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Lubomyr Melnyk performing at the NUMINA lente music festival, New York, April 14, 2011. Photo: Jay Sanders.

ALEX HUBBARD

Lubomyr Melnyk (NUMINA lente music festival, New York)

Lubomyr Melnyk's performance on the first night of the NUMINA lente festival, organized by Jay Sanders and Keith Connolly, offered a glimpse of an intensity, invention, and sincerity that one rarely, if ever, sees. Melnyk is a Ukrainian composer who has worked in obscurity and "shit poverty" (as he puts it) for more than forty years. This was only his third concert in New York. To try to describe Melnyk's music is to fall short of its virtuosity. He is debatably the fastest pianist in the world and has created his own "continuous music"—an exquisite layering of harmonic overtones and melodies. Waves of sound build, mix, vibrate, and rupture. The physical properties of his music are astounding; then to see it played, coming out of a piano being driven at top speed or almost possessed by a man whose arms seem to be more swimming than playing an instrument—this is the kind of fix that I wait around New York for.

DAVID NOONAN

Katharina Stoeber and Barbara Wolff, *Peles Empire*

In 2005, artists Stoeber and Wolff came together to create *Peles Empire*, an ongoing collaborative project that takes its name from the fin de siècle Romanian Peleş Castle. Known for its splendid pastiche of architectural and cultural influences, the palace features styles ranging from neo-Renaissance, Gothic Revival, and Baroque to Moorish, imperial, and Florentine. With each new iteration of the project, Stoeber and Wolff dress the walls of a given space with a trompe l'oeil re-creation of one of the castle's many rooms. This always evolving, continually fascinating project—which includes not only wall treatments but also a range of performances, exhibitions, and events—has existed, since early this year, in mirrored form, split between outposts in London's neighborhood of Stoke Newington and the Romanian city of Cluj.



Peles Empire, The King's Study, 2007, letter-format color copies. Installation view, MAX Center, Los Angeles.

B. WURTZ

"Tony Tasset: *Judy*" (Leo Koenig Inc. Projekte, New York)

Tony Tasset's film *Judy*, 1998, shows a woman looking at the camera, which is supposedly being operated by Tasset, her husband. We witness, and relate to, her air of suspicion and self-consciousness, but what is most palpable is the strong psychological bond between her and the cameraman. Like voyeurs, we study the few seconds of footage as they loop over and over again. The piece is presented in a dark room by a cold and impersonal monster—the film projector—which loudly screeches and creaks along, scratching and gradually destroying the film. Even with this machine standing in place of the husband, we still detect love on the woman's face.



Tony Tasset, *Judy*, 1998, still from a color film in 35 mm, 6 seconds.

Matt Keegan, *Untitled (Group 14)*, 2011, four color photographs, painted sheet metal, magnets, 48 x 96".



SARA VANDERBEEK

"Matt Keegan: I Apple NY" (D'Amelio Terras, New York)

Much like New York itself, Matt Keegan's show "I Apple NY" was immersive and layered, pushing me to reconsider not just what the nature of a city is but what an art exhibition can be. Every piece felt intimate and personal yet also communicated more universal concerns. From his dynamic image arrangements along the walls to his poignant book *A History of New York*, published in conjunction with the show, Keegan offered us an affecting reminder that New York, as a collective entity, resonates not only with the histories embedded in its infrastructure but with the ideals, emotions, dreams, and struggles of the people who live here.

MANDLA REUTER

Kerstin Cmelka, *Change* ("Based in Berlin," various venues, Berlin) Kerstin Cmelka's *Change*, 2009, part of her ongoing series "Microdramas," was a standout piece in this year's "Based in Berlin" exhibition. In keeping with previous works such as *Nora*, 2009, and *Ich liebe Dich*, 2011, *Change* is an amazingly sexy hybrid of performance art, amateur theatrics, and folk theater. Out of the many different strategies in contemporary performance, Cmelka's work constitutes one of the most remarkable and straightforward approaches: figurative and hyperpersonal one moment, entirely abstract and general the next.

LAURA OWENS

Merlin Carpenter (*Overduin and Kite*, Los Angeles) In the 1969 film adaptation of Terry Southern's satirical novel *The Magic Christian*, Sir Guy Grand and his son Youngman Grand (played by Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr, respectively) work to reveal the avarice of the material world through humor, absurdist gesture, and hallucinatory Dada-like pranks. Likewise, Merlin Carpenter (whose name could be translated as "Magic Christian") mounted an exhibition in LA this year that was a tonic for every fatty cell that has accumulated within the obese corpus of painting. Like Sir Guy Grand or a wicked and unorthodox Zen master, Carpenter created a slim koan of an exhibition that activated a spiral of thought and awareness of structure that didn't allow the viewer to don the usual cloak of invisibility within the gallery but instead sparked an undeniable self-consciousness, unveiling the passive posture that we routinely relax into while walking through a show.



Merlin Carpenter, *1990 Repainted 1*, 2010, oil on linen, 39 1/2 x 27 1/2".

LEIGH LEDARE

"Commodity/Fetish" (Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York) This deft, subterranean show—which included works by Robert Heinecken, Hans Bellmer, Sam Lewitt, and Richard Prince—was organized by artist Nicolás Guagnini for the gallery's basement using Guagnini's own "Curatorial Machine": four cross-shaped sets of freestanding walls, on which the majority of works hung. It was a show that visitors, according to their desires, could manually reconfigure as if the walls were rotating postcard racks. Offset by Bellmer's razing erotic vocabulary, Lewitt's bureaucratic fetishes of inscription and exchange, and Heinecken's refantasticized advertising identifications, Guagnini's structural apparatus served to underwrite the whole show and to demand that the viewer pass through a revolving door of appropriable positions. Such shrewd, masochistic play let slip our paradoxical investment in the object to reveal—only to quickly re-veil—an unbearable void of meaning.