

Hussein Mitha, 'Grace Schwindt - CCA Glasgow, UK'. Frieze, nr.207, Nov./Dec. 2019, p.165.

GRACE SCHWINDT CCA Glasgow, UK

A small work in bronze, entitled *Tears* (2019), stands on a plinth at the entrance of Grace Schwindt's exhibition. The press release identifies it as 'a solitary, suited capitalist figure — whose face is seen to melt from, merge with or prop up its body.' This figure, sustained by its own illness, appears caught in a posture of forward-shuffling disavowal, a stilling prelude to the ensuing installation, which negotiates a personal and collective space determined by the history of illness under capitalism.

Commissioned by CCA, Glasgow and Rozenstraat – a rose is a rose is a rose, Amsterdam, Schwindt's multi-channel video, *Five Surfaces All White* (2019), draws from research into The Socialist Patients' Collective (SPK), a radical, militant anti-psychiatry collective from Heidelberg, active in the 1970s. Their motto, 'Turn Illness into a Weapon', audaciously politicized poor health, treating it not as a state of docile, passive alienation, but as a site of collective struggle against capitalism. For the SPK, illness was to be reclaimed in a positive capacity – with performative enthusiasm, even.

In Schwindt's work, the zeal of this movement fades into melancholic memory, leaving a much sadder, residual performativity. *Five Surfaces All White* presents a horse, a singer, a ballet dancer and an older man – bourgeois tropes – against a set of five white screens. They appear mournful, like sad reminders of capitalism's failure to protect even those it privileges. In the background is the misty landscape of Cove Park, where the artist spent time on a retreat on the west coast of Scotland. Schwindt's actors are captured working through movements, gestures, noises together in a way that is perhaps reminiscent of the communal patient-led techniques advocated by the SPK. The figures are filmed interacting – or attempting to and failing – making movements suggestive of a longing for contact, reciprocation and reprise, which are inevitably stalled by particular contingencies, left un-tied-up,

blocked. A semi-fictionalized translation of conversations Schwindt had with her grandfather at his care home punctuates the film. Voiced by 'the singer' it yields a cryptic, ventriloquizing dialogue: 'I ask him to repeat, he does but still I cannot understand what he is saying; I ask him again and again to repeat.' Illness is shared, repeated and also impossible to share or recount.

The surrounding installation replicates and re-envisions the set from within the film, with the audience positioned against five white surfaces – the screens across which Schwindt's work is projected. This linking of the film's characters with the gallery audience points to the ubiquity of the architectural principle by which both are determined. Just as Schwindt's characters negotiate the processes of collective choreography, the audience, too, is implicated as both a choreographed and choreographing element.

Fastened onto one of the white surfaces in the film is a piece of black fabric – a source of intrigue for the characters, which breaks with the all-white rubric, voiced again by 'the singer': 'He opens his eyes briefly and says: "five surfaces, all white". He must have seen the window on the sixth wall.' The window, far from breaking the spell of the all-white room and opening up onto the misty natural landscape, only emphasises its disillusion. The fabric is unpinned by one of the characters and a rectangle drawn in its place. This 'all white' superimposition brings to mind G.K. Chesterton's metaphor for preserving the status quo, theorized in his work *Orthodoxy* (1908). He argues that in order for a post to remain white it must be continually re-painted white.

The status quo presents itself as natural, just as whiteness presents itself as neutral, as a neutral colour within public health institutions and the architecture of corporate capitalism alike. In the film, the ballet dancer's white dress breaks at the hemline into plumes of magenta, red, yellow and turquoise: signs of the fraying order, and a speculative possibility or a memory of something different.

Hussein Mitha

