

# ArtReview

Truth, Justice and the New American Way



UK £6.50



Jeder Mensch ein Cowboy



Leigh Ledare *Place du jardin aux fleurs*  
Office Baroque, Brussels 15 November – 23 December

Any man who gets bored in the midst of a crowd is an idiot, said Charles Baudelaire, who considered enjoying crowds to be a form of art. Leigh Ledare seems to think the same, judging by his 16mm-film *Vokzal* (all works 2016). For this piece, the American artist filmed anonymous passersby in the vicinity of three Moscow train stations. If the setting is generic – the artist deliberately did not film inside the beautiful locations – so are the people. Ledare fixes his gaze on a crowd, none of them really standing out. The actions they are involved in are also rather ordinary: walking, smoking, calling, texting, fidgeting, intermittent drinking and drug dealing. Only the Cyrillic alphabet that appears every now and then in the background reveals something of the *couleur locale*. Most of the people appear oblivious to being filmed, making the spectator a voyeur – something further accentuated by the simple yet efficient architectural intervention Ledare has staged for this show.

The gallery space is divided lengthwise by a narrow plasterboard corridor. Attached to it, a long stretch of wood functions as a low bench. Openings have been cut in the partition, through which the film – shown here in three parts on three screens – is projected on the opposite side of the corridor. In order to walk

through the exhibition, one has to pass in front of the projector, temporarily blocking the projection and casting a shadow on the screen, as if becoming one of the Moscow crowd. The device simultaneously disrupts and emphasises watching, resulting in – to employ an oft-used image – the spectator becoming an actor.

*The Walk* consists of 32 panels for which Ledare put together four different elements: found photos of male and female actors from film casting books of Soviet times; a picture of a dog from a similar publication; a page torn from R. D. Laing's book *Knots* (1970), in which the writer/psychologist sketches different kinds of human interaction by means of various dialogues; and stains from soap, food, shit or paint spilled on the page. Besides the relationship – and alleged similarity – between man and his dog, or different forms of human relations, the work tries to suggest a system of its own in bringing together disparate elements that are vaguely associated in a *composition trouvée*.

*The Large Group* is a video that was produced for last year's Manifesta 11 in Zürich, wherein artists were invited to collaborate with locals from different professions: in Ledare's case, a group therapist/psychiatrist. Together they set up a three-day experimental group session for which 21 people were selected, supposedly

forming a cross-section of Zürich society, albeit clearly a very white one. The participants are installed on chairs in three concentric circles, making it impossible to have eye contact with everybody. They are only allowed to discuss the 'here and now'. The session leads to a discussion that ends in argument and lukewarm apologies, and puts into question the (themselves questionable) conditions of the session and the consultants' authority.

Ledare is clearly no Stanley Milgram. Unlike real social psychology experiments, this session does not yield any interesting findings – unless we conclude that a group of people placed together in one room will start nagging each other about trivial matters and feel obliged to give their opinion, even though they have nothing to say. But for that you can simply watch an episode of *Big Brother*. As a social experiment, the work is superficial; as an artwork, it's boring. Whereas in his earlier work Ledare insightfully tackled forms of social interaction in a very personal way by investigating his relationship with his mother – a onetime exotic dancer, besides her other, often conflicting social roles – here he seems to be trying to say 'something' about human relationships. What, exactly, is not really clear. It is doubtful whether it is even clear for Ledare himself. *Sam Steverlynck*



*Vokzal*, 2016, 16mm film, approx 60 min.  
Photo: Kristien Daem. © the artist.  
Courtesy the artist and Office Baroque, Brussels