

## The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing

by Mathilde Heyns

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Terri Friedman "After-ski Quilt with Revolving Lights and Swastika", 1996

Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, evolves around the paradox of the lightness and the heaviness. One tends to choose the lightness in life over the heaviness, yet "the heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become. Conversely, the absolute absence of a burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into the heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant." (Milan Kundera, p.5) The absolute absence of a burden, however, causes man to be lighter than air, fly up and hover above the earth and earthly existence, becoming only half real, leaving his movements to be free as well as pointless. The dazzling world of glamour, sports and pop music, the supposed domain of lightness, is the central theme in the group show "The Unbearable Whiteness of Skiing (existentialism now)," curated by artist Twan Janssen.

Entering Artists' Space Hooghuis is like entering a discotheque. The side, high space is filled with a dense fog; various kinds of music clash; lights blink and a laserbeam rotates. Along with the energetic exuberance in the room comes a sense of loneliness, when you appear to be the only person present in this festive hall. A huge wallpainting by Sylvie Fleury--the trademark of "Egoiste" perfume shaved out in white letters on a deep black wall--is an allegory on lightness and heaviness. Associations with glossy fashion magazines, beautiful people and expensive taste mingle with the selfishness and greediness of an egoist pur-sang. Fleury, who turned her glamorous lifestyle into art, tries on an endless amount of shoes in her video twinkle. The functional act of "finding the right shoes with the right outfit" has made way for a bored, narcissistic performance to the beat of hits from the '50s.

To literally show oneself is also the theme in Peter Land's video *pete land may 5, 1994*. The artist dances naked in his room to the sound of pounding music. His exuberant joy is contagious. The stomping feet and shaking naked belly are touching and embarrassingly frank at the same time. Land, in a most outspoken way, shows the voyeurism that is inherent in looking at art. This intimate, naked private dance had been recorded on video for a while, before the artist decided to call it a work of art.

In the piece "*Le True*" by Bernard Joisten, it's not the artist revealing himself, but rather, it is the spectator who is invited to reveal his state of mind. "*Le True*" is an installation in which four white doors hang from the ceiling, resembling the format of stalls in a public restroom. With a black marker visitors have written cliché-graffiti and an occasional meaningful message on the doors. Despite the anonymity in this installation, the fact remains that it's hard to write something without thinking about it.

Artist Twan Janssen has surrounded himself in the exhibition with the artwork of colleagues he admires. He has consciously surrounded his own work with the work of others to create a dynamic relationship. By making a personal choice from the abundance of art available nowadays, Janssen has made an existentialist point: man only exists in his decisions; he is the sum of his acts. The choice of works is significant for Janssen's work. His own contributions to the show are minimal and modest. The laserbeam my eye-level rotates at his exact eye level, scanning the show endlessly, as if to make sure that the right choices are made. In the wonderful world of twan janssen, love, the preeminently existential lie, is for sale. For \$300 one of his works will be dedicated to you, with love. The name of the buyer and Janssen's love will stay with the artwork and will be mentioned in catalogs, publication and exhibitions.

Life's cruel insincerity, one of the themes of existentialism, is echoed most in Terri Friedman's work. For "*the Californian art collector*" she made the work gifted and clairvoyant, a circulating system of tubes with purple water and glitter pumping through it. The image on the enclosed user's manual shows that the work fits beautifully in the home of a modern collector. A well-dressed man and woman are kissing surrounded by their favorite works of art. The double meaning of the title, however, shows Friedman's ambivalence towards contemporary collecting. Especially for this show, Terri Friedman made a circular, creamy-white after-ski quilt for white people, radiating with joy as its spiral of Christmas-lights blinks and evolves. Various colorful images in the quilt illustrate Friedman's opinion on skiing being a "white" matter. As a persiflage on the famous painting *American Gothic*, 1930, by Gant Wood, she has given a puritan white farmer and his wife skiing-shades. Friedman's reaction to the literal meaning of the show's title is both sharp and subtle--in the center of the quilt, a swastika is carefully embroidered.

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