

CLAIRE FONTAINE

September 17 - October 21, 2005

Reena Spaulings Fine Art is pleased to present Claire Fontaine. For her very first exhibition in New York, the Paris-based artist presents examples of a symbolic practice that begins by questioning its own use-value in a world increasingly resistant to the actions of its inhabitants. Calling herself a “ready-made artist,” Claire Fontaine suggests that she is an imposter in her own role, and that the practice of contemporary art is no longer destined to act directly on reality. Her works call attention to the fact that the problem of representation has everywhere replaced the question of how to use our lives, and that early signs of this shift can be glimpsed in the increasingly aestheticized politics of the twentieth-century avant-gardes.

Translated into Arabic, “Foreigners Everywhere” is the title both of this show and of a neon work in the gallery’s front window. A second neon work, *Father & Son (Hooded Prisoner with Child)*, is a drawing based on a popular news photograph depicting an Iraqi detainee and his son, a meditated glimpse of the sort of “naked life” the war on terror endlessly produces. This work has been roughly blacked-out with oil-based paint, negating its own light and questioning the link, in a world become image, between visibility and imperial violence. The tiny work *In God They Trust*, an altered American twenty-five cent coin that hides a fold-out box cutter blade, reminds us that the art of detournement can be more than an aesthetic strategy.

There is also a text on the ceiling written with the flame of a cigarette lighter. I HAVE NO WORDS TO TELL YOU HOW MUCH I HATE THE POLICE is a quotation from the film *MADE IN U.S.A.* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1966), whose star Anna Karina obsessively repeats this line of dialogue throughout an entire scene. A black leather rucksack stuffed with assorted candies (*If You See Something, Say Something*) references Felix Gonzales-Torres’s “spills” while removing it from the spectator, hiding its contents, and giving a threatening translation to a seemingly generous, public-interactive gesture that opened the way to “relational aesthetics” in the early-90s. “Public,” says Claire Fontaine, is now nothing but another word for order and an adjective to describe the audience.

Such tensions between forms and their contents, between visibility and opacity, between formal and political violence, etc, point to the fact that the correlate to our celebrated freedom to manage symbols is the impossibility of effective action in today’s democracies. But it is only by treating and acknowledging our shared political impotence that we can begin to find our way out of an impasse we already know by heart.

Gallery Hours: Thursday through Sunday, 12-6pm