

### REVIEWS

October 2013

#### NEW YORK

### Simon Fujiwara

Andrea Rosen Gallery // June 28–August 9

EXPLAINING THE autobiographical themes that run through his work, Fujiwara once offered an anecdote from his art-school days in Germany. Because he hailed from an architecture background, his peers tended to dismiss his sculptures as the work of an architect. Turning to his own story, then, was a means to an end, not the end itself: “What we do as artists is almost always read against our biographies, and...the only way I could take control of this would be to use my biography as the material for my works.”

The British-Japanese artist, now based in Berlin, has since mined his personal history to good effect in sly multimedia installations: In 2010 he won Frieze Art Fair’s Cartier Prize, and last year, at 30, he scored a career retrospective at Tate St Ives, in Cornwall. His current project at Andrea Rosen, “Studio Pietà (King Kong Komplex),” marks his first solo presentation in New York. In the rear gallery, a series of three large photographs centers on the image of a blonde model cradling a shirtless man in her arms, Pietà-style. The main gallery, meanwhile, features a documentary film in which Fujiwara narrates, in the form of a Q&A interview with himself, his motives for staging this image and the process of realizing it. A series of bulletin boards adorned with actors’ head shots, family photos, and other documents shown in this work surround the projected film.

Here is what we learn from Fujiwara’s voice-over: His intent was to re-create a photo of his own mother, taken on a beach in Lebanon during her days as a traveling showgirl, in the arms of a man other than

his father. The image, he suggests, had a personal erotic kick for him; he recalls finding the features of the man in the photo exotic. In the process of telling his story of restaging the image, Fujiwara takes off on a variety of asides: explicating what he calls the King Kong complex (that dark-skinned men have served as symbols for repressed European sexuality); investigating water pollution on the beach where the original photo was taken (he remembers the figures in the photo as wet—but could they even have been swimming?); and detailing the challenges of casting “Middle Eastern-looking men” in Berlin.

Fujiwara’s obsession with confession might seem a bit cloying in the age of over-sharing. That’s why, in a kind of reversal of figure and ground, his detours from autobiography are probably the real thing of interest here. The final photo deliberately flips the one Fujiwara set out to re-create, with the woman holding the man. In one of the more poignant turns of his film’s narrative, Fujiwara recounts that the actor playing his mystery man, who once portrayed a terrorist in Stephen Spielberg’s *Munich*, 2005, told him during the shoot how he resented being continually typecast because of his ethnicity. The final inversion is framed as a coy response to this, and the whole installation can be read as less about the artist’s personal story and more about how that story, bound up with those of others, becomes restructured and reshuffled. In that sense, Fujiwara does indeed still think like an architect, in that architecture is the art that pits us most directly against the challenge of living together. —Ben Davis

#### LONDON

### Hamish Fulton

Maureen Paley // July 20–August 25

THE APPARENTLY endless distances traveled by Britain’s most celebrated artist-walker—journeys walked personally by the artist and later illustrated in posters, sculptures, videos, and photographs—feel especially remote during London’s summer. On the day I visit this collection of work indexing the numerous paths



traversed by Fulton over 40 years, including treks in the Himalayas and protests in Tibet, the great outdoors could not feel further away. Of course, the discrepancy between the journeys themselves and how they are represented is one of Fulton’s main preoccupations.

The ground floor of the exhibition has 21 pieces that span the artist’s career, most of which are hung on two walls. A selection of small painted wood sculptures contrasts with a three-meter-high poster opposite, dominated by sans serif text reading, in part, “Walking down the middle of the road, Tibetan Protest,” which easily overpowers the room. The work refers to a protest walk made by the artist from the Chinese Embassy on London’s Portland Place to Trafalgar Square in 2009. Political messages continue with *Google Champa Tenzin*, 2007, a work again concerning Tibetan upheaval, yet its educational sentiment and its posterlike design ultimately overwhelm the delicacy of the other material. The small-scale ziggurat that is *21 pieces of wood. Beartooth Mountains. Montana. 1997*, for

BELOW:  
**Simon Fujiwara**  
Installation  
view of  
“Studio Pietà  
(King Kong  
Komplex),”  
2013.

RIGHT:  
**Hamish Fulton**  
*7 pieces of  
wood. Mont  
Blanc. France  
Italy, 2009.*  
Painted wood  
with walk  
text, 9 x 5 in.

