

ART PAPERS

STRIKING IDEAS + MOVING IMAGES + SMART TEXTS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011 US \$7 CAN \$9 UK £6 EU €8

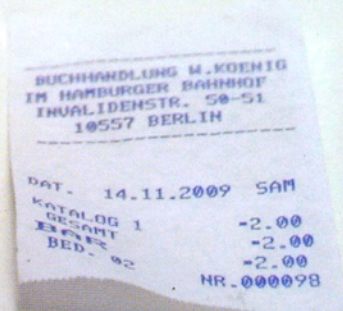


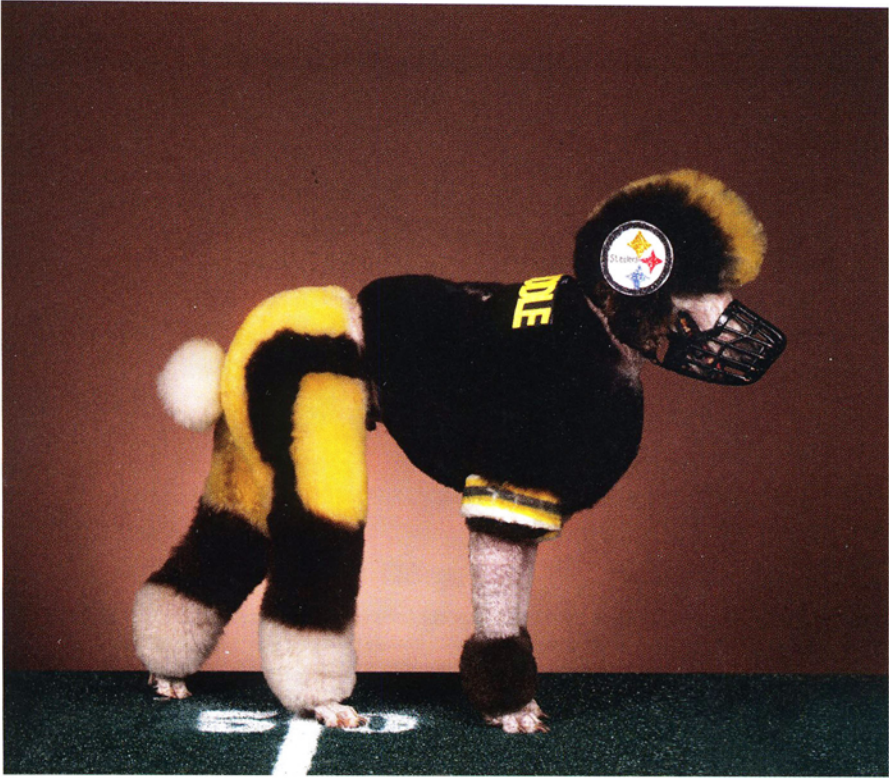
NEGENTROPY
AND PASTORALISM:
FERNANDO GARCÍA DORY

READYBOUGHT
JODI
IN CONVERSATION

CHARACTER
UNCATEGORIZED:
JIM NUTT

PORNO-POPULISM
THE PEOPLE'S BIENNIAL
+ WHATEVER IT TAKES





fifty-five

thirty-six



forty





WHATEVER IT TAKES PITTSBURGH

In their statement for *Whatever it Takes*, curators Jon Rubin, an assistant professor at the Carnegie Mellon School of Art, and Astria Suparak, the Miller Gallery Director, exalt the yet-unsung quality of Steeler Nation as “an active community of cultural producers” [Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University; August 27, 2010–January 30, 2011]. Innocuous enough, the term “cultural producers” can be used more safely than “artists.” The substitute is sensible, if almost litigiously dodgy.

A wood-framed replica of the basement of superfan Denny DeLuca is centrally located on the second floor. The original is itself a trove of customized and re-appropriated memorabilia that would take much to inventory. Like all the objects in the show, they are unlicensed. On the TV, DeLuca, a local chef, paternally recites anecdotes behind some of the more notable items, proffering a quieter side of Steelers mania, stripped of the war paint. He lovingly expounds upon this and that object, such as a gore-covered golden boxing glove sporting the scrawled names of opposing team members who have been physically punished by Pittsburgh linemen.

