

‘Crumbling the Antiseptic Beauty’ Shatters the Sterile Veneer

At Fondation Pernod Ricard in Paris, David Douard curates a show featuring 13 artists that frames collective practice as something sticky and uneasy

BY DYLAN HUW IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 10 JUN 24



‘Crumbling the Antiseptic Beauty’ sees artist-curator David Douard channel the poetics of movement and cross-pollination, which animate his sculptural practice, into a group show of unlikely and mysterious rewards. It constellates mostly pre-existing work by 13 artists in Douard’s orbit to gesture towards the stimulation and polyvocal affect generated by the shared-studio environment. Though Douard’s practice remains entwined with the ‘post-internet art’ label, this show is suggestive of the rough-and-ready analogue media that have long inflected his work – think graffiti and fanzines – and named after a beloved 1982 record by jangle-pop outfit Felt. Like the music of that band, this show dares you to succumb to its accumulated disorientations.



'Crumbling the Antiseptic Beauty', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris; photograph: Martin Argyroglo

A liquid unease permeates our path from one artwork to the next. Obstructions appear both in the form of Marie Angeletti's *Polished Balls* (2023), which are scattered throughout sections of the exhibition, and in the imposing white blinds with which Douard has partitioned the space, such that we peripherally sense many works before we fully encounter them. There is uncertainty as to whether we're being invited to wander into this or that corridor, or where a display of one artist's work stops and another begins. Such a subordination of individual pieces into an architectural-affective framework characterized by contingency and trepidation makes for a welcome stickiness at a moment in which the institutional art world's fetishization of 'collective practices' has assumed its own uncritical orthodoxies. Here, the overarching logic is not exactly collectivist but perhaps ouroboric, works feeding each other in ways that demand the viewer pursue their own imaginative fancies.



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The latent erotics of such an environment are drawn out by the presentation – on a PC workstation – of Morag Keil's *Potpourri* (2013), which fuses mock paparazzi and home-video footage in a coolly ironic commentary on stardom, capital and consent. The voice-over of Keil's film resounded as I browsed Jacques-Elie Chabert's 2001 photographs of an apartment the late Pascal Doury shared with fellow artists, which likewise speak to our moment's obsession with retracing the collective psychic upheaval that accompanied our recent transition from analogue to digital documentation. Overlooking the 27 platforms of the adjacent Gare Saint-Lazare are two 2024 paintings by Guillaume Dénervaud, *Les blés sédatifs* (Sedative Blues) and *La gare Saint-Lazare* (St-Lazare Station), the show's one clear instance of site-responsiveness. The canvases translate the station's commingling of light and industry into brushstrokes evocative of dancing particles. Nearby, Benjamin Lallier's *untitled leather sofas* (2023), doused in black acrylics, face the white nothingness of the space's walls, their eeriness intensified by the wiry shadows of Clémentine Adou's *Daddy long legs' hands* (2023–24), a structure whose spindly metal frames, bent like a wind-beaten umbrella, form a kind of focal point to the exhibition.



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The show's dominant affect of corrupted office-space sterility suggests Douard's devotion to chance and to us forming our own associations between the artworks, the space's imposing demarcators and fellow visitors. In this regard, it feels in conversation with similar artist-curated group exhibitions which draw from diverse practices to evoke the slipperiness of 'collectivity' in contemporary networked society – including those which have in recent years become central to James Richards's practice. A reconfiguration of Richards's immersive sound collage *Migratory Motor Complex* (2017), originally mounted for the reverent environs of a Venetian church, acts as a coda. Enveloping visitors within six surround-sound speakers, it's one of several works which subjugate the corporeality of the observer-listener to the forceful agency of the exhibition's spatial apparatus. At one point, a voice repeats the refrain: 'Begin again, begin again.' So, I do: I reverse my path through the exhibition, this time photographing hitherto-unnoticed details, as if to forensically document instances where its clinical (almost antiseptic) cool reveals moments of potentiality – even something like beauty.

'Crumbling the Antiseptic Beauty' is at Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris, until 13 July

Main image: 'Crumbling the Antiseptic Beauty', 2024, exhibition view. Courtesy: Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris; photograph: Martin Argyroglo