

Edouard Leve: Galerie Loevenbruck

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A useful piece of information before we start: The artist Edouard Leve is also a writer and has published a collection of 533 projects entitled *Oeuvres* (P.O.L., 2003), beginning: "I. A book describes the works an author has thought of but has not produced." Which is to say a miscellaneous list of possible paintings, videos, and performances; architectural models cut up into sections, crazy people walking in the street filmed from behind, a museum in which all the paintings are covered in black fabric, a painter who recopies the abstract canvases made by monkeys, and so on. In his book, Leve thus creates an inventory, a future retrospective, indeed, the catalogue raisonné of a contemporary artist.

This spring, Leve will publish his second book, *Journal*: It assembles news items collected from the press, but without the names of people and places or any of those expressive turns of phrase likely to communicate the emotion prompted by the event--anonymous news that is almost abstract: "Two hundred people were killed in a fire in a crowded train"; "A manufacturer of electrical appliances has announced an acceleration in its restructuring and the elimination of thousands of employees from its factories within the next three months"; "Low clouds and fog in the Central region. Sun will emerge later in the day over the entire region." The mechanical coldness of this "white writing," the impassive distance from events, gives rise to an unsettling and ironic sense of strangeness.

Generic images: It is in this same register of neutrality and distance that one can place Leve's magnificently visual photographs, notably the "Pornographie" series, 2002, for which the artist asked anonymous people to strike poses characteristic of porn, but with everyone remaining clothed. A strange, contemporary Kama Sutra, full of ambiguity: Is this a critique of pornography or an attempt to increase arousal by concealing the objects of desire? The anxious vision of a mechanized sexuality or a choreography of gestures? Leve paradoxically uncovers the visual power of neutral images.

We should be careful not to classify Leve as a "literary" artist--though some may consider that "typically French." But we might note that in his search for an aesthetic of neutrality, a similar approach unites Leve's images and texts: For example, for the series "Quotidien," 2003, Leve has also collected press clippings. Carefully chosen images are reconstructed in the studio with models who may not resemble the people in the original photographs. On black backgrounds free of any geographical indication, anonymous figures of indeterminate social status raise their fists, bring their hands to their faces, or stretch out on the ground, their faces

always expressionless. It becomes impossible to reconstruct the event with any precision: Leve aims, on the contrary, to expand meaning, to charge these images, seen a hundred times in the press, with visibility.

In the sublime series "Rugby," 2003, the players are captured in action but wearing street clothes. They extend their hands toward an implied ball, absent from the image. Nourished by references to El Greco and Zurbaran, present in the play of colors and gesturality of the figures, these tableaux vivants of contemporary athletics open wide the free zone an artist might today occupy between fine art and media.

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

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