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Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan's film installation, Monument to Another Man's Fatherland, 2008, is dominated by a large 35mm projector, situated in the center of the gallery rather than hidden in a soundproof projection booth. While the workings of this machine are therefore audible as well as visible, the film it projects—a fine-grained monochromatic journey across a montage of the richly detailed surfaces of a sculptural relief—is silent. The images document a well-known monument depicting a Gigantomachia, or struggle between gods and giants, built to celebrate a battle between the Celts and the Pergamon Kingdom in 166-167 BC. At the end of the nineteenth century, this monument was removed from Bergama, Turkey and eventually housed in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin. Van Brummelen and de Haan worked from reproductions culled from an array of academic books and museum guides because they were forbidden to film in the museum and denied access to its image archives. Openly presenting their project as a reflection on globalization and the displacement of people and objects, the artists were informed that the museum did not want to engage in debates about the repatriation of the monument. In response, they reconstructed the frieze from multiple sources, announcing their strategy by sometimes revealing the edges of the two-dimensional composite and incorporating brief flashes of white to suggest discontinuity or repetition.

A lengthy text, featuring a detailed list of source publications and a miniature composite of the frieze, is presented on one of the gallery walls. Despite the vast differences in scale between the miniature and the film projection, both elements of the installation communicate a fascination with the legibility of images. The combination of mythic subject matter and silent film also specifically recalls a utopian moment, not long after the monument was removed from its site of origin, when cinema itself was imagined as constituting a kind of universal humanist language. This focus on language and legibility becomes more explicit in another component of the installation: a black and white 16mm film with synchronized sound, consisting of short presentations to the camera by a succession of young men and women. The participants are all students in an "integration class" at the Goethe-Institut in Istanbul, which provides an introduction to German vocabulary and culture for aspiring immigrants who need to pass a proficiency exam. Each student, identified by first name on a clapboard at the beginning of the shot, struggles to decipher an art historical description of the frieze, in German. These presentations to camera are fairly short, less than fifteen seconds each, so the students are not subjected to sustained scrutiny in the manner of a screen test. Nonetheless, the participants are clearly unsettled by the fact that they are operating in unfamiliar linguistic territory. In contrast to the methodical, relentless progression of the camera across the surface of the Gigantomachia in the larger projection, the static cinematography in the second film reveals smaller and more hesitant movements, on the faces of the readers who attempt to decode the words presented to them. Through this interplay between textual and filmic elements, Monument to Another Man's Fatherland offers a rich and elegant exploration of language and power.

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