



Galerie Nächst St Stephan/Rosemarie  
Schwarzwälder, Vienna, Austria

*The Invention of Morel* (1940), by Adolfo Bioy Casares, tells the story of an outcast on an island said to be cursed and rife with disease. The story's narrator, however, is preoccupied with the island's ghostly inhabitants, who re-enact the same scenario each day: a woman watches the sun set, men and women listen to the phonograph – yet no one reacts to the tormented narrator, who is caught in the position of both voyeur and witness. But the figures that so fascinate the narrator are simply copies from the past, created by Morel's 'invention', a machine that gives eternal life to whatever it records and then plays on a loop, while killing its original subject. The machine itself is housed, tellingly, in a structure called 'the museum'.

Copies – true and false copies, sterile and endless reproductions – are at the core of Joëlle Tuerlinckx's minimal installations, sculptures and drawings. Delving into the divide between psychological fact and fantasy, her work operates within the same territory as Bioy Casares' celebrated novella. In pieces that range from clusters of drawings to found objects and vitrines, Tuerlinckx creates works that feel deliberately incomplete, taking the form of suggestions rather than declarations.

Tuerlinckx's copies can be as simple as a photocopy of a piece of cloth or a scrap of paper tacked to the wall or left on the ground; they can also take the form of a complex installation. At Galerie Nächst St Stephan she painted a black

frame along the edge of one room to imitate a vitrine. The vitrine itself was represented in a model: *Table du présent absolu: (Here) You Are*, from 1958–2008 (the first date references the origin of the found object – in this case a table – that forms the basis of the work). Although she often conflates the relationship between the original and the copy, even more complex is the way Tuerlinckx uses the copy to evoke the play between the mutable and the fixed. A series of installations titled *Faux Rayon* (False Ray, 2000) renders artificial shadows and rays of sunlight in wire, paint and even clay. These false shadows fall in unexpected ways, but they are also – unnaturally and pointedly so – immutable in the face of external light changes and, implicitly, the passing of time.

Tuerlinckx's work can initially seem scientific, even mathematical, in its basic tone. Diagrams of unknown objects and mysteriously specific measurements abound. Often her work moves towards the creation of language, generating systems of signification that remain unexplained, just short of collapsing into meaninglessness. In this sense her work is rooted in the production of systems of signification or categorization; it is perhaps for this reason that in her hands the gallery space can feel like a working laboratory, albeit one that operates within Tuerlinckx's own coded universe.

But the point at which her work achieves its poetic quality is precisely the point at which the generated copy, the product of the laboratory, reveals its own fixity and its fundamentally moribund status. Within this context Tuerlinckx

Joëlle Tuerlinckx  
2008  
Mixed media  
Installation View

skilfully uses the vitrine to emphasize the sterile nature of the reproduction, whether it is a footprint or a photocopy that rests inside, while also evoking the notion of a lost original.

Because it articulates the limitations of creative production, Tuerlinckx's work can feel melancholic. But it also remains spontaneously generative, whether it is in the geometric proliferation of her drawings or the compulsive movements of a hand scribbling on a sheet of paper. There is a genuinely horrifying moment in Bioy Casares' novella when the narrator accidentally copies his own hand with the machine. The copied hand attains its own life, endlessly reproducing the same movements, while the original withers away into a decay that spreads through the whole of the body. In her film *Stretch-Film série coloriage noir/blanc* (Stretch-Film, Black/White Colouring Series, 2008) Tuerlinckx captures a scribbling hand reminiscent of the one trapped by Morel's fatal invention. In this way both Bioy Casares and Tuerlinckx articulate the film medium's essential mood of loss as well as its inherent danger.

Past its elegant melancholy, Tuerlinckx's work is full of many such risks and silent wagers, not the least of which is the question of the hollowedness that is engendered by the copy. There are literal copies, and then there are systems of representation (including, of course, language), all of which operate on the precipice of a void. Tuerlinckx locates her work inside that void, exploring the point at which representation breaks down, and also the place where it compulsively reconstitutes itself.

Katie Kitamura

# Joëlle Tuerlinckx