On the back wall, a panoramic black-and-gold Robinson projection illustrates the plenitude of allegedly Steelers-themed bars around the world. Next is a wall of photographs of team tattoos, indelible marks of self-identification that here double as unifiers. The images range in intricacy and size from meaty shoulder-width tableaux of steel-skinned men snapping chains before a fiery red city skyline to the team logo's innocent triple diamond. Abiding by the show's ethos of democratized documentation, they are situated in a neat grid, given equal billing among dozens more.

Installed nearby, *The Immaculate Re-creation* features a patch of astroturf rigged with recording equipment and a projection screen that allow the viewer to momentarily proxy wide receiver Franco Harris as he makes the nail-biting, game-winning catch of the 1972 AFC playoff game against the Raiders. Known since as the “Immaculate Reception”—Catholic wordplay for a

traditionally Catholic town—the catch is a historic lynching of the team's mythology. As such, it's a logical addition. Yet, its interactive, semi-kinetic dimension seems belabored in this context, which otherwise privileges a grassroots idiom.

This is evidence that *Whatever It Takes* works best when it's least produced. The galvanizing raucousness and the instinctive clinging to the team's success or failure don't translate unless they are laid bare. Likewise, understanding the Steelers fans' ferocity requires an act of fellowship or faith. Suparak and Rubin curate gingerly—with preservationist care—framing without straining to deconstruct the insular and heartfelt peculiarities of Steelers culture. The gallery mediates a sort of creative sublimation of fandom, with its inimitable rawness and verve.

Significantly, most of the exhibition's coverage has been published outside the arts sections. It's framed locally as a usually opaque art space's populist nod to sports fans, and nationally as a tourist curiosity. In “Cheering Section,” published on September 18 in *The New York Times*, writer Eric Dash drolly notes “Art Basel it is not.”

While Art Basel it is surely not designed to be, Dash's facile observation brushes upon the debatable nature of such an exhibition. A demonstration of the institutional limitations of relational art and an exploration of the lengths to which a curator may responsibly go in pursuing alternative exhibition methods, *Whatever it Takes* is no more a valentine to fans than it is a forum for necessarily good art to be viewed.

The effectiveness of the show, after all, hinges on the modification of conventional judgements, even by contemporary standards, and the re-assertion of things like passion, relevance, and solidarity. In the City of Champions, different rules apply.

—Curt Riegelneegg

FORUM 65: REANIMATION PITTSBURGH

Forum 65: Reanimation veers away from carpeted quietude, opting instead to position its idiosyncratically-scaled projections amidst right angles and cut stone [Carnegie Museum of Art; July 2–October 3, 2010]. Reminiscent of Lascaux Cave more than a traditional sound-dampened black box, the exhibition implies a valuable critique of the established codes for display of moving-image works. *Reanimation* includes two films, which clack and buzz from imposing pedestal-mounted projectors that stand like sphinxes in the middle of the slate floor. The high ceiling fills with noise even though all three works are silent. While the presentation of moving-image installations at major institutions is usually confined to soporific “sit and whisper” zones—little churches—the space of *Forum 65: Reanimation* hums with energy. In phase with this hard-edged installation, the subjects and diegetic contours of the show map complex, primal topographies of obsession, ritual, and entrancement. The artists appear to delight in building atmospheres of cultural gravitas, which they know will evaporate in the light of their works' evident artifice and ephemeral media.

The pieces on view—by William E. Jones, Joachim Koester, and the team of Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer—dispense with discursive scripts in order to trace material and bodily experience more directly. Resonant conceptual chords and strict aesthetic focus invigorate them. *Punctured*, 2010, Jones' projected sequence of digitized images, began with one hundred vintage prints from the Library of Congress' photo archives. These prints are from black-and-white negatives shot on assignment in the 1930s and 1940s by prominent photographers and rejected by Roy Stryker, the Farm Security Administration's director of photography, who unceremoniously punched holes in them, scarring each image with a black circle. Taking these fingertip-sized voids as his literal and figurative points of departure, Jones places them at the center of his frame. The “camera” starts inside each picture's black hole and zooms out until the entire image is visible. Painstaking

PAGE 1: detail of *Whatever It Takes*: Ren Netherland/Animal Photography, *Cosley Football Player (Roethlispooodle)*, 2009, photograph, dog groomed by its owner Justine Cosley (courtesy of the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh); ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: detail of *Whatever It Takes*: *The Immaculate Re-creation*, 2010, interactive installation (produced by and courtesy of the Miller Gallery at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh); William E. Jones, still from *Punctured*, 2010 (courtesy of the artist and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh)