

Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija

★★★★★

Friedrich Petzel Gallery, through Apr 21 (see Chelsea)

Stories Are Propaganda, a collaborative film by Parisian Philippe Parreno and NYC-, Berlin- and Bangkok-based Rirkrit Tiravanija, is an unlikely blend of education, metafiction and vaudeville. The latter is signaled by a red velvet curtain on one wall; spray-painted with the exhibition title, it is parted to reveal a flat-screen monitor, the only object in the otherwise empty room.

A narrator with a boyish voice and a British accent guides us through the eight-minute piece, charting “a journey through an infinite urban landscape.” He shuttles back and forth in time, between a “then” when “Thai food seemed exotic” (a winking reference to Tiravanija’s own work), and a new era in which you can “get an espresso in Hamburg or Milwaukee.” The dividing line between these two epochs is drawn at 1972, a year that saw the demise of “radical architecture groups” in general and the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis in particular. It’s also the year, or so we’re told, that filmmongers Spielberg and Lucas were beginning



their ascents, as though the celluloid dreamworld of film arose from the rubble of modernist utopias.

It’s hard to square, even tangentially, the film’s voiceover and visual components. The central image is a white rabbit, first seen pulled out of a magician’s hat, then sniffing gingerly at glowing mud on a soundstage. In the last scene, a hand casts a rabbit shadow puppet by the light of the moon.

While the piece does not cohere into anything like the “propaganda” of the title, neither does it form a consoling bedtime story, as the presence of the boy, the moon and the bunny might suggest. Instead, it conjures an intriguing if slightly unsettling dream—one that resists interpretation.—*Alex Kitnick*

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