Book Reviews

Boris Groys’ Going Public

Sternberg Press; e-flux Journal. Cover design Liam Gillick. $15.

When Rizzoli publishes a book about a contemporary artist it’s like attaining Olympus; typically they are big fat publications with long essays written by distinguished art historians. I’m glad AVAF’s monograph takes that format in order to destroy it from the inside. This is not a surprise, because this is what AVAF does with any kind of project: deconstruct the alphabet of visual art under the umbrella of generosity and community. In fact, my copy of the AVAF monograph was given to me as a present with a special dedication drawn with Uni Posca paint markers.

The book features an introduction by Natalie Kovač, which is followed by an essay by Cay Sophie Rabinowitz. Her most important point in the text is perhaps the parallel between AVAF and Situationism, specifically the notion of the dérive — which can be easily associated with the kind of visually hallucinatory mazes that comprise many of AVAF’s installations. Think of New Babylon, the long-term Situationist project by Dutch artist Constant.

Yet the texts seem to be a minor part of the project. We might consider the book more as a sort of flan- boyant and ironic interpretation of the catalogue rai- sonné format. AVAF took this opportunity to archive a selection of large-scale projects and installa- tions dating from 2003 to 2009. Among them it is worth mentioning assume vivid astro focus XI (2004), a multilayered work made in collaboration with collectors Rosa and Carlos de La Cruz, in which AVAF created a colorful environment that embraces works by other artists from Felix Gonzalez-Torres and General Idea — one of the members of AVAF calls them “primal influences” — to Marco Boglio, Sella and Justin Samson. This project is emblematic of AVAF’s paradoxical notion of signature, and can be a useful starting point for understanding the monograph as a whole. Speaking of signatures, in order to put the viewer into a state of joyful confusion that is perfectly Carionian (one of the core members of AVAF is Brazilian) AVAF began to use alternate acronyms, inviting friends and acquaintances to suggest new versions so we have the work of “aborz viral attack fantasy” presented at Hiromi Yoshii in Tokyo in 2006 or the massive project by “absolutely venomous accurately fallacious (naturally delicious)” presented at Deitch Studios in Long Island City in 2008. Another aspect of AVAF highlighted in the book is the spirit of community: images of people, performances, parties, DJ sets and more are valuable elements for under- standing what AVAF is about. The intense overdose of images and the unstoppable rhythm of the layout brings the reader to a state in which it doesn’t really matter what is being looked at. The only way to embrace this monograph is to wear the 3-D mask (with the features of a Brazilian tinny) that is included in the book; just start flipping pages until you are visually drunk.

Nicola Trezzi