

David Velasco, Arforum International, Oct 2006

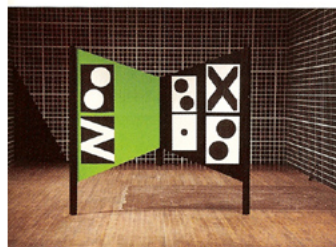
Philippe Decrauzat

SWISS INSTITUTE—CONTEMPORARY ART

Having first encountered Swiss artist Philippe Decrauzat through his *Komakino*, 2006—a Joy Division-inspired “wall decal” installed in “War on 45 / My Mirrors Are Painted Black (For You),” Banks Violette’s recent curatorial endeavor at Bortolami Dayan—I approached his concurrent New York solo debut at the Swiss Institute—Contemporary Art with trepidation. *Komakino* struck me as balancing precariously between formally interesting and—in the context of a show whose principal enterprise seemed to involve negotiating tensions between masculinity and bourgeois hipness—glibly fashionable, and I wondered in which direction this show would tilt.

Luckily, Decrauzat aimed here for depth over easy allusion, an ambition reflected in the show’s most visually striking feature,

Philippe Decrauzat, view of “Plate 28” (foreground: *A Square*, 2006, and *The Isotopes*, 2005–06; foreground: *Untitled*, 2006.



an imposing grid of blocks of black vinyl tape, modestly titled *A Square*, 2006, that covered three of the gallery’s walls. The piece is a tribute to *Plate 28*, 1884–85, one of Eadweard Muybridge’s iconic photographic motion studies. Comprising a series of flipbook-style images of a man leaping over a hurdle, Muybridge’s frames show the jumper in midair; in several of the images, he’s tugging at strings stretched horizontally

across the wall behind him to measure the height of his leaps. It’s a moment that reportedly “interests” Decrauzat, though no evidence of this particular gesture is immediately apparent in *A Square*.

If Muybridge’s photograph records the hand’s disturbance of the regular distribution of the strings and the allegiance to scientific instrumentalism that they imply, Decrauzat’s homage is characterized by an evacuation of the traces of human intervention. However, on the rightmost wall, *A Square*’s vinyl tapers at irregular intervals, generating a graphic dynamism that relieves the piece of its exhaustive repetition. This kinetic departure from the grid’s formal limitations motions toward the effects of the leaper’s disruptive tug and thus to *A Square*’s constitutive discrepancy. This is not quite Rosalind Krauss’s grid—a symptom of modernism’s unconscious desire to reconcile secular and spiritual principles. Instead, *A Square* sits at the threshold of subjective impulsivity (the hand’s intrusion) and scientific pretenses toward objectivity (the hand’s absence).

In the middle of the gallery, architecturally framed by *A Square*, stood *Untitled*, 2006, a flat sculpture modeled after a 1925 design by Soviet photomontagist Gustav Klutsis for a poster display board to be installed at the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party. The original drawing contains an Escheresque discrepancy: The planes of the structure converge, suggesting three-dimensional perspective, but six propagandistic signs (proclamations in both Russian and German) posted to the structure’s walls are drawn facing front, as if they were attached to a two-dimensional surface. Decrauzat, taking pleasure in this graphic contradiction, built the structure flat, eliminating the signs’ text and interpreting lines suggesting depth as instructions to angle the framework up or down. The result is something akin to a large, polygonal bow tie.

Outside the frame of *A Square* hung *Pulsar*, 2004, a silk-screen print reproducing documentation of radio wave emissions from neutron star

CP 1979, famously cropped and employed by Peter Saville for the cover of *Unknown Pleasures*, Joy Division’s iconic 1979 debut album. The weakest piece in the show, it nonetheless played a pivotal role. Decrauzat used the chart’s irregular dips and peaks as a guide for regulating patterns of light in his 16-mm film *A change of speed, A change of style, A change of scene; Part II*, 2006, smartly installed in a room accessible only through a small, triangular entrance cut from a corner of *A Square*. The film, a sequence of deserted sci-fi landscapes culled from episodes of *The Twilight Zone*, is both pretty and unsettling, and demonstrates once again Decrauzat’s intriguing aptitude for highlighting oblique moments and incongruities in our cultural history, reproducing, flattening, twisting, and weaving them into intriguing visual monuments.

—David Velasco