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“Between the Spectacular Site and Institutional Critique: Tacita Dean’s FILM (2011) at the Tate Modern”

Abstract:

Tacita Dean’s 11-minute moving image installation titled FILM opened at Tate Modern in the October of 2011. Shot by a 90-degrees rotated anamorphic lens and projected vertically in portrait format on a 13-meter high white monolith screen installed at the east end of the Turbine Hall of the museum, FILM was a sizeable site-specific work. Even though Dean designed her work specifically for Tate Modern, existing scholarship on the installation almost exclusively focuses on FILM’s reflexive focus on its own medium’s unique qualities. Propelled by the impending obsolescence of the analogue film format in the face of the rise of the digital, Dean indeed attempted to raise awareness about this matter by making a “portrait of the film itself.” Yet, without a comprehensive consideration of the profound relationship between Dean’s moving image installation and the architecture as well as the history of Turbine Hall, any attempt to analyse FILM overlooks the broader cultural and historical ramifications of the work. In my paper, I argue that FILM imposed an implicit critique to the museum institution and its politics of spectacle. Unlike other commissioned works in the Unilever Series at the Turbine Hall such as Olafur Eliasson’s The Weather Project (2003), Ai Weiwei’s Sunflower Seeds (2010), and Rachel Whiteread’s Embankment (2005), FILM neither perceptually transformed the vast space of the hall, nor was it dwarfed by the exhibition space. Instead, the installation managed to co-exist with the Turbine Hall while addressing its viewers in an intimate manner that relied on tactility. Focusing on the spatial and institutional politics of FILM, I intend to question the implications and limitations of “site-specificity” in the contemporary art scene while reconsidering the art and museum world’s loosely-defined concepts of “public” and “public space.”

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(Forthcoming) “Ethnographic Interactions: The Discourse of Animality in L’Enfant sauvage.”
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