

SAD MAG

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REVIEW // MUNGO THOMSON: TIME, PEOPLE, MONEY, CRICKETS

by Alice Fleerackers



June 25, 2001 (How the Universe Will End), 2012
March 6, 1995 (When Did the Universe Begin?), 2012
Enamel on low-iron mirror, poplar and anodized aluminum, Installation
view, Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York

I'd never heard of Mungo Thomson before last Tuesday, when I stepped inside the air-conditioned lobby of the Contemporary Art Gallery for a break from Vancouver's heatwave. In that cool recluse, I discovered Mungo Thomson: Time, People, Money, Crickets—a stunning compilation of some of the LA artist's latest work—and now I can't get his name, or the exhibit, out of my mind.

Time, People, Money, Crickets experiments with sound, film, print and space to create an interactive gallery experience. The exhibit features several large-scale mirror works from Thomson's TIME series, a musical score based on the chirping of crickets (Crickets, 2012-2013), and my personal favourite: a 132-page collection of photographs of gallery visitors viewing seemingly invisible artworks (People, 2011).

Expertly curated by Nigel Prince, the exhibition cleverly inverts roles of artist and visitor; photographer and model; creator and observer. Upon entering a large, white room, I found myself surrounded by mirrors emblazoned with the iconic TIME Magazine logo. The mirrors faced each other, creating an unending string of reflections. It was hard not to be self-conscious in that space; standing amid a hundred selfies, there were so many versions of myself that I began to feel claustrophobic. The experience was also distancing; I could feel my identity, my entire concept of self, becoming fainter and fainter with each subsequent reflection. Mirrors—I realized—reflect, but they also warp and obscure.

A collection of open cardboard boxes stood, seemingly neglected, among the mirrors. Go ahead, grab one, a gallery attendant urged me. Inside was *People*: a magazine without words, filled with photographs of galleries without art. All that was left, of course, were the people themselves, caught in the act of observation—an act which, when the image has been removed, appears stranger and stranger with each turn of the page. Thomson did phenomenal work editing the photographs, and the effect is very striking. It was an eerie experience—observing people observing things—one that became even eerier when I realized that I, too, was being observed—not by others, but by my own, unending reflection.

I ended my visit in a small room, almost hidden from view in a nook under the stairs. There I found *Untitled* (Margo Leavin Gallery, 1970–) (2009), a Super-16mm stop-motion film animation that flips through all the contacts in the business card rolodexes of Los Angeles' Margo Leavin Gallery (founded in 1970 and closed in 2012). There was something very soothing about the sound of the softly shuffling slides and the repetitive nature of the footage; something meditative about revisiting this now archaic organizational tool. But there was also something disturbing about watching the index cards fall—it was so easy to forget what these cards represent. Before me, I realized, were hundreds of people, each with their own stories, relationships, roles: artists, framers, electricians, collectors, customs agents, florists, critics, exterminators. *Untitled* is not just an examination of some outdated technology, but an archive of real, three dimensional human beings. Just as the *TIME* mirrors emphasize and obscure the identity of the person they reflect, these index cards seemed to both celebrate and overlook the individuality of the people they document.

Shaken but inspired, I left the Contemporary Art Gallery and stepped back out into the July blaze. I noticed a chill down my spine that had nothing to do with the AC.