

## **I Haven't Seen a Butterfly Here, Tania Mouraud's Haunting Return to New York**

This review of *Tania Mouraud, I haven't seen a butterfly here* at Cueto Project in New York was initially published in the Huffington Post - 07/13/2011

It took French artist Tania Mouraud more than 30 years to come back in New York with a solo project, her first being an installation at PS1 in 1977.

The artist returns to us with a long awaited mini-retrospective at Cueto Project that articulates itself as a site-specific installation. With only five strong and emblematic pieces -- completed within the past ten years -- shown in three different rooms, she manages to create an extremely contrasted sounding and pictorial environment, quite disturbing and unpleasant at first.

In the first room, one video and two wall installations surround you and inform you how much her work addresses sight, mind and the body. On the right, a black and white wall painting with a phrase *I haven't seen a butterfly here* (2011) gives the exhibition its title. The phrase is extracted from a poem written by Pavel Friedman while incarcerated at Theresienstadt before being deported to Auschwitz where he died. This imposing piece, barely readable because the letters are stretched and thin, embraces the walls and dialogues with *Black Continent (Identified experience)* (2011) an abstract phrase of black wood relief on an opposite wall with a small screen that emits a faint scream and a blurry video shot in the Negev desert -- an important territory in Israel's history.

In the cavernous second room, there is only one video, entitled *Sightseeing* (2002). Here, clarinets lament while one witnesses a landscape from inside a moving car or perhaps a train? It is unclear and this is deliberate from an artist who likes to play with the memory of images. Toward the end, the meditation is disrupted and the viewer challenged. The gate of the Struthof concentration camp in France brings us back to history and leaves us distressed.

In the last room, the wall size projection of the video *Face to Face* (2009) put us in presence of a moving train and crane in a desolate landscape made of scrap metal. The video, shot in a metal scrap yard, allude not only to the destruction of the environment but also like *Sightseeing* to histories of genocide.

The experiential progression through the three spaces is intense, chaotic and dramatic. The words, the journey, the gate, the train: even though you do not know Pavel Friedman, you feel he is in the room. Horror is here too. Mouraud is making this atmospheric journey through history and memory for the viewer -- who also becomes the witness -- deeply moving. She subtly invites us to sharpen our awareness of our present and perhaps actually find a butterfly here

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