

Skoltz_Kolgen

SILENT ROOM

Alwynne Pritchard, 2006

Suspended like martyred saints, obstructed by harnesses, goggles, stilts, stethoscopes or cages – the inhabitants of Skoltz_Kolgen's *Silent Room* are trapped. But the object of their confinement is often also the means by which they attempt to reach beyond their world. In this endeavour to extricate themselves they dance their silent rituals, green and deadly pale beneath electric strip lighting, hissing and buzzing - numbing - throughout. And the tragedy of each character's condition resonates more powerfully for being limited to the confines of a single room - domestic, rather than epic. Their isolation, too, is often heightened by the implied presence of an absent other - Gustav searches for something beyond his own silence by placing a shell to his ear; the insomniac peeps out into a world about which we know nothing, except that it is much brighter than his own; Nikolai reaches in vain to be heard through the megaphone and Uber is restricted to walking around in diligent circles as footsteps and voices are heard to ascend the stairwell outside. And the solitary condition of couples is felt no less powerfully, as they hang suspended side by side or sit back to back with only a fragile piano roll attempting to hold them together.

This film resonates through iconographic objects with which Western art has always spoken - fish, birdcages, crosses, a lamb and a pig, a chess board, dolls, nuns, clocks and a tree, bringing to my mind the symbolism of Bosch, Donatello, Masaccio, Duchamp, Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters, Rene Magritte and Francis Bacon. Not that these objects point outwards here; the significance that they bring with them is absorbed completely by the film, the weight of their past serving to give allegorical power to the characters' actions. But the poetry of *Silent Room* is communicated through visual and aural images that are beautiful both as abstract as well as symbolic or narrative objects. The anxiety of humanity in the face of our own mutability is expressed as much by the repetitive, searching or sustained sound world of the film and the hesitant stalling, blurring and reversing of the camera as it is by the more obviously indicative emaciated human bodies and animal carcasses. And it's not only the objects themselves that speak to us, but the way in which one is rhymed with another - Gustav's shell and the fat man's stethoscope; the horse's head in 'Brehm (102)' and the pig's head in 'Eleanor (779)'; Nikolai's jumping and Eleanor's bouncing, her arms outstretched and head lowered to rhyme with the crucifixion in 'Dortoir'. The rhythm of the visual images' interconnection is complex and manifold and works as a rhythmic counterpoint to the sounds of the film. These are the rhythms of the rituals with which the characters in *Silent Room* strive to define, express and heal themselves, bringing to mind the work of Joseph Beuys. It's no surprise, then, that he's one of the artists cited by Skoltz_Kolgen as an inspiration, and one

of the first to spring to mind as I watched Eleanor tenderly trussing her dead pig's nose before carefully ironing his flesh. Beuys' belief that the place we should all first conquer and then inhabit 'is the human mind - our mind' is borne out by Skoltz_Kolgen in *Silent Room*, as the mysterious furnishings of the human psyche are playfully and tenderly exposed, examined and reconfigured before our very eyes.