

That the World Should Know No Men but These

GRIN, Providence

Oct 14 - Nov11, Reception Oct 14, 6-9PM

The most recent works by artist Sandra Erbacher reflect on the darker side of bureaucracy and the role it has played in supporting oppressive regimes of power.

Pulling from various historical as well as literary sources, and deliberately blurring the boundaries between the two, Erbacher creates a corporate lobby of a fictional company specializing in “knowledge work”.

The Adaptive Enterprise, one of the focal pieces of the show is a mission statement of said imaginary company spelled out in three-dimensional gold letters across one of the two large center walls. Its use of authoritative language coupled with its substantial size aim to impress upon the visitor the power, authority and influence exerted by the company. This however, is called into doubt by the content of the statement, which seems vague and purposefully evasive.

On the opposite wall looms *ComSystem*, a large-format photograph mounted on dibond and displayed against a backdrop of carpet tiles. The photograph, which is appropriated from the catalogue of an office furniture manufacturer, depicts a desk in the shape of a swastika. According to the manufacturer, the large, continuing desk is tailored to the work needs of each individual, whilst supporting communication within a group that needs to share information. This emphasis on flexibility, adaptability and a breakdown of hierarchies stands in sharp contrast to the ideological symbolism the swastika has acquired after World War II conjuring the detached efficiency and compartmentalised bureaucracy with which the horrors of the Holocaust have been perpetrated.

To the right of *ComSystem* sits *Utopian Structure for the Cultivation of Social Connectivity*, a stack of office water cooler bottles that have been carved out of styrofoam and coated with hydrocal. Formally, *Utopian Structure* borrows from, and is homage to Constantin Brancusi's Endless Column, while providing a tongue-in-cheek critique of the commonplace lobby sculpture. The title further alludes to the failed aspirations of modernism to transform society, erase inequality and bring people together through affordable, functional, minimalist design and architecture.

Interspersed amongst the larger works hang three charts printed on paper. Resembling office notices, they each measure 14x18in and are attached to the wall using pushpins. The charts and graphs displayed in the map series feature plans for different office landscapes. Office landscapes were conceived of in the early 1950s in what was an attempt to implement an open plan and to break down walls and, by extension, hierarchies in the office. However, what was designed to create a more democratic and dynamic space, eventually led to the introduction of the office cubicle, a symbol of white-collar workforce alienation. The maps are accompanied by captions assembled from online mission statement generators that attest to Erbacher's concern with language as a vehicle to create, perpetuate and potentially disrupt ideologies and unequal power relations.

A standard piece of office equipment is the subject of *imageRUNNER*, a freestanding, life-sized photograph of a photocopier nudged into a corner of the space. *imageRUNNER* blurs the boundaries between photography and sculpture, and between flatness and perspective, while lending the space a sense of the strange as well as the mundane.

Circling back to the center of this fictional lobby, a waiting area made up of four chairs, an end table and plants, offers the viewer a moment of respite. The tranquility of the space, however, is interrupted by a slowly ascending sound conjuring the anxiousness and uncertainty of the waiting room experience. *That the World Should Know No Men but These* is at once dystopian, anxiety provoking and humorous. Through strategies of re-contextualisation and juxtaposition of image, object, text and sound, Erbacher asks the viewer to question assumed singular truths and voices of authority, particularly when embedded in, disguised and validated by the workings of a bureaucratic system.