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3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73 at ICA by Cameron Rowland at ICA 28/2/2020

On Sunday (16th of Feb) I met my friend George, I haven't seen him