

STATION

A streetcar named re-tir-ee/If slippers could talk

Oscar Perry

30th May – 20th June 2015

‘I guess I have always looked at painting as secondary to cinema. An inferior medium...I’ve always wanted my shows to exist in that odd place between cinema and traditional exhibitions. Like strange relics from a overlooked Hollywood Backlot’ – Oscar Perry

You board the streetcar, ducking under a christmas tree air freshener hanging from above the door. A tour of the Backlot is about to begin. A sign reminds you to keep your limbs inside the vehicle at all times. The Backlot is an anachronism, a site in which Perry renounces painting as similarly thus under the conditions of contemporaneity. Both rendered obsolete by a capitalist imperative convolved with, on the one hand, a demand for realism and, on the other hand, a lack of demand for realism. The streetcar is going too fast and through the window you can just make out paintings – large and abstract, oil and acrylic, collage and mixed media. The only other passenger is a lady seated across from you. She is wearing a six-fingered black latex glove and holding a martooni. On her lap lies an old black and white book with Matisse’s *The Snail* on the cover. Your head starts to spin. You press the button and disembark, deciding to go it by foot. You look around, shake your head, and laugh. Undoubtedly an Oscar Perry show.

Your laughter sounds like the slipping of signification, the banana peel as slapstick staple. The Backlot as the locus of Perry’s mind. There is no economy here. A site teeming with narrative collision, the indecipherable scrawl of intersecting histories pushed beyond the limits of their logic. You will encounter no classic cinematic arc, no continuity, and no dénouement. Watch for the comedic dilettantism, replete with puns and references ranging from the pop-cultural to the art-historical. Here, there is no transgression of the high/low binary as an intervention in the definition of capital ‘a’ Art, nor is Perry insider trading knowledgeable viewers to a wealth of meaning. If a grave is being marked it is not that of Art. Rather, it is Perry as Vic and Bob, deferring to and discarding history in a quick-fire inscription of gags. Meaning in the Backlot is transient, ceaselessly being reconfigured as nexuses hitherto unthought.

Your laughter soughs through the vast Backlot before dissipating, averring only the isolation of the artist. You will not come here again. In his 1921 film *The High Sign*, Buster Keaton steps over a banana peel, places his hands over his mouth and mocks the banana peel. By subverting the classic gag Keaton brings the audience in on the joke, placing artist and viewer on the same plane. Then Keaton takes one more step and slips on a second banana peel he didn’t see. Now, it is us who have fallen. The jocose tenor of Perry’s work always resonates in these dual registers, acknowledging that ‘the premise of all comedy is a man in trouble’.

All that is left is silence. While this silence bears witness to the absence of the warm thrum of community, it also testifies to the absence of cold capitalist logic. In this evocation of silence you feel the presence of a resisting subject manifest in the materiality and depth of art that serves no master. The megrim-inducing whirring of the state is thrown into sharp relief as the world of contemporary mediation is dissolved by presence, a presence counterposed to the lone cogs of neoliberalism. In the Backlot, Perry renounces painting only to re-enthroned art as a practice always already anachronistic, a tax burden and an unwanted capital expenditure with ever-diminishing returns. For that, it is all the more valuable.

- Matthew Taft