

REVIEWS NOV. 10, 2015

## Body By Body

NEW YORK,  
at Eli Ping Frances Perkins

by Joseph Henry

View of Body by Body's exhibition, 2015, showing *Nothing to Lose* (foreground) and *Sympathy for the Landlord* (background), both 2015, at Eli Ping Frances Perkins.



Cast your thoughts back to New York between 9/11 and 2010 and consider its key descriptors. Bloomberg, Williamsburg, the Highline. Following the gritty '70s, flashy '80s and culturally crepuscular '90s—as the clichés about New York's recent decades go—the '00s evoke gentrification and stop-and-frisk. Yet in a new song called "NY in '00s," the British musician and writer Momus presents the era as a bygone golden age in New York, as a prelapsarian time before rapacious professionalization. "Hurrah for New York in the aughts," he sings in a mannered falsetto. "And now the city stinks to hell / Of money and computers."

The song was commissioned by Body by Body, an artist duo composed of Melissa Sachs and Cameron Soren, as an online component for their exhibition at Eli Ping Frances Perkins. The show included multiple sculptural works that combine wall-mounted steel boxes and sound or video components. In the audio component of *All New Yorkers Should Receive a Stipend of 1,000 Dollars a Month* (all works 2015), an artist describes how he and his collaborator collapsed under the pressure of New York's ruthless cultural competition. They can't afford to ship their work back following a show; he drinks too much; they avoid art fairs; he gets evicted, gets cancer and then dies in a construction accident. A myriad of voices with various accents repeat his last line ("Now I'm dead, bye"), reproducing the effect of Momus's ornate, digitally enhanced timbre. In another such work, *Sympathy for the Landlord*, a woman narrates a recent failed romantic encounter. Comparing these works with Momus's song, one gets the sense that Body by Body see the aughts in a positive light, against a precarious present ridden with miscommunication and cultural dead ends.

The steel cases from which these sound pieces play contain front panels featuring cut-out designs. The failed artist's monologue, for instance, plays from behind an Art Nouveau-like lattice spelling "Seth Price as Wes Anderson Memorial Boutique." Two additional steel cases serve as screens for video projections. One of them, whose front-panel design includes a couple of tasteful palms, offers a funny video travelogue of visits to Lower East Side galleries such as Tomorrow and Essex Street. The camera sloppily records the art on display, while distorted voices and collaged images refuse narrative coherence. The projectors for the two videos rest on sculptures mimicking Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chairs—further examples of the exhibition's frenetic citing of different historical cultural moments.

The show also included a "conceptual album," with music composed by the duo recorded on dozens of unlabeled cassette tapes. When played amid the cacophony of the other works, the tapes produced a bewildering sonic morass. A last video, viewed through a peephole in the wall, alternates between an animated GIF of Courbet's *Stonebreakers* and serial enunciations of the word "FUCK" over a crude digital drawing of a highway.

The collage of tropes, vocal accents and artistic styles throughout the show amounted to a fractured portrait of a New York grasping for cohesion. In reflecting a crisis of communication and knowledge, however, *Body by Body* forfeited any insightful reading of that crisis. Presenting sensory and historical fatigue as symptoms of the chaotic present, they merely echoed what we already experience.