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BEAT STREULI

New Works

15 January - 28 February 2010

Opening Thursday 14th January 2010, 6-9 pm

Beat Streuli's new body of work signals a shift in the artist's practice. In his solo exhibition at Erna Hecey he will be presenting a new photographic series and two double screen video installations. In his new photographs, Streuli shifts his focus from the close-up representation of urban *flâneurs*, the city portraits of anonymous men and women in the street for which he has made his name, more to the 'hard' physical, material 'fabric' of urban space, in this case cars and their drivers caught in slow-moving traffic. Zooming in on the shiny, slick, metallic surfaces of car bodies, he captures the drivers behind the wheel unawares, predominantly in a state of stasis or pensive waiting as they stand still in the city's traffic. The photographs are cropped and zoom in on specific details, never revealing the entire image or 'picture', In some instances, therefore, the image becomes completely abstract, resembling more of a hard-edged painting with a compelling haptic quality, than a photographic print with a recognisable subject.

All together these photographs form a dysfunctional choreography of vehicles, an industrial *ballet mécanique* of slow-moving mechanical monoliths while at the same time they are also distillations of ordinary and ubiquitous yet very particular moments of quotidian life. The human subject – so integral to Streuli's practice – does not disappear but in this case becomes more opaque, more elusive and distant, hidden as it is behind the reflective glass of a window screen, or partially obscured by the car's enclosing steel body. As a meticulous observer of the everyday, here too Streuli highlights the particular formal and physical qualities of the surfaces he draws his attention to; for it is, in particular, the notion of the *surface* rather than the subject that takes precedence here. At the same time, he plays with the different connotations of the car itself - from status symbol and fetish object to symbol of masculinity. In this case then, the car functions as both mirror *and* screen.

In his imposing, double, floor-to-ceiling video projection, on the other hand, the focus on detail is rendered even more systematic due to the time-based nature of the medium, and the viewer is subjected to a rapid succession of images of a wide variety of hard, sturdy, well-fortified surfaces of the urban surrounds: from the edges of a car's bumper, the corner of a skip, a fragment from a billboard, to a street barrier, a metallic grill, the lettering on a truck, a rear view mirror, a drain in the street, rubbish on the asphalt, and the façade of an apartment block. Interspersed in between all these images of the city's hard edges are photographs of its dwellers going about their daily business. All in all, these images constitute a generic portrait of the inanimate objects and structures that characterise the modern megalopolis, while at the same time they also hint at the latent hostility and aggressive nature of the large city and its capacity to engender human alienation. Streuli's exacting eye alludes to the tougher sides of urban reality, capturing that distinct urban 'edge' as well as the sense of entrapment and oppression it often generates but at the same time drawing attention to its overlooked sense of formal beauty