

ARTFORUM

Frances Scholz

TIF SIGERIDS

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View of “Amboy,” 2014.

“Amboy,” Cologne-based Conceptualist Frances Scholz’s first major solo exhibition in Los Angeles consists of little more than a press release, two five-minute videos—ostensibly, the trailers for a documentary film about an artist named Amboy—and a set of five relatively small photographs of Amboy, California, an unincorporated town located in the Mojave Desert. Working with these modest fragments Scholz stages a provocative critique of contemporary art stardom as transacted in the sunlit glare of LA, the epicenter of our most potent mythologies, tall tales and shared hallucinations. In one of them, an artist named Frances Scholz visits the city in order to make a film on the (genuinely fascinating) life of Lydia van Vogt, widow of science-fiction author A. E. van Vogt. But Scholz soon abandons that project, we learn, detoured by the story of Amboy, an artist “you haven’t heard of,” (according to the press release) whose turbulent absence and mercurial afterimage are at the center of this confounding installation.

The frame narrative is pure hokey of course, the first in a cascading series of densely intertextual red herrings deployed by Scholz, not the least of which is the eponymous Amboy, a thinly veiled Hollywood stand-in for the late LA-based artist Jason Rhoades, whose volcanic talent turned the American low-cult lore of violence, cocaine, straight sex, and salvaged thrills into an obsessive, polymorphous visual language for contemporary art. An immediately recognizable Paul Giamatti plays Amboy as self-destructive art monster and redneck Trimalchio, consuming and regurgitating all in unholy communion with the image flow that surrounds him. Scholz ironically evokes and pays tribute to Amboy/Rhoades’s gargantuan, fan-boy extroversion, then compresses it into a bleak joke without a punch line, a self-reflexive knot of parallel histories, alternate geographies, and unsettling slippages between the fake reality conjured by “Amboy” and the real, fake world just outside.

— **Alexander Keefe**

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