9TH BERLIN BIENNALE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

By Barbara Casavecchia

What has the notion of “self” become, in times of growing “self-likeness”—that is, seeing ourselves digitally mirrored in other people? The 9th Berlin Biennale, signed by the New York-based artist collective DIS (Lauren Boyle, Solomon Chase, Marco Roso, and David Toro), puts itself over as “a stage for this actor of the self to roleplay her own obliviousness” as the introductory statement explains. It is a profusely self-aware, self-conscious, and self-referential show, and it’s evident that the curators are not trying to draw lines of demarcation or judgment. “We are not oppositional in the traditional sense,” Roso told me, “as we are living in the age of alliances of time.”

Like the pool of water that surrounds the monumental projection of Cécile B. Evans’s new work *What the Heart Wants* (2016), which many disinterested visitors ended up falling into during the press preview, DIS reflects and amplifies its surroundings. And their biennale frames as a parallel the cultural perspective of a generation (most participating artists were born in the late 1970s and 1980s and are based in New York or Berlin) imbued with corporate aesthetic and obsessed by the dysfunctions of online life—itself artificial, individualism, self-branding, prosthetic optimism, and emotional uneasiness—so easily tapped into by pop-up culture.

Traumatic occurrences and conflicts seem far away, with DIS’s own video *ExtraSpaceCraft* (2016), shot at the actual site of the former National Observatory of Iraq, now in the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government, providing an exception. And yet the aspiration is to make visible what lies below the surface of communication, as in Simin Fujimori’s *The Happy Museum* (2016), which includes the Foundation for the Future (2013), a sample of the makeup world Argenta Merlo, designed to perform the best “natural” skin condition under the scrutiny of high-definition camera lens. “The world has never felt more radically left or more right-wing reactionary. You are not trying to draw lines of demarcation or judgment. Transparency can’t hide the shade,” says the DIS statement spotted at the entrance of the Feuerle Collection, in a chilling concrete block along Hackescher Ufer. The fact that “the world” may not entirely coincide with a US/Western-centric, capitalistically advanced and market-oriented viewpoint is one of the serious problems at play.

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a bodily fact, one is a historical construct. Glenn Ligons insistence on materiality and its disconnect from the way to operate in, but at the same time opened up the larger art world to new subjectivities. What I find most interesting about his work is its insistence on materiality and its disappo