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ENCLAVE REVIEW

Maria Park: Composition
Margaret Thatcher Gallery, New York
Paul Hegarty

Composition was a show where Maria Park reworked elements of François Truffaut's 1966 film *Fahrenheit 451* in three groups of pieces, under the titles *Bookends*, *Bookcases*, and *Covers* 13-27. All three sets perform complex manoeuvres on and around referencing, whilst reflecting on media, on crossings between media, and on how transfer from one medium to another alters the expression and experience of image and idea. At the core of these works is the film's depiction of a dystopia where thought control is achieved through the banning of books, the punishment of offenders through burning (for books), and imprisonment or murder (for bookholders). Truffaut's film is already an adaptation, of Ray Bradbury's 1953 novel of the same name, and it lovingly depicts many books, albeit often just before they are about to be destroyed. Covers, titles and imprints are lingered on before erupting in a blaze of the eponymous temperature. Maria Park focusses on this display in order to further bring out the materiality of books, of reading and the role reading plays in constructing conscious subjectivity. These works do far more than 'referencing', in that they focus strongly on how citation can become an intermedial device, once it returns us to the purpose of original idea being referenced, which risks loss in any revisualisation or 'appropriation'.

In the *Bookends* series, scenes from *Fahrenheit 451* are stencilled in acrylic on two sides of plexiglass cubes, often using the striking colours (especially red) that dominate the film. A cube is stationed at either end of a small group of actual books, and the ensemble sits on a small shelf. The high-luminosity images on the cubes take the 'bookends' away from their seeming function as supports, and transforms them into proto-ceramic

relics, hieratic signs of a different culture that have been arranged according to a speculative understanding of their purpose. The books, too, seem to be removed from their usual function, and not only stand in for something broader, like the value of reading or learning but also for some sacred practice that must be maintained. Through display, we can remember what the books are for, rather than merely commemorate them. In becoming objects, the images and books rejoin a material nature that the act of reading, as well as non-reading, makes us tend to forget. In other words, ideas need to take tangible shape, no ether can sustain them as well as media, format or form.

The *Bookcase* series takes a different approach. Here, book spines are painted in acrylic on flat plexiglass, but with words and images removed. So, imprints (such as many of those released by Penguin), even outlines of titles, can be guessed at but are withheld, in an exaggerated take on the idea that reading requires more work than, say, watching an adaptation; only here the books themselves withhold the presence of ready mnemonic titles that experienced readers take for granted. Once again, reading is highlighted as practice precisely through being withdrawn. In the *Covers* series, the front covers of books take their place in acrylic rows and columns, faceless yet still possessing identity. The book becomes enigma, an ideal, an exemplar of the function of individual books. In so doing, this series develops and plays with the interest a viewer may have as to the specific choice of the books in *Bookends*, where the criteria seem to be colour, or contrast, or even pleasingness of font, ahead of any significance to the titles, or their connection to the books displayed in the film. Progressively, books remove themselves from our potential deciphering only to reveal themselves in apperception, coming close to the blank sublimity of the monolith of *2001: A Space Odyssey* - full of knowledge, of thought, of symbolism, of danger, yet mute.

Park's works in *Composition* reveal the strangeness in Truffaut's paean to the value of reading: the content slips away to be replaced by a more visual, possibly superficial understanding of books as being valuable in their own right - i.e. as collectors see them, as objects, not as transparent containers. Only when this initial transformation is done, via the shift in medium (book to film to sculptural painting, and sometimes back to book, but not to the same ones), does reading, or the

experience of books, perhaps, come into view, into thinking. Park takes us from the narration that specific books contain, to offer a more open sense of reading. Now, it may be possible that this openness replays the hatred the dystopian régime has for books, in that they become blank, pretty objects all in a line. As the works tread a shifting line between these possibilities, Park's books are poised between storytelling and pure form, a parallel both implicit and solid to Michael Fried's critical idea of theatricality in art.

In what to me is a troubling counter-society that we see by way of conclusion to the film (but that is portrayed as a messianic utopia), renegades congregate in the woods, each one identified as being a book they have memorised. This is a perverse way of saving reading, an absurd literalisation of 'the reader'. Instead of books being open, they can only be transmitted anew, from the official channel/person. Park's book/image/object series surmount this unwitting repetition of the evil State in *Fahrenheit 451* in the Deleuzian flurry of dematerialising and rematerialising performed in and through her (re) works. The key is the presence of real books, and of course, real shelves. Are these 'shelves'? Things sit on them, but as we know from the titles, they are integral to two of the series. This element of the pieces flickers forcefully between form and function, a canny modernist regrouping of what looks like a postmodernist appropriation. We might know what an individual's pile of books signify to them or to others, but Park raises the further question of the myriad signifying potentials that 'the book' can never fully contain, as it spills out, through its nature, into other forms.

Paul Hegarty teaches cultural studies and philosophy in the French Department, University College Cork. He performs in the bands Safe, Trace and the Phil Collins Project. His book *Rumour and Radiation: Sound in Video Art* is out now with Bloomsbury. *Maria Park: Composition* was on view 11 September - 18 October 2014.



Maria Park: *Bookends* Set 4 (2014). Acrylic on plexiglass cubes and 5 books on shelf. Cubes 17.75 x 17.75 cm; shelf 4 x 91 x 20 cm. Books: Chris Kraus, *Where Art Belongs* (Semiotexte 2011); John Muir, *All the World Over* (Sierra Club 1996); John Muir, *Mountaineering Essays* (Peregrine Smith Books 1984); Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* (Penguin Modern Classics 1977); R.D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (Pantheon 1967). Image courtesy of Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York.