

WINTER 2014
DEVILLE COHEN: POISON



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EXHIBITIONS | CENTRAL MEDIATHEQUE

Deville Cohen: *POISON*

Curated by Jennifer Matotek

JANUARY 20 TO APRIL 3, 2014

The ephemeral and the jerry-rigged: Deville Cohen's *POISON*

by Jennifer Matotek, Director/Curator, Dunlop Art Gallery

Deville Cohen's *POISON* is a video that substitutes real objects and set pieces with photocopies of real things, duplications bound together with paper clips and clamps. It trades the white cube studio for the soundstage/black box theatre, and directness for metaphors. There is also, simultaneous to substitution and representation, a kind of conflation – of set-pieces with actors, of foreground with background, of artifice with reality, of photography with sculpture, of flatness with physicality, of animation with collage, and of video with performance.

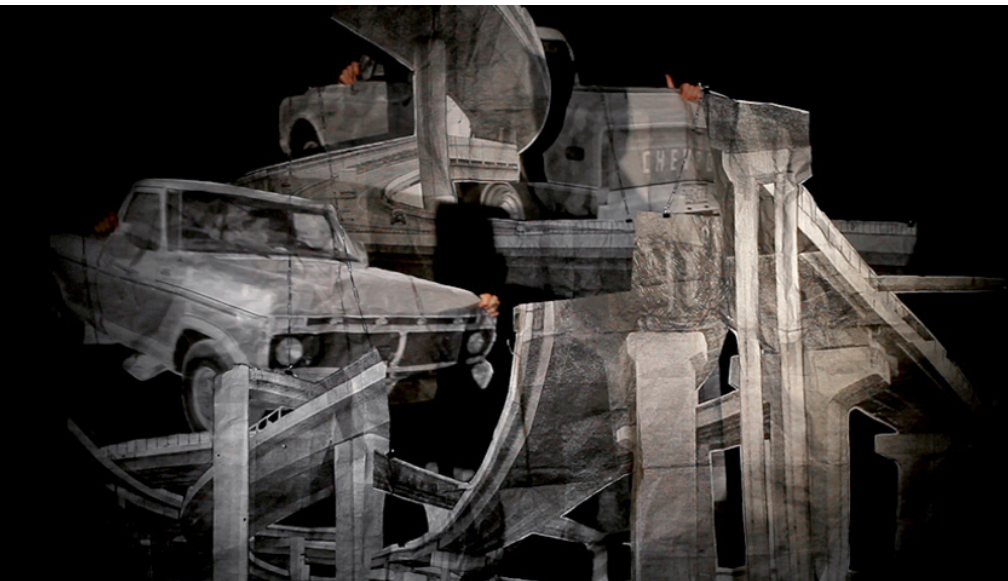
The unsurprising side effect of this complicated simultaneity of elements is strains and tears against conventional narrative. *POISON* begins with a die



picking up a hitchhiking 8-ball at a gas station. The two drive to the mountains and climb to the top, where the storyline begins to cloud. Water, represented by white lace, is drawn from the top of the mountain and placed, by human hands, into a hanging fruit basket. While the two climb the mountain, their car is towed. Nearby, another car strikes an elk, who, in death, sings its own eulogy, a blues song sung in German. The towed pick-up truck is taken to the dump, and the die and 8-ball go to retrieve it, using the collected blood of the elk (red lace) to resurrect the vehicle. The tow truck drives away, through a labyrinthine freeway conflated with a waterpark. At the top of a waterslide mountain, the truck pivots downward, and, as the video closes, everything begins to ooze. Bright green lace pours out of the pick-up truck, down the waterslides, and out the mouths and armpits of the people slipping down the waterslides.

POISON's storyline, with its layers, interjections, and meanderings, unfolds as a kind of dream – literally materialized as unfolding black, white, red, and green spools of lace that weave through the video, pushing and pulling through set pieces; stretching, catching, and slipping through openings in the photocopied papers. Some transitions are marked by clever framing devices; most notably and repeatedly through the openings of a large pop-up book, through which miniaturized set pieces emerge and unfold towards the viewer, underlining shifts in scale. *POISON*'s key conflict seems to be that of the natural environment versus the urban environment, and its key motifs are collapse and disintegration, pollution and consumption.

What Cohen is saying about consumption in *POISON* isn't entirely clear. Cohen's practice, lo-fi and DIY, explores how individuals interact with their



environments in real and imaginary ways. The delicateness of the crumpled photocopies he uses impart a sense of fragility, a fragility which one might connect with themes of environmentalism, particularly given the work's apparent meditations on the natural and the manmade. Cohen posits that the logic we use to understand the “real” can be “ephemeral” and “jerry-rigged”¹ – something humorously underscored through the consistent casting of his photocopier in his videos; a machine that performs a small role in each of his pieces as a kind of pseudo-auteur. One might expect such ambiguity to disquiet, but instead, Cohen's practice, as exemplified in *POISON*, provokes reconsiderations of how we interact with objects and our environment, and the nature and process of art-making.

¹Deville Cohen, Artist's Statement, MoMA PS1 Studio Visit, Museum of Modern Art, 2012, accessed on Dec 3, 2013, <http://momaps1.org/studio-visit/artist/deville-cohen>.

Artist Biography

Deville Cohen was born in Tel Aviv, Israel and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He studied at the Weisensee Kunsthochschule in Berlin and holds an MFA from Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2010. His performance-based photographs and video installations have been exhibited throughout the United States and Europe.

IMAGE CREDITS

DEVILLE COHEN *POISON* 2011 video, 17:58

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For more information, please visit our website, www.dunlopartgallery.org.

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The Dunlop Art Gallery is wheelchair accessible.

