

FEATURED REVIEW

VLATKA HORVAT:
OR SOME OTHER TIME
The Kitchen, New York City

by Mark Orange

A short looped video animation titled *All Moves* (all works 2009) situated in the reception area of the Kitchen's second-floor gallery space introduces something of a protagonist for Vlatka Horvat's solo exhibition "Or Some Other Time."

The video features a cropped black-and-white photograph of female legs, cut off at the waist and wearing a knee-length black skirt and pair of wedge shoes. The image is crudely animated back and forth across the screen, legs jerkily unbending in a stiff left-right, left-right. They come to a halt and execute a little hip sway dance move (achieved by simply reflecting the image back and forth on its vertical axis), before performing a wing-like flutter and managing, however briefly, to take off and rise a few inches up the screen.

While not exactly taxing the resources of Final Cut Pro, the work has an affecting quality and announces some of the themes of cropping, reflection, fragmentation and dislocation taken up in the two rooms of the exhibition space.

Inside, we immediately encounter the animated legs again, projected onto a

series of sculptural assemblages. In *Walk Pivot*, the projection, multiplied three times through an improvised plexi and mirror glass prism, plays out across a group of cardboard and wood-laminate scraps stacked in one corner of the space. Pinned on these humble supports are printed images of pine forests and tree lines, across which the legs traverse as if in some demented parody of a stroll in nature.

In *Table Forest*, a wood-laminate table is bisected by an 8-foot-high panel pasted with a forest floor-level view of pines. The panel's digital glitches — the point where one part of the image has been grafted onto the other — are left abundantly obvious, compressing the space and increasing an uncomfortable wood-for-the-trees claustrophobia that begins to pervade the exhibition. Our animated protagonist here decides to take the air on the blank reverse side of the panel.

This slicing at mid-point (the table, the waist) is also employed in three works that feature a small wood and metal school chair cut in half along its vertical axis. In *Floor Chair* it lies, cut inner side-down, as if half submerged in the industrial grey floor of the gallery. *Wall Chair with Moss* and *Mirror Chair* offer two versions of how this half-chair might attempt to reconstitute itself: in the former, through embedding its remaining two legs in a little sod of moss, and in the latter, by leaning against a sheet of mirror glass, becoming whole again, if only in reflection. This mirror glass in turn rests against a slab of the same wood-laminate tabletop that appeared in *Walk Pivot* and *Table Forest*, and we have an almost tragicomic sense of the little wooden chair trying to reach back

and touch its point of origin.

Horvat's natural world is profitably impoverished further in *Birds Shelf*, where 13 robotic bird figurines fitted with movement detectors serenade the viewer as we walk by their perch. And in *Wall Fan*, a ceiling fan mounted at knee height through an opening in a partition wall, the fan's blades slow down and speed up on some unaccountable schedule and succeed only in furnishing a weighty sense of uncirculated air mass to the spaces they conjoin.

Better yet is *Horizon*, a horizontally scrolling ink jet print based on an image of a tree line of variously elongated pines reflected perfectly in the still water of a lake. This staple of Ansel Adams-inspired amateurs is digitally extended ad infinitum, 10 feet along the wall and off into a big heap on the floor. A potentially sublime window on the world of nature, through reflection and repetition, transforms into a referent much closer to home — that of the pulsing cardiogram. Another spin on the artist's compressed horizons, the piece envisions a natural world hampered by the inescapable architecture of the body (a fundamental "issue" over how we inhabit our surroundings that recalls Horvat's earlier photographic works that document attempts to become one with her surroundings — to the point of disappearing).

Not that this work is predicated on some sense of existential malaise, however. Where existentialism was reconciled to a fundamental recalcitrance in the objects that surround us, Horvat instead animates her objects with something of her own restlessness. This is exemplified, finally, in *Body Chair (Charts)*, a two-paneled collage made up of a grid of images in which a female body morphs stage-by-stage into an image of a chair, replacing body part for chair part in as many permutations as possible. Its advanced prosthetic choreography plants the notion that all of the tables and chairs we have encountered thus far have been so many surrogate limbs.

In fact, the exhibition overall, in its use and reuse of the same elements in different pieces, has the feel of a dismembered and reconstituted body, one that — for all its bruised poetry — seems to somehow fit. ☺



Vlatka Horvat, installation view,
photo: Adam Reich