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Oscar Tuazon

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

View of “Oscar Tuazon,” 2012.

Oscar Tuazon’s invasions of space—which he improvises on-site, working them out as he goes—have been much discussed lately. One hears talk of “structural tension” (Julian Rose in *Artforum*) or a “palpable miss” (Philippe Pirotte in *Parkett*). Tuazon’s topography of smaller structures in the spacious new rooms of Galerie Eva Presenhuber opened up yet another perspective on his work. To begin with, there was the very direct, almost archaic occupation of the space using heavy construction materials, steel frames, wood, glass, and poured concrete. Heavy beams sketched out complex geometric bodies in the space with their sharp lines that in the end wound up looking almost like filigree. In between, one found constructions of closed surfaces and frameworks reminiscent of furniture, boldly jutting structures featuring shiny neon lights or out-of-commission appliances serving as foreign bodies and, like technological fossils, offering a distant memory of some possible function. An inset mirror allowed oblique glimpses into a sculpture’s underlying armature or the space in which the constructed figure inscribed itself. Unexpected in Tuazon’s work were the idiosyncratic but technically quite precise and structurally plausible connections he established between the different raw materials.

Equally surprising was the way singular plastic elements dovetailed to form a sculptural landscape within the three-part sequence of erstwhile industrial rooms. Tuazon casually played on the architecture in an inset window placed high on the wall, but above all in the passage between the first and second sections of the space: a rigorously symmetrical portal, inserted at an acute angle, made of framing rods and a poured-concrete floor that at first seemed as if it were simply mirroring the preceding room but then suddenly proved to be a point of access, an opening and a passageway, a transition. The white cube abruptly became the architectural shell for underlying structures, dwellings that could hold their own even in the wilderness or the outskirts of vast metropolises.

These constructions coalescing into disruptively built or shoddily renovated—but in any case compact—fragments were not just the product of the artist’s momentary intuitions while working in a given space. Fundamentally, though it may not be obvious, Tuazon is asking what the origin of an as-yet-unknown language might look like. The artist relates that, in high school, the first foreign language he signed up for was Lushootseed, a Coast Salish dialect now spoken by only a handful of people in Washington State and British Columbia. And his parents were bookbinders. For Tuazon, engagement with the roots of language is tied up in the manual labor of crafting its support. This thinking with one’s hands, as he calls it, his quite manual intervention, is at the same time a way of speaking in materials that coaxes new words and phrases from ancient tongues. The archaic meets the immanent, confronting the makeshift shack in the most inhospitable wilderness with modular structures that break the mold of all architectural frameworks and might well expand to form entire urban networks. Following Wittgenstein, we can observe here that meaning—in this case, of the individual materials and sculptural elements—lies in use.

—*Hans Rudolf Reust*

Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.