

Mircea Cantor



Műcsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest, Hungary

Mircea Cantor's first exhibition in Hungary felt like a retrospective. But Cantor has stressed that he is not so interested in constantly presenting new work, rejecting what he calls the 'what's-your-next-project mantra'. Instead, he is attracted to the idea of a 'remake', by which he means the integration of older works into a new solo show. This reference to the artist's own past work stood in contrast to the repeated emphasis in this latest exhibition on things to come – evidenced by the title 'Future Gifts'.

The well-balanced exhibition began with Cantor's most frequently presented video work: *Deeparture* (2005) shows a wolf and a deer in an empty room that is clearly a white cube. These natural enemies, filmed without sound, roam the room in a heightened state of alertness. The viewer soon begins to wonder if the wolf will attack. But the kind of bloody scenario offered by natural history documentaries seems unlikely given the video's calm filming technique. Though often reiterated, comparisons with Joseph Beuys' coyote action *I like America and America likes me* (1974) are hardly fitting. There is no pseudo-shamanistic interaction between artist and animal here; the flared nostrils, flitting eyes and swift movements are spectacle enough. Most

Mircea Cantor
Seven Future Gifts
2008
Concrete, iron
Dimensions variable

touching of all is how out of place the animals look in the sterile space, its emptiness seems more impenetrable than any undergrowth.

Being cut of place is also the subject of the installation *Stranieri* (Foreigners, 2007), which consists of 49 baguettes spread over a round, table-like platform. The loaves of bread have knives stuck in them and salt appears to be running out of the cuts. The classical gifts of hospitality, handed to 'strangers' on their arrival, take on a painful aftertaste in the equation bread equals flesh and salt equals blood. The press release mentions a childhood memory of Cantor's in which his Romanian grandmother, following an archaic custom, sprinkled salt into wounds to stop the bleeding. In *Of Hospitality* (2000), Jacques Derrida revisits questions of hospitality from antiquity and criticizes the way globalized trade goes hand in hand with repressive immigration policy. In this sense, Cantor's installation seems to be reminding us of the many 'stranieri' currently in need of hospitality.

The refugee theme is clearer still in Cantor's mural, *Chapelet* (2007), in which a room is enclosed by a depiction of barbed wire. On closer inspection, the wire turns out to consist of fingerprints. One inevitably thinks of biometric identification in the context of border controls. But the work's title opens up a religious dimension and associates the barbed wire with Christ's crown of thorns. In this way, the work encircling the viewer acquires a density of meaning that

verges on pathos. The 16mm film *Shadow For A While* (2007), which shows the shadow of a slowly burning flag, could be read as a farewell to political symbols. The black rectangle on a white ground is gradually broken down by invisible flames, creating a mood that is more elegiac than revolutionary. As a shadow, it is impossible to identify the symbols or colours of any particular state on the flag; it could equally be a white flag of peace.

The last room contains the only new work in the show. *Seven Future Gifts* (2008) represent gift-wrapped packages of various sizes, reduced to the outline of a ribbon tied with a bow. They are based on a small installation of ceramics made by Cantor in 2006 for 'Toys For Children', a joint show with Ion Grigorescu. Here the sculptures have been reproduced in rudimentary concrete, each with a different type of bow, and range in size from minute to over six feet tall. The soft edges of Cantor's grey concrete ribbons are reminiscent of Robert Morris' works in felt. In an interview, however, the artist has spoken out against the backwardness of artistic strategies and interpretations that refer to art history. With *Seven Future Gifts*, Cantor has created a paradoxical figure: a form that is present to the senses of sight and touch, but that claims to represent a promise yet to be fulfilled.

Nicole Scheyerer
Translated by Nicholas Grindell