

The Rebirth of Nandi Loaf, or, Nandi Loaf has been Deleted

Andrew Hodgson - 17/02/2024

With her show '7' at Profil Galerie, Nandi Loaf asked the visitor to find the point of artistic creation, of artistic objects, submerged in a world deep in the process of utterly dismantling itself. She sought to give the viewer nothing, and in doing so give her audience nothing that might be taken away. And yet even an apocalypse has its cultural mediation. Even the catastrophe, any given catastrophe, has its cultural artefacts. It is, after all, by its cultural product that we know the catastrophes that have been, and by which those who come after us will know this one also.

In the two murals and robotic droning voice of a soundwork (all untitled, 2024), the artist evoked sparse flickers of the Nandi Loaf universe more immersively concocted in the previous installations that have established the Loaf aesthetic of coy nihilism. They appear as quotational snippets here, interspersed around the Marais apartment-cum-white cube of the gallery. In the larger main space, the blanked domestic walls are interrupted by a large waist-up Jack Skellington playing Father Christmas, as the baby goth embodiment of Halloween chooses to reinvent himself so in the film *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993). He reaches out across the wall from above the fireplace, announcing «Japanese text.» The impenetrability of Google Translate Japanese similarly draws the viewer into the second room, where intermittently the off-key syllables of a language spoken far from here plays from a small speaker hung above the doorway. In the back corner of this backroom another work of machine translation closer to home is adhered to the walls reading “Je ne sais pas.” “The I don't know” of the mural speaks perhaps of the reaction the artist expected from those attending the exhibition, or the viewer when assessing the Loaf corpus as a whole. This concluding statement reads as seven characters (including spacing) on each wall, drawing on the title of the show '7'. The title of the exhibition refers to this presentation as part of a larger sequence within the Loaf universe, being the artist's seventh solo showing.

This Parisian seventh showing presents a new transmutation of the themes and world-view explored at-large within the Loaf oeuvre. To take her 2021 work *Grid*, a wall work constructed of painted pre-stretched Walmart canvases that form the Instagram-esque grid of the work's title. Constructed of cheap consumer materials, each canvas demands the viewer follows “the most important artist of the 21st century” on various social media accounts. That is, the most important artist of a generation, a spirit that is re-embodied in each generation, and who must be followed online in its current quasi-Buddhist reborn iteration. A spirit of art that is embodied in our now within the form of Nandi Loaf. Counter to the eternal this might suggest however, to follow those links three years later is to arrive at a series of variations of the phrase “Nandi Loaf has been deleted.”

If this represents the work of an artist in 2021 at play within the artworld's thrall to capital and hyper-commercialisation, the untitled 2024 works represent an end to this ironic play within the boundaries of the artworld game. The symbols deployed in '7' have shif-

ted. With it, the Loaf universe moves away from the symbols of Loaf as Other, and instead turns to play with the symbols of a real life Loaf, a Loaf-proper. The Experiential, rather than Performed, Loaf. The cutesy cultural detournement of placing baby goth Jack across a wall exclaiming in Japanese “The show is over” might be taken as a personal statement of retreat from the capitalistic horror and socio-aesthetic redundancy of the artworld at large. And yet, it seems rather to speak of the world of art retreating from itself; de-politicised, unmoored to any relational aesthetic project, drowned in capital. Superfluous. In amongst all this Loaf’s practice has mutated, from playing with the soft interface of our catastrophe, to the negation of that play in a practice that makes of the gallery space a theatre of the absurd.

Loaf invites the viewer to play out a process she describes as “the crash after the sugar rush,” to pull themselves through the saccharine leftovers of an art practice now uninterested in the market that has enveloped it, and within which the practice of being an artist has become the practice of “farming zombies.” The ephemerality of the show itself, its un-saleability, is a continuation of a digital, socially-distanced install practice that has characterised Loaf’s recent shows. The murals were photoshopped into place on digital images of the gallery space. Documentation of the soundwork portrays a strikingly emptied room, the small cylinder of a speaker removed in order to properly document a view of the medium of air through which the robotic voice might travel. The two murals were drafted and painted directly onto the walls on 15/01/2024, and were subsequently scrubbed away and overpainted on 12/02/2024. At time of writing, there is little trace left of the nothing Loaf sought here to create. There is no easily-digested slideshow of ‘7’ on the Loaf grid, as the grid is a graveyard; the grid itself has been deleted.

This oblique reversal here again directs to the odd effect of creating nothing. For a nothing to exist, there must be a thing to be negated. In the process of negation, the artist seeks nothing, and in doing so, builds something else; Loaf has installed and removed a signifying thing, perhaps also a signifying no-thing. Objects, negated or not, leave their human traces. The Loaf interruptions of the empty apartment, white-washed and strip-lit though still embellished with the architectural leavings of domesticity, sought to give the viewer nothing, to smear a sickly residue that could not or would not be consumed and recycled. And yet the undead avatar of the artist declaring the end of the game, leering over their audience seems to suggest there is another life to Nandi Loaf, a new stage in the project of our generation’s most important artist. A statement by which the objects of art might function despite the undeath of capital, the graveyard that is art made bite-size by the internet and ADHD, and the historic global catastrophes through which we now try to persist. A stage set where there must be someone left to give the line “that’s all, folks!” And that person might just have to be, the most important artist of our times.