

ARTFORUM

Øystein Aasan

LA VITRINE

24 rue Moret,

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Norwegian artist Øystein Aasan has something up his sleeve: controlled explosions of images or text that stealthily disarm their reader. Aasan divides his source materials into small squares, spaced at small intervals, as if a grid of negative space has wedged apart the image. In “Double Trouble,” his modest presentation at La Vitrine, a poster of Alfred Werker’s 1953 *Devil’s Canyon* has been thusly “pixelated” and affixed to Alu-Dibond panels. In *Display Unit (UT UT UT)*, 2007, the gridded content is a phrase from *Finnegans Wake*. Printed on slanted shelves in a “display unit” lined with mirror paper, the isolated characters seem to float off into their reflections, making reading a feat of memory to battle the Babel in Joyce’s babble. The Tower of Babel, incidentally, is a reference Aasan attributes to his ongoing work and source archive *Never ending memory*, which is absent from the exhibition but adumbrated by two other works in the show: *Double Trouble*, 2009, resembles a series of long troughs placed vertically, echoing the hand-built drawers that house the archive. *Memory Game*, 2009, is a short sequence of slides in which blanks alternate with selections from these files, photographed together in a vitrine, like cards in the eponymous game. The opening moments of Chris Marker’s *Sans Soleil* (1983) come to mind—“the image of happiness” intercut with black leader—as does the pliable narrative promise of the photographs in W. G. Sebald’s novels.

There is something forlorn about this tribute to memory, a faculty under siege; the anachronistic efforts of the pastime seem to buckle under Aasan’s crisp aesthetic, which itself embraces the currently ubiquitous look of nostalgia. Just like images in the children’s game of Memory, Aasan’s materials—plywood, MDF, anonymous photos, and imagery appropriated from old B-grade culture—pop up all over the place these days. That he can nonetheless invest them with pathos and surprise makes his memory game look indeed like a magic trick.

— Joanna Fiduccia



View of “Øystein Aasan,” 2009. From left: *Display Unit (UT UT UT)*, 2007; *Double Trouble*, 2009; *Devil’s Canyon (Like jungle beasts they fight for her love!)*, 2009; and *Memory Game*, 2009.