



SOLD SOLD

Ben Borthwick

Andrea Büttner

**Yes, I Believe
Every Word You Say**



Yes, I Believe Every Word You Say, 2007, woodcut on paper, 220 x 90 cm courtesy the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London

An exhibition series
presenting a singular artwork
chosen by an invited curator.

11 April - 18 May 2008

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Yes I Believe
Every Word You Say
(2007)

Opening reception:
7-9pm Saturday 12th April 2008

1355 Westwood Blvd.
Los Angeles CA 90024

Open Fri. Sat.
12-6pm & appointment.

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www.pawnshopgallery.com

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PawnShop is 2 blocks
from the Hammer Museum,
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opposite at Borders,
1360 Westwood Blvd.

"As a curator who is committed to engaging with the specific context of where I work, the invitation to present a project at PawnShop gives rise, on a microscale, to the classic problem of the parachute project: curator drops in, does their thing to 'engage' in the local context then fucks off again to do the same shite elsewhere. In these situations, site specificity ceases to mean engaging in the specific context of the site and instead ends up as nothing more than branding the gallery with a stamp of authorial individuality of that curator.

Which left me thinking the logical conclusion for my response to curating a project for Solo Solo in a city I don't know anything about is to present a work that is universalizing and non-specific. But that is not really of any interest to me in my practice as a curator. Andrea Büttner's 'Yes, I Believe Every Word You Say' is a piece that has its own internal set of operations - historical, formal, philosophical, emotional - that have various connection with LA. But also I hope that showing this piece at this moment in time goes beyond the artwork's internal logics and engages with the broader rhetorics of the US at this specific moment.

What fascinates me about Büttner's work is that she is absolutely committed to the political possibilities of an authentic mode of expression and the desire to believe, while at the same time questioning that commitment and desire. She is

asking whether it is possible to make or believe in an art that represents an authentic position. The work at one moment implores and registers the desire for truth, while at the next is skeptical and full of doubt. Its own proclamations are undermined by the naïve honesty of its statement. It switches between naivety and knowing doubt and in an unnerving way it is not clear if it is doing this willfully or if this is an effect of the viewers relation to the work."
- Ben Borthwick 2008.

Ben Borthwick is Assistant Curator at Tate Modern, London. His most recent exhibitions are *Illuminations* and *Irresistible Force* both in the Level 2 Gallery. He was also curator of Tate Modern's retrospective *Gilbert & George: Major Exhibition*, currently at the de Young Museum, San Francisco.

Andrea Büttner's recent projects include: solo exhibitions at Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (2007), and Hollybush Gardens, London (2008). Group exhibitions include: *Artist in Resignation* at Raster Gallery, Warsaw (2008), *Pensée Sauvage - On Freedom* at Frankfurter Kunstverein (2007), *Overtake* at Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork (2007) and *Anxiety of Influence*, The New Wight Biennial, UCLA, Los Angeles (2006). Forthcoming solo exhibition at Crystal Palace, Stockholm (May 2008)

Inverted interview #2: Ben Borthwick and Andrea Büttner (Tate Modern 02.19.08)

Andrea Büttner: What are your favorite artists and what makes you happy about them? Which artists are most influential in your practice?

Ben Borthwick: ...err... err...

AB: Maybe say your favorite artist first?

BB: [laughter] I'm not sure if that's a fair question... [more laughter]... err... It's not actually something I ask myself.

AB: No?

BB: No, never. Okay, well, I guess actually it is a question I ask myself quite often, but I can't ever answer it without listing some 10, or maybe 20. And they always change. I can't... I don't have a favorite artist. In terms of influence in practice, yes... [pause]... I think there are details, like really unlikely details from different sources that aren't formal, that aren't historical, that aren't thematic but just really particular details that come together into what I do.

AB: Could one say that there is a critical strategy of affirmation in your work? What's the value of the "Yes" in Yes I Believe?

BB: It's the one word that has its own field. And it's a bold and strong font, but it's a very modernist, technological font so there's a disassociation between the method of production and the image that's produced. So that touches on the historical relationship between medium and what the work is saying. In terms of affirmation and criticality, I guess that Marxist theory is really a theory of negation...

AB: ... And critical theory and everything that was taken in the realm of artistic discourse.

BB: One of the reasons why... I believe... that this piece is able to... disrupt... is because it doesn't conform to those theoretical orthodoxies. It's using a form of language that is generally not spoken in the spaces of contemporary art, and it's using it critically.

AB: I have a question which touches upon the relationship between artist and curator. In these *Solo Solo* exhibitions, quite a stress is put on the role of the curator. How do you feel about that as an artist? Don't you think it's your work that hangs in this show?

BB: I think the way that *Solo Solo* sets up the relationship, the artist is completely excluded because it's a relationship between a curator and an artwork, not a curator and an artist. And I think the question touches on the difference between making work and showing work. Because when you're making work, your relationship is absolutely intimate and about realizing or working out ideas that are unresolved. Whereas when a work is shown, whether or not those ideas have been resolved during production, as an artist, you no longer

have control of the reception of the work. So in some ways, the formulation of *Solo Solo* is actually correct for an exhibition.

AB: If I understood you correctly, when I asked you about how you see the relationship between artists and curators, you said *Solo Solo* was really about exhibiting, in a way, that it's about giving up control and foregrounding the process of reception. And this is exhibited in the concept of *Solo Solo* – that it is my process of reception as a curator, that it is my choice that is exhibited. In a way the act of reception is exhibited or the act of choice of work. I wonder how this relates to you articulating thoughts and interpreting your work?

