

Simon Starling's Phantom Ride



by Lucia Ruggiero

An introductory guide to Starling's video commission piece, currently on show at the Tate Britain, cites Foucault as theoretical inspiration. 'the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages'



'Phantom Ride'] is a video piece featured on an enormous video screen in the Duveen Galleries of the Tate Britain. Stemming from this idea of combining history in one space, Starling has used the 'phantom ride' genre to create a visual journey through the history of the gallery. 'Phantom ride' as a genre was popular at the start of cinema as an artistic form of production, a thrilling virtual journey that makes you feel as if you may fall off your seat. The ghostly theme of the work is perhaps mirrored by the history of the gallery; in 1940 a bomb hit the Tate Britain building and the gallery roof was destroyed. Projections of the rubble waste and past exhibitions are shown in the video piece, which takes us through the gallery's use as an exhibition space, its destruction and its rehabilitation.



Sound effects and zooming camera angles fly you in and around the space, while art pieces from different time periods are featured,

all within the same digital sequence. What we are watching is a meta-gallery; while we stand physically within the gallery itself we are taken on a journey through a digital interpretation of the same space. This interaction of the digital work with the real gallery structure is enthralling. The way the camera sweeps quickly and abruptly from one space to the other takes us on a 'Phantom Ride' through gallery history, where the old pieces are the ghosts from the gallery's past. Works featured in the piece include Picasso's 'The Charnel House' from 1944-5, Warhol's 'Triple Elvis' from 1963, and a statue of St George by the Provost and Fellows of Eton College from around 1560. Perhaps the only letdown of the piece is the imbalance in immediate recognition between the contemporary pieces, which include some of the most iconic artists throughout history, and the Early Modern and 19th Century, which are not as well known. In a piece that depends so much on the visual recognition of artwork by the audience, the contrast between the old and the new in an attempt to unite different artistic eras into one gallery space may have been more successful had the older pieces been more iconic. However, this cannot merely be the choice of the artist as his selection depended entirely on pieces that had genuinely been displayed within the Duveen galleries at some point in history. Perhaps unintentionally, the digital piece sheds light on the progress the gallery space has undergone from displaying rarer more English and local pieces, to being home to international successes such as Picasso and Pollock.

Simon Starling is an English artist who works with film, video, photography and sculpture.

About 'Phantom Ride' on the Tate Britain website:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/simon-starling>

(Photos: Alfred Carlebach 1939, Tate Archive (c))