

NEW YORK

Tony Conrad

Greene Naftali // January 16–February 17

WITH THE RELEASE of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, a bombastically violent revenge narrative of a freed slave, the history of exploitation films has captured the public's imagination. This is the generative cultural backdrop for *WiP*, an installation based on the women in prison (or WiP) genre. But unlike Tarantino's film, a gleeful Hollywood bloodbath riddled with bullet holes, racial slurs, threats of sexual brutality, and absurdist humor, Conrad's installation does not strive for cinematic verisimilitude or slick aesthetics. Rather, it fuses Conrad's interest in perceptual disorientation with a clunky deconstruction of the film genre.

WiP uses as its point of departure a series of amateur women-in-prison films Conrad created in the early 1980s. These featured male and female artist friends like Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler restaging loosely improvised scenes based on the genre's hollow pornographic clichés, such as lesbian affairs between prisoners and sadistic abuse by prison guards. The giggling actors switch roles and genders, interrupting the action for a slapdash punk rock jam. Conrad



Tony Conrad
Installation view
of *WiP*, 2013.

projects an edited version of the film in a backroom installation based on his prison sets, incorporating buttery yellow cells furnished with bunk beds and bedpans, salmon-colored walls, and a flickering grid of fluorescent lights. Two panes of glass suspended from the ceiling, reminiscent of the booths that separate prison inmates from visitors, occupy most of the front gallery.

As an exhibition, "*WiP*" makes reference to Conrad's history in expanded cinema, his interests in subcultures, and his Foucauldian notions of institutional authority. The whole,

however, never exceeds the sum of its parts. Instead of immersing the viewers, the elements juggle by competing for their attention, resulting in a fractured skimming of the genre's surface conventions. The proplike cellblock architecture threatens to overwhelm rather than elevate the moments of wry humor and cross-dressing transgression by Kelley and company in the film. If *Django* is problematic for Tarantino's unchecked indulgence of blaxploitation's conventions, *WiP* falters for its detached approach to the genre's problematics of representation. —Wendy Vogel



A.R. Penck
*System—Problem—
abstract (System—
Problem—abstract)*,
2010. Acrylic on
canvas, 63 x 51 1/4 in.

NEW YORK

A.R. Penck

Michael Werner // January 10–March 8

BORN RALF WINKLER in Dresden in 1939, Penck managed to smuggle his canvases out of the German Democratic Republic in 1969 for his first solo show in Cologne, which was organized by Michael Werner. It was the beginning of a relationship between Penck and the gallery that has continued uninterrupted since. With hundreds of important gallery, museum, and biennial exhibitions to his name, Penck returns to Werner's intimate New York space with a lively selection of paintings from the past few years.

The largest canvas in the show, *Dreigeteiltes Problem* (Tripartite Problem), 2011, is a pictograph with letters, arrows, and geometric forms surrounding three of Penck's signature male stick figures. Using thick brushstrokes and a primary palette of red, green, blue, and black on a lightly washed field, Penck creates an enigmatic yet jazzy image of a man caught in a complex environment. Similarly, *Zwischen zwei Welten* (Between Two Worlds), also 2011, floats

three male stick figures in a cosmos of symbols and shapes, rendered in black on a stark white ground, as though they're adrift in a purely philosophical domain.

Eröffnung (Opening) and *Vorstoß* (Advance), both 2010, present red and black letters and forms arranged on small white canvases in the referential manner of El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich, respectively. Meanwhile, *Landschaft—Tag* (Landscape—Day) and *Landschaft—abseits* (Landscape—remote), both 2011, turn the world upside down, with the sun piercing an expressionistic landscape of rapidly painted shapes in the former and darkness encroaching on a rat-infested, layered realm in the other.

Constructing an artistic universe to express existential concerns, Penck in this exhibition returns to the iconic vocabulary that he has developed over time with the same primitive directness that labeled him a rebel in his youth.

—Paul Laster