

“Curiosity”

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“*Curiosität*” (Curiosity), a remarkable group show curated by the French artist François Curlet, was an examination of the curio—an object considered novel, rare, or bizarre. Entering the exhibition, one got to the heart of the matter right away, passing through a door whose frame was a large replica of a zipper. This was Michelle Naismith’s *Portable Liberator*, 2008, just one of the many oddities in store. In the initial room, in a display case to the right, appeared two works by two pairs of artists. The first, Patrice Gaillard & Claude’s *Untitled*, 2008, consisted of a simple disc of transparent glass whose reverse side had been painted black. Not only was the function of this obscure object impossible to determine; even its aesthetic status seemed in question. But it was precisely this sophisticated absurdity that gave the piece its flavor in this context. The second work, by the Belgian-Italian couple Simona Denicolai and Ivo Provoost, involved a series of bones on which the logo of a Belgian telecommunications company was affixed. *Os et crânes d’une société* (Bones and Skulls of a Company), 2005, was a play on Marcel Broodthaers’s famous *Fémur d’homme belge* (Femur of a Belgian Man), 1965.

Some equally improbable sculptures occupied the center of the room as well. Andreas Slominski’s giant *Badger Trap*, 1998, set up in a large green oil drum, was a precarious and hilarious folly; from the floor beside it sprang a bulbous sculpture that resembled a bit of graffiti lettering expanded to three dimensions, *Bomb*.

R Supert Sport, 2006, by Frédéric Platéus. There were also distorted metallic rods by Freek Wambacq, *Bent*, 2006–2007, which seemed to refer at once to minimalist sculpture and to the art of snake charming—certainly one of the more surprising combinations. Checky references to art history were also present in Gert Robijns’s work, ironically entitled *Diet* (Diet), 2007. Here, unfathomable sculptural volumes in the style of Donald Judd found themselves topped by a prosaic box of cookies, carelessly opened.

The exhibition continued in this playful vein, and one could appreciate the various associations and allusions emanating from other works in the show by Bazilebustamante, Anita Molinero, Michael Van den Abele, Claes Oldenburg, Christophe Terlinden, peopleday® (Curlet’s own pseudonym), Jens Haaning, and Antonio Ortega. At the same time, the various elements of this apparently disparate whole began to respond to each other and slowly reveal their connecting threads. The exhibition in its entirety seemed to take on something of the character of Curlet’s own versatile art, which often deals with the relationship of original and copy, signature and trademark. Furthermore, one could see here a tacit rereading of French sculpture of the 1980s, which is also typical of Curlet; even as the works in the show



View of
“Curiosity” 2008.

made oblique or explicit reference to the work of Judd, Oldenburg, or Sol LeWitt, one could still make out an amused look at the legacies of Bernard Venet, Bertrand Lavier, or Jean-Pierre Raynaud. Reexamining the old model of the cabinet of curiosities turned out to be a way of questioning the connections between art and economy, art and possession. For an exhibition in a commercial gallery, this made its own sense, too.

—Yoann Van Parys

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.