

Absolute Duration

Carpe Diem | Lisbon | 2017

Absolute Duration – the title comes from Sigmund Freud’s essay On Transience – is a collaborative exhibition project between Miguel Branco (PT), Michael Huey (USA/AT), and Wolfgang Wirth (AT), conceived for Carpe Diem Arte e Pesquisa and taking place in five rooms of the Palácio Pombal in Lisbon.

In responding to the enfilade, each artist has created/selected work that aligns with the very particular present state and condition of the exhibition space(s): the result is a web of interventions that – taken together with the rooms themselves – functions overall as an interconnected, kaleidoscopic installation.

The fragmentary grandeur of the palace speaks not only to art history generally and to a specific architectural/cultural historical past, but – with its array of damaged walls and ceilings, missing tilework, exposed structural elements, and random wallpaper remnants – also addresses something like the space’s own partially-revealed memory.

Given the particulars of the site, the visitor finds himself on shaky ground, confronted by untenable conditions, spatial dysfunctionality, and decay. It is a profoundly unsettling, multi-layered experience....

The artists’ approach is an attempt (well understood to be doomed to failure) to ameliorate these circumstances and fix these flaws through a provisory process of ‘refurbishment’ of the spaces: to offer up rooms once again positing themselves as furnished spaces – in theory – even as they remain utterly, preposterously uninhabitable. Missing socle zones are covered by mirrors, a room is wallpapered over, pictures are hung, furnishings and objects brought in. None of these measures, in the end, fully mask the signals of dysfunction; on the contrary, they heighten and underscore them.

By moving into the ground floor rooms of Carpe Diem at Palácio Pombal, art sets temporary parameters for itself in which it can feel at home, knowing, nevertheless, that Absolute Duration is unattainable.
