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Frances Scholz

TIF SIGFRIDS

View of "Frances Scholz," 2014.

The most coherent moments in Frances Scholz's *Trailer I* and *II*, both 2014, ostensibly promo shorts for her as-yet-unmade film *Amboy*, are recurring snippets of writer (and friend of the gallery) Chris Kraus (re)delivering a lecture she once gave on Jason Rhoades. For Scholz's project, Kraus has swapped Rhoades's name for "Amboy," the documentary's doubtful subject, a fictional painter "you haven't heard of"—resulting in phrases intended for Rhoades's practice but here projected onto Scholz's prolific every-artist. For example: "It was mostly just a bunch of people hanging around eating and drinking." Projected at a wild angle that cut across two gallery walls, the videos were delirious, schizo—scenes and images strung together incoherently without plot, AMBOY and COMING SOON crawling up the screen every thirty seconds. But is it? Whereas Scholz's previous exhibitions have hung on her facility in negotiating various painterly dichotomies—portrait versus landscape, vertical versus horizontal, abstract versus concrete—the present show seemed to fly free from such preoccupations. Here, Scholz stripped away the "work," creating and exhibiting an artist as "pure" pretext. Amboy—Amgirl?—has no artwork, no body, no fixed gender—just a name, a gallery, and a lot of friends "hanging around."

The story of *Amboy* begins, apparently, with Scholz's hunt for a sci-fi writer's widow, leading the artist from Cologne, where she is based, to Amboy, California—a "ghost town" in the Mojave (population: four males) whose material shell exists even as Amboy the artist does not. At Tif Sigfrids, five framed snapshots document the area's humble attractions: salt ponds at sunset;a mobile chicken shack; a crater in Amboy (the work is subtitled "Black Pussy," simultaneously an allusion to Rhoades's practice and a quick jab at James Turrell's *Roden*). These impersonal scenes are arranged in a huddle around an expanse of sand as bare as a blank canvas awaiting a painter of vision. Amboy, the artist, remains withdrawn, but his patrons keep showing up: LA collector Juliet McIver—a friend of the gallery who for the past couple of years has been airlifting curious artists and curators to Amboy—pilots the Bellanca propeller plane at the end of *Trailer II*.

In another scene, outside an iconic house by the Viennese-born LA architect Rudolph Schindler, Mark von Schlegell, actual sci-fi author and sometime art writer with ties to Scholz's Cologne, gives an actual lecture. A "plant" in the audience turns out to be Noura Wedell, a writer, editor, and fellow intellectual from Semiotext(e), the publishing house that Kraus helps run and that published two of von Schlegell's books. Yet another friend, the actor Paul Giamatti, makes a virtuosic cameo, memorably munching a cigar and mumbling darkly: "Fiction . . . He's talking about *me*. . . ." Cut to bits by Stephen Malkmus, Sergej Jensen, Eleanor Antin and other actual, art-famous people killing time in a hallway, in the desert, on camera . . .

How recognizable are the faces in Scholz's freewheeling "who's who"? Basically not at all, unless you too happen to have an "in" to the LA network sketched in the *Amboy* trailers' sutured, frenetic montage. Scholz appeared in the gallery sans any evidence of the artist's "hand." Found school chairs; perfunctory landscape photos of salt ponds, craters, and dirt; a crazily keystoned projection—the films amount to a shaky and sunbaked cop of certain tropes of the American-boy artist and his art-world entourage. While the viewer is busy spotting celebrities in *Amboy*, Scholz crafts a convincingly "exhibition-y" exhibition from these same stock myths—with a cagey nod to the absent Amboy's complicity in perpetuating them. Her looping, low-budget trailers-without-a-film careen into each other; Scholz straps herself to these artist-fictions like one half of a tandem skydiving team (boy and girl). It's not clear—and not important—where one ends and the other begins, only that they always plummet toward a noplace called *Amboy* (coming soon).

—*Travis Diehl*

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