

Taking Illogical Ideas to their Logical Conclusion/Liam Gillick

Not so long ago a group of European explorers were travelling in the Arctic. After weeks of trekking they came across a group of Eskimos. This encounter was not surprising; the explorers' guide was an Eskimo, though from a different area. Yet there was something odd about the people they met that day. The group was nervous. They had never met anybody before and had believed themselves to be the only inhabitants of a white, snowy earth. Following some tentative approaches across a small break in the ice, the groups came together. Linguistic differences were soon overcome through similarities between the guide's dialect and that of the Arctic hunters. Ideas were exchanged and gifts shared, but one thing disturbed the Eskimo group more than anything else: when they were shown the explorers' ship they were desperate to know from what snow the lamps were made. Richard Deacon applies a peculiar visual coding to a wide range of materials and concepts. Although we now feel familiar with his way of working, it continually side-steps and skips past the empirical logic of description. His combinations are extreme yet controlled, so much so that he often appears to share the temporary visual dyslexia of an isolated group. He sees one material as carrying the potential of another. The work revels in the possibility of misinterpretation. It is possible that Deacon's thinking is unrestrained by the descriptive necessity of straight narrative. There is no logical step, often it is difficult to resolve the relationship between source and result. It is perhaps best to make an analogy: A horse walks into a bar. The barman ignores him for some time. The horse coughs. Finally the barman comes over. Glancing up at the customer, he smiles and says. 'Hey, what's with the long face?' Parallel vision could be a key, seeing more than one possibility at the same time, focusing on the problem of a horse in a bar both for what it is and in order to play a word game that a horse could never appreciate. Deacon forces us to see material construction as exactly what it is, whilst using sleight of hand to kid us into thinking that we are experiencing a logical unity. Making 'jokes' for materials to appreciate and for us to take seriously. Consider plywood, not for what it does best but as a tribute to all the things people have tried to do with it. One of Charles and Ray Eames' best works is not a chair, or a game or a bookcase, but a moulded plywood splint, produced under pressure, both literal and intellectual. Art creates problems. Material dissonance is not funny in itself, yet in the right hands can be twisted and cajoled into renewed visions of sincere perversion. Deacon puts forward a new absurdity that only falls into place once we are prepared to see glass as a new form of ice.