



Art in America

NEWS & FEATURES EXHIBITIONS MAGAZINE NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBE 



REVIEWS MAR. 13, 2014

Phanos Kyriacou

NEW YORK,
at Maccarone

by Courtney Fiske



Phanos Kyriacou:
Taxonomic Possibilities III, 2013,
plywood, white oak and
mixed mediums, 25
by 96 by 48 inches; at
Maccarone.

ADVERTISEMENT

One of the more arresting objects in Cypriot artist Phanos Kyriacou's New York debut was a small monitor, placed on the floor, playing a video depicting the snout of a sleeping dog. Periodically, a tremor punctuates his otherwise still repose: a flitting of the eyelid; a furrowing of the ear; a puckering of the nostril, oyster pink against his fur's mottled gray. As his sleep deepens, the shudders build until, around eight minutes in, he jolts awake, then exits the frame.

Titled *Rocky's Dreaming* (all works 2013), the video takes as its subject what film theorist André Bazin termed the "microaction": "an infinitely divisible attention," as he described, "to the complexities in even the most ordinary of events." To write of Kyriacou and Bazin together is not to chart a line of influence, but to stress a shared sensibility: a patient, sustained regard for the peripheral and the slight. The objects on view here, a mix of sculptures and looped videos, are all modestly sized and materially spare; one is tempted to call them "minor."

Restrained and unassuming, they elicit a slow, observational mode of looking that seems almost cinematic in its insistence that one focus and hold one's gaze. It's art that hinges on a protraction of perception: something like the experience of the fixed-frame, long-duration shots that Bazin so favored.

Anchoring the show were selections from Kyriacou's series "Taxonomic Possibilities," identically sized white-oak platforms set atop plywood frames and topped with an array of sculptural objects. Each occupies a different elevation—on the floor, two feet above the



Art in America
ARTNEWS

**DAILY
MONTHLY
QUARTERLY**

11 issues of Art in America
4 issues of ARTnews
artnews.com
artinamericamagazine.com

SUBSCRIBE Artnews.com/Combo

ground, or at waist level—and features a mix of found and crafted objects, several of them commissioned from artisans in Kyriacou's hometown of Nicosia. Consider *Taxonomic Possibilities III*, raised by the width of one plywood plank from the floor. Spaced across its platform are 10 objects, including a voluted rind; a wooden triangle plunged in a plaster base; a pair of scumbled posts, seemingly clipped from a balustrade; a sliver of folded gold foil; and a patinated mass, squished as if pressed by someone's palm. Materially blunt and structurally transparent, the objects resist the remove of metaphor. They are, to paraphrase Richard Tuttle, things that look like themselves.

Taxonomies are nothing new to contemporary art: one thinks of Claes Oldenburg's ode to the right angle, *Ray Gun Wing* (1977); Mark Dion's systematized tableaux; or Gabriel Orozco's classification of beached litter, *Sandstars* (2012). If Kyriacou's work feels different, it's because it lacks their fevered inflection. His concern is neither with excess—a rehearsal of rationalism's algebraic logic that yields an absurd accumulation—nor with the completist impulse that the term "taxonomy" implies. At once deliberate and accidental, his arrangements coalesce through their contingency: one senses that they could always be otherwise.

Loop around the room, and the question emerges: are Kyriacou's taxonomies just so much winsome eclecticism? At times, his lo-fi, DIY aesthetic yields objects of quiet beauty but not much else. *Tectonic Gestures*, for instance, is a column comprised of six rounded cubes, cast in plaster from a block of insulating foam and precariously stacked. While the crenulated surface of each unit intrigues, its premise is somewhat predictable: yet another riff on a Post-Minimalist idiom. While aesthetically interesting, it's intellectually flat. One wishes that Kyriacou had elaborated the theme of localness evoked by his collaboration with Nicosian craftsmen and his deployment of certain materials, such as plaster and limestone, typical of Cypriot architecture. Add a bit more conceptual scaffolding to Kyriacou's project, and it has potential for much more than poetic obliqueness.

Related Articles