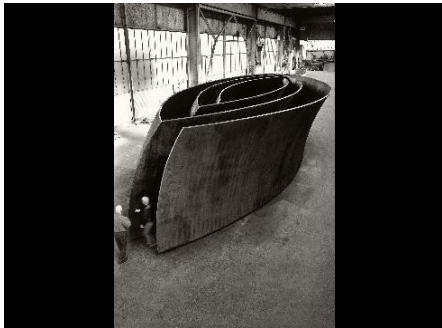


GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Taylor-Wood's Mimed Music, Serra's Metal Maze: London Galleries

Review by Martin Gayford



Oct. 31 (Bloomberg) -- The first question about new technology is, of course, does it do anything that old technology can't? The same goes for novel art media and their practitioners.

Most of the works in Sam Taylor-Wood's new London exhibition -- ``Yes I No," at White Cube, Mason's Yard, through Nov. 29 and at No. 1, the Piazza, Covent Garden, through Nov. 5 -- fail that test. But one, triumphantly, passes.

``Sigh" (2008), on show in the basement gallery at Mason's Yard, offers a new twist on the experience of music that is quite a feat. Taylor-Wood has filmed the BBC Concert Orchestra performing in an unusual manner. The musicians wear everyday clothes, and mime as they pretend to play a richly sweeping score by the composer Anne Dudley -- without their instruments.

Described like that, the idea may seem forced and pretentious. Actually, it has a surprising effect. As you watch the strings sawing away without their fiddles and the

brass puffing sans trumpets and trombones, you become hyper-aware of the gap between the contortions of the player and the beautiful abstract sound that fills the air.

In the absence of his flute, there is nothing to focus on but the rapt expression of the flautist as he puckers his lip and waits for the moment to come in. Different sections and individuals are featured on large screens, arranged in a circle, so you seem to be right in the middle of the orchestra.

Joyless Winter

“Sigh” does something only video art could do, but the rest of the exhibition is a demonstration of how old-fashioned new media can be. Upstairs at Mason’s Yard, there is a series of photographs of terrain similar to that in Emily Bronte’s 19th-century novel “Wuthering Heights.” These look a lot like the bleak landscapes minor Victorian painters often turned out (one in the Tate, titled “The Joyless Winter Day” by Joseph Farquharson may give you the idea).

Over at Covent Garden, there are photographs of the artist herself, suspended from party balloons, and in another series, clowns hanging about in dismal spots such as underground stations. If a painter used imagery like that, everyone would say it was romantic kitsch.

In contrast, the American sculptor Richard Serra, who has exhibitions at both the Gagosian galleries in London (6-24 Britannia St., WC1, until Dec. 20, and 17-19 Davies St., W1, through Nov. 22) is doing something novel with an old medium. People have been making 3D art out of bits of metal since the days of ancient Ur. Though not, it is fair to say, the way Serra does.

Gnarled Pigment

He is interested in a particular experience: being up close to a big, heavy, solid object that fills your view. His drawings (on show at Davies St.) all contain just one or two

forms in thick, gnarled, black pigment. Looking at them is like standing next to an elephant's leg or a huge tree trunk.

Serra's sculpture gives you that sort of feeling in real space. One of them, "Open-Ended" (2007-8) consists of curved steel plates, 12 feet high, arranged to make a series of convoluted passages. It adds up to an industrial maze in which the space constantly expands and contracts around you.

Some people find Serra's work menacing and aggressive, yet he undeniably delivers sensations that art never delivered before. So too, in its way, does Taylor-Wood's "Sigh." At the moment, those are both among the sights of London.

For more information on the Sam Taylor-Wood show, go to <http://www.whitecube.com/>. For details on the Richard Serra exhibition, see <http://www.gagosian.com/>.

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