BB: Well, hopefully there won't be a contradiction between the curator's interest in the work and the artist's intentions. And that's something that has to be shared— mutual respect of each other's values for when a curator picks a work and when an artist agrees to show work. Otherwise, it's exploitative. The curator exploiting the artist for her own ends, which may go against the artist's values and intentions. Or it could be an artist exploiting a curator for access to spaces or that curator's network. If that happens in either direction then it's cynical. That kind of cynicism feels so pervasive in the market. In my practice I try to eliminate that precisely because, like we mentioned earlier in terms of affirmation, my practice is fundamentally about ethics and belief.

AB: Thank You

BB: Thank You

[laughter]

[whispering: "bloody hell"]

Ben Borthwick: So... Andrea... [laughter] should I believe every word you say?

Andrea Büttner: Umm hmmm. When we speak? When we meet and speak? Um, as we are friends, I think, probably yes – I try and be honest with you. I have a very strong epistemic impulse, so that's another reason: I think, it's always best to share this interest in truth, yes?

BB: So... I do believe every word you say [laughter] as a friend?

AB: Yes! Actually, *Yes, I Believe Every Word You Say* is also about friendship: because I tend to show this piece together with other pieces. There, it's really about believing what I combine it with or believing other artists' sentences so this is about an act of affirmation or belief. Belief in another person saying the truth. And, um, then you can again believe me: that I believe

every word that other people say. Not everybody. But certain persons, yes.

BB: So, I've been thinking about this work in relation to rhetoric. And that it's, it's... err... seems like it's constructed in the way a very typical answer to a rhetorical question would be constructed.

AB: I'm really interested in doing something beautiful and, um, making others believe me, in a way... [laughter] and embracing the "yes" too. So maybe the question of beauty is the question of rhetorics actually. I mean, this piece was produced in respect to a sound piece, two sound pieces, where I read other artists text pieces. I must give this sentence, "Yes, I believe every word you say", some weight through putting some effort into beauty.

BB: What I find interesting is that beauty... in a theory context... beauty is this negative thing because of its seductive powers, because it persuades with its seduction. But what I find interesting in your work, is that you use affirmation in order to, or in such a way, that you destabilize the seductiveness.

AB: Hmmm... destabilize... what...?

BB: Yes. The, um...

AB: De... stable... ize. [deep breath]

BB: Instead of being seduced into... believing...

AB: I think because there is a direct address in the rhetorics in my work, it's always a bit awkward, you know? That's not how seduction actually works: "I want to sleep with you now" (laughter). That's why I think I destabilize seduction because this direct address doesn't go together with seduction, actually.

BB: Yes.

AB: And what you said about beauty in a theory context, I mean, the first, or like, the big concept of a theory of reception within the art is Kant's concept... It's all about beauty and aesthetic judgement. It actually, um, is beauty that gives the viewer dignity as a subject. And, um, yes... I don't know. Destabilize... and, um... so... I think where we say, "Yes, I think this is beautiful" we are somehow vulnerable, too, yes? Like when you say, "I have the chance to exhibit one art piece and I chose this piece." I'm sure it took you a while to choose this piece because you're somehow vulnerable when making a choice... when you're making an aesthetic choice.

BB: Yes.

AB: And so... I think to think about beauty and the vulnerability when making an aesthetic judgement, it's a very important thing because it's very political. And um...

BB: Yes. [long pause] Moving on to a different, um, kind of politics. I chose *Yes, I Believe Every Word You Say* because watching the US elections from the outside without any of the investment in the debate that you have if you're voting, I feel very very aware of the rhetorics that are being played out by the different candidates and this seemed a way of reflecting on the different desires... on the desire to believe. I'm interested in whether that choice manipulates you as an artist, or manipulates your work.

AB: If the print was red, white, blue... no! [laughter]

BB: This is actually more of a question about a relationship between artist and curator, about the relation between an artwork and the thesis that a curator is making.

AB: Yes. So yes, it manipulates the work. I am not at all concerned in my practice with political issues in that way. On the contrary... But I'm not angry with you [laughter].

BB: Is there time for one last question? So in terms of the materiality of the object, how does the choice of paper and fragility of it when it's installed, the fact that when somebody walks past it, it's so light that it will blow away from the wall... how does that reflect on the statement, "Yes, I believe every word that you say" ?

AB: Actually, the materiality is not so much the question dealing with rhetorics but more a crafts question. This is the size of the woodcut that I can't print with a press anymore, so I have to print it by hand and that means I have to take a paper that absorbs easily. [whispered: Yes, I believe every word you say] But I'm really pleased with the outcome. Not every woodcut fits with this fragility but this one I am happy because it goes well with my tender feelings. [laughter]

BB: Ok, well maybe this is where my relationship as curator differs to your relationship to it as an artist which is that I'm not involved in the fabrication. I'm looking at it at the reception stage. And so, semiotically, what it does is set up a relationship between this very bold affirmation and fragility of its support.

AB: Yes, and that's very interesting. That's like when a seduction would work, when you would say, very boldly, what I said before. I am too shy to say it again! I wish I could say that. Very well, [laughter] I think we stop here.

BB: I think we stop here.

[laughter]

AB: Great.