

art & photo

Musings on the Mutinies to Come

Claire Fontaine

by Jerry Saltz

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Claire Fontaine is the fictional artistic persona created by two Paris-based women, neither named Claire or Fontaine. Fabricating an anonymous entity is a canny idea at a time when just saying one is an artist is already fraught with expectation. Fontaine are aware of their imposter status and note that they are "nothing but the nth ready-made artist, the nth meaning-transmitter in the general buzz." Yet they want "to create images for a mutiny to come, to transcribe symptoms of the crisis, visually, and conceptually."



In God They Trust (2005)
photo: Reena Spaulings Fine Art

Claire Fontaine
Reena Spaulings Fine Art
371 Grand Street
Through October 21

Fontaine's strength isn't only their subterfuge or their smarts or that they're not taking the easy way out by only making art about the 1960s. Their debut is sparse but razor sharp. In the window of this Lower East Side storefront is a neon sign in Arabic that translates as "Foreigners Everywhere"—an apt, loaded phrase in a neighborhood traditionally home to immigrants. It is difficult to parse these words as positive or negative—they're a perfect echo of the ambiguity of being an outsider in America today.

In God They Trust is a sort of switchblade made of a U.S. quarter that has been cut in half and outfitted with a folding box cutter blade. It suggests in the most acerbic terms that "the war on terror" is nothing but a linguistic construction and that terror will go where it goes. On the gallery ceiling, written with the flame of a cigarette lighter, is a sentence taken from a Godard film, "I have no words to tell you how much I hate the police." This may be what Fontaine mean by "mutinies to come."

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Chris Martin

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