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THE PART IN THE STORY WHERE A PART BECOMES A PART OF SOMETHING ELSE

 Witte de With, Rotterdam
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Looking for clarifications or closing statements to the cryptic two-year project "Moderation," led by Moderator Herman Chong, one might come only as close as the performative text of artists Tim Etchells and Vaclav Horvat in the epilogue exhibition "The Part in the Story Where a Part becomes a Part of Something Else" at Witte de With, Rotterdam, which read, one day, "Looking in all the wrong places," and on another, "Sorry to everyone whose searches led them here erroneously. As an independent event program of performances, residencies, and symposia, "Moderation" stretches across two non-profit spaces, Spring Workshop, Hong Kong, and Witte de With, Rotterdam, which function as points of encounters within a project framework conditioned by distance and the asymmetries of time and place. The exhibition, curated by Chang and Samuel Sulemaner, converges around an attention towards physical objects at odds with the event-based nature of the overall project up to this point.

The explicit title of the exhibition, comprised of existing works and a handful of new commissions by about 30 artists based in Hong Kong, Rotterdam, and elsewhere, hints at the fragmentary nature of the show and "Moderation" in general, intent on generating multiple storylines and possible readings within a single physical exhibition.

Meandering through the show, one stumbles upon clustered motifs and objects that come into conversation with each other, where layers of meanings begin to emerge throughout a viewing experience of repetition and variation. Opening (and ending) this exercise is Cho Yun-young's take on flags, Unshakable Hope (2005), hong between Witte de With and another nearby building, flipping quietly over a side street as a marker of a flâneur that might have passed or is still due to happen at an inexact point in time. As a counterpoint to Cho's work, Ivan Argote's Little Cube (pitch) (2009), a broken paper-mache cube spilling confetti and candy on the ground, is presented indoors, touching on the potentially sinister and antinormative nature of this carnival. This ostensible underdog of mid-century and dark humor, while not immediately palpable, can be traced in everyday banal interventions that puncture the veneer of clean minimalism that pervades this exhibition.

As much as a narrative of Hong Kong-Rotterdam cultural exchange grounds the intention and context of "Moderation" and its final exhibition, the presentation at Witte de With disregards the need to provide the superficial cultural representations often characteristic of such undertakings. Making use of the extensive timeframe of the project, the curators take care in forging connections with artists from both locales, distilling practices and works that refer to signatures in each city's spatial history. Adding further to this thread is Lee Kuo's Piece (2009), documenting an occasion at which his patterned cloth work was used in a picnic with his friends, a gesture of reclaiming space in Hong Kong's contested public sphere.

Despite the focus on physical objects in the show, it is the intangibility of time that binds them together, each one serving as an individual measure of the passage of time within and beyond the exhibition's duration. This is the case with Nadim Abbas' Hell Is Here (2014), a soap milk Tetra Pak pyramid that disintegrates as visitors are invited to consume them. It is also the case with the pair of paintings by On Kawara, Lat. 52°27'N, Long. 8°46'E (1965) and 13 Jan. 1973 (1973); the former piece predates the artist's "Today" series with coordinates pointing to Algeria, a site of anti-colonial war. In many ways "Moderation" embodies the conditions of an extended moment, stretched and harnessed between two pillars marked by divergent geographies. As an exhibition, "The Part in the Story" makes apparent the syncretism of time and place, much like Félix Gonzalez-Torres' workUntitled (Project Pieces) (1987-1990), where the clock hands fall eventually out of sync, their rhythms growing apart as their batteries run out. Contained within the exhibition, these works stand as time capsules, brought together within the same space in a shared temporality. One senses a faint past future belatedness, walking through these various moments in time and place. —Christina Li