

White Out Paul Smith

Near the Coptic quarter in Cairo we noticed whole rows of streets in whose four- and five-story houses thousands of chickens and goats and even pigs are kept. We tried to imagine what the noise would be like if these houses were to burn down.¹

Homes, like any relationship, are a series of redundancies. Objects in a suburban living room are placed 'just so' to rub out the easily reducible dimensions of said space. Despite the intention, there is a certain claustrophobia inherent in home repairs. The process of growth in a suburban setting requires regression, a temporary shrinkage before the illusion of land from sea to shining sea is achieved. Paul Smith's *White Out* employs this notion, asking you to raise your feet uncomfortably from the solid ground as you bear witness to the processes of remodeling stalled at the halfway point. Unlike reality, however, his drop ceiling does not impede; instead, it beckons you to raise your eyes and discover a new vantage of the same site unscathed.

A home is a series of obfuscating scars. My father's back porch, an advantageous example, presents a tree growing bolt upright from the centre. Is this the centre? It could be, but the centre could also be a birdhouse in the distance, my father's eyes, a space between the porch and tree, a point outside all of this (maybe on another block). I inform dad, between sips of carob milk, that this disrupted surface is a perfect commentary on the instability of structures and that Derrida

would certainly be proud.

Walk outside of the building to take a look into the storefront. Smith's partially-coated window, the negative reversal of a number of chinks in a white washed fence, allows for the same impeded view with which my father must contend if he wants to see straight to his neighbours flower garden. This is the intrigue of the voyeur: the possibility of endlessness in all of one's blind spots.

As you enter the gallery again, the illusion that you are taking part in the somewhat greater outdoors is very real as Smith has restructured an already restructured space. Consider Beckett's Watt who tried not only to invert the order of words in a sentence, but also the positions of the letters in those words. In my one-track mind, this place for viewing art becomes a sentence rewritten. The myopic art gallery, a homogenization of angles retouched with toothpaste. The typical home is the same. The difference here, in the gallery, is that the viewer is handed a pamphlet, a viewmaster, before entering. The interpretation is prepackaged.

If I choose, I may scratch away imperfections in any order and reinterpret. I disrupt the space easily: I spot the breaks in the 80 - 110 pastel mixing base. I lean my head into the weight of

the wall and am awash in the glow of a shortcut. I cover one eye and a paradigm shifts like a breeze. I turn out half the lights and the ceiling retreats. I hang words and illustrate them with pictures. I ask the person behind the desk about these new shadows, placed as arbitrarily as a sigh. I have made the installation mine. I leave, edified.

Ardis: The moon is beautiful now.

Paul: You should have seen it before the war.²

Look around: one lives out of crates consistently. The crates Smith places at various levels, in specific locations, are much like refuse that eventually finds the perfect, albeit aleatory, spot within a home. I toss a box on the floor. In a few weeks this box has been a coffee table, a step ladder and a doorstep. The box remains opaque, these crates remain open.

Basements are conduits, non-text. Smith's basement, however, takes on the role of a gallery, offering unimpeded objects on walls. He has deified a bottle cap, a rubber band, a washer, a socket cover, a juice lid, a dimmer knob, an appliance leg, the end of a roller. Like the room you have just left upstairs, the size of these objects has been stretched in areas, reduced in others. Unlike the upper floor, however, they are not obscured. (Note where the shelving sleeps amongst them, like a ladder leading the way out of suburbia, but cluttered with too much noise.) The basement:

flakes of drywall lasting longer than snow, insects shellacked whilst breathing. These are the bones hidden beneath your surface in full view for anyone.

By choosing certain vagaries and/or approaches, I reinterpret *White Out* with words. I proffer each sentence like a daydream. My omissions resonate onward, purposeful. Be warned: If reading as you walk, you may hear the off-kilter buzz of each predicate and low-spinning of adverbs behind the 8 x 24' murals. I decide to dwell on the gray base (raised floor without function) a bit longer than the hollowed crates. In the process I impose a false hierarchy of importance. This creation, my interpretation, is ad hoc and depends on the present. After the opening, the scratch on a wall created by an unruly guest is ripe with even more significations. At that point, this essay is passé because the installation has been recreated. For now, the often incoherent scatter of my composition should be viewed in the same way as this chipped paint. I offer fragmented themes in anticipation of further movements within the piece. Regard the facility of a good dislike, a red tile wall never receiving its due, butterflies in paperboys in basements, beetles shoved in plastic and then crushed, dew on tiny metal toys in sandboxes.

Like its namesake, Paul Smith's *White Out* covers the past only partially — the mark of what was remains imprinted, hinted, ubiquitous. Imperfections and futility are highlighted. The moon is empty and the lies of Werther are an anathema. Today, discontinuity and false hopes are a source of revelry and weekend retreats.

In *White Out*, these clichés of contemporary art are unimportant. Smith is not concerned with

the verbosity of light fixtures or the overwrought sentimentality of a frame. Working with perimeters and angles he has masterfully illustrated what the contemporary public gallery space has become: an institutionalized waiting room where the viewer is asked to sit and watch the materials of modernity peel silently onto his or her lap. These interiors, the sides unseen, are invariably so much louder than those sanitized outsides. And graciously, a

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