all the candles at once.

It's telling that Frances Stark's first major survey should take place in Europe instead of her hometown of Los Angeles, especially given her work's clear basis in English-language text, typography, prose, and poetry. (Stark is justly famous for her numerous published writings and books.)

A lover and hoarder of letters and words, a virtual and visual lexicographer, Stark oftentimes seems driven to repeat, reframe, re-visualize language in a glossolalia form reminiscent of lettrist poetry. In fact, Stark's art can easily be considered a linguistic version of Tourette's Syndrome (or equally the latter a verbal art form). So it's little wonder that her *Portrait of the Artist as a Full-on Bird* (2004) depicts Stark as a parakeet—one of the most verbose of the talking parrots, which doubtless also squawks Joyce. Elsewhere, the show refers to Flaubert, Gombrowicz, Henry Miller, Nietzsche, T.S. Eliot, and Nathaniel West, to name a few. Stark is less explicit in tracing visual analogues or forebears, but it's pretty safe to assume dada and fluxus artists, Warhol the diarist, Baldessari, and (logically) Richard Prince. And for what it's worth, we are shown a facsimile of her MFA thesis cover signed by her former Art Center teachers, Stephen Prina and Mike Kelley.

Organized by Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in collaboration with FRAC Bourgogne and Culturgest, Lisbon, "The Fall of Frances Stark" is structured both diaristically—a slap in the face to postmodernist authorial assassins—and chronologically, allowing the audience to grasp the artist's stepwise development from the early 1990s to the present. Given the logic of the exhibition, the "Fall" can encompass any number of lapsarian or Freudian interpretations (including the name of the legendary U.K. post-punk band referred to in several works), but I primarily read it as an autumnal metaphor for maturation and inevitability—perhaps stock-in-trade behavior for an artist just turning 40. It's pretty simple once you get it: life is one long free-for-all or slide in currency. Frances gets a degree. Frances gets a life. Frances gets a boyfriend. Frances gets a dealer. Frances gets a higher degree. Frances has a baby. Frances gets a job. Frances gets another life. Frances loses the boyfriend. Frances gets increasingly busy. Frances gets nostalgic for her old life. In fact, Stark's series of petty falls achieves a rhythm that's real hard to resist, charting a topography of routine and desire that is recognizable to all of us, emblazoned by her effortlessly titled *Free Money* (2004). My guess is that she'd make a great reality TV producer and could definitely turn a quick buck if she wanted.

The survey is accompanied by a handsome artist's book, *Frances Stark: Collected Works* (Walther König, 2007), whose cover reproduces a collage containing a drawing of an apple emblazoned with the text, "Agonizing yet blissful little orgies of soul probing" (the apple stalk is rendered photographically, with a chrysalis of a penumbral butterfly attached to it). The book is like an audio guide to the exhibition as a whole, which inexorably slides into the major fall of Stark's life, as she sees it. That fall—the worst of all for an American—is monetary. Stark has apparently fallen afoul of her student debt, the \$85,000 her master's degree cost her (a repo man wised up to her teaching job and career). In the book, she racks up a narratological balance sheet for all the work in the show, listing her output (artworks, writing, and teaching) versus input (her education). Nothing much measures up. Oh, the agony. Yet she still manages to rub the art world's face in it—even truck drivers are better off in the end. Oh, the bliss. I hope that Stark who, like St. Francis, to quote the title of one of her 2002 works, "hasn't a brass farthing," is at least as successful in her poverty, and doesn't go the way of the U.S. sub-prime mortgage market. Fingers crossed, hers is an American story with a second act.



(LEFT) JÁN MANČUŠKA, *20 MINUTES AFTER*, 2006. COURTESY THE ARTIST, ANDREW KREPS GALLERY, NEW YORK & MEYER RIEGGER GALERIE, KARLSRUHE. (RIGHT) INSTALLATION DETAIL, "THE FALL OF FRANCES STARK," FRAC BOURGOGNE, DIJON. (LEFT) FRANCES STARK, *ST. FRANCIS HASN'T A BRASS FARTHING*, 2002, COLLAGE, CARBON, WATERCOLOR ON PAPER, 50.5 x 60.5 CM. COURTESY GREENGRASS, LONDON. POINTSETTA TREE, 2004, COLLAGE & SPRAY PAINT ON CANVAS BOARD, 60.5 x 51 CM. © FRÉDÉRIC BUISSON/FRAC BOURGOGNE.