

frieze

Navid Nuur

Quotation, collaboration and dissemination; ice lollies, art magazines and floral foam

Navid Nuur's recent solo exhibition, 'THE VALUE OF VOID', included provocations directed at the general public and an overture to critics. Amidst the usual press-pack blurbs for the show – which toured from S.M.A.K., Ghent, to Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel and De Hallen, Haarlem – was a text headed 'Be part of the art', inviting critics to participate in the making of a new collaborative work. This entailed inserting the title and caption, 'Navid Nuur, Where You End and I Begin,' 2008–2009, Pencil, this Article,' at the end of a review of the show, as well as promising to send Nuur a copy of the publication. The artist plans to turn these reviews into drawings by joining up all of the full stops in the texts using a ruler and a pencil. Although I haven't quoted the title and caption as requested, perhaps Nuur might still appropriate this text. Especially given that, in another work, 'Untitled (Distant Relations Between Lovers Could Fail By the Lack of Your True Focus)' (1986/2008), he got members of the public to tear pages out of a selection of the best-known art magazines (including this one) and turn them into darts destined for a roughly drawn target of diminishing rings, each assigned one word from the title of the piece. (In dating his work, Nuur includes the year in which it was conceived as well as that in which it was realized; the omnipresent inverted commas are intended to indicate that titles are a quote or an enunciation.)

Nuur's work evidences a fascination with process, dissemination, dissipation and ephemeral components – light (the artist's name translates as 'light' in Arabic), projections, ash and water. 'These are the Days' (2004–ongoing), for example, is a series of miniature models of spaces made from leftover studio materials, with spyglasses fitted into them so that viewers can ponder their inner workings. His work questions the fixed or static art object, exploring how it might extend beyond the physical and temporal conventions of an exhibition, and into the minds of viewers. Another example is Vein of Venus II (2008–9), which consists of a freezer full of ice lollies and an overhead projector, on top of which the lollies are placed one after another to melt, creating an ever-changing projection of sliding, sugary, psychedelic-hued liquid. Nuur has coined a quasi-technical sounding term for his works: 'interimodules'. As the artist put it in an interview: 'I see my works as modules that can build on from other works or locations. And

as interim: a temporary form between the outside space and myself.'

Text-based works – usually written in English, although the artist, who was born in Iran, lives and works in the Netherlands – are a regular feature of Nuur's practice. In fact, he has confessed to having a love-hate relationship to the Latin alphabet, something that he attributes to his graffiti-artist past, dyslexia and a childhood spent learning Farsi. Texts partially dissolve or are washed away in some works, as in 'Absence Of Evidence Is Not Evidence Of Absence' (2006–7), in which words are sprayed onto the canvas in water. Or they communicate in the way a slogan on a wall might – 'Untitled' (2008) states: 'The ink of this invitation smells so bad that no image of my art works could survive here.'

'THE VALUE OF VOID' included an as yet incomplete, and subsequently untitled, text-based work. Under a desk in the foyer of the Fridericianum, and not officially on display, lay a sandwich board declaring in roughly painted white letters: 'I have damaged an art work by Navid Nuur: I have failed as a viewer.' The board is to be donned by any gallery-goer who damages a work, and a photograph will be taken of them wearing it. Despite qualms about the element of public vilification, I realized it is rare to see a work of art that expresses an openly distrustful relationship to the audience.

Just as the tone of address of Nuur's work oscillates between playful and ranting, so the artist either actively courts the public's participation or rejects it out of hand. For instance, the hapless viewer might in one work be encouraged to drink and become part of the art ('Let Us Meet Inside You', 2007–9) and at the next turn be repelled by a piece like THRESHOLDER (2007–9) – a perversely tactile curved wall made entirely from the green foam oasis blocks used for floral arrangements. If you've ever held that material then you will know how hard it is to resist denting it – much like plastic bubble wrap, whose air cushions are a treat to pop. The blocks are covered with impressions of the artist's thumbprints – but his alone. This work perhaps most directly expresses Nuur's notion of art as something that ideally should compel but should also confront us with rules of engagement.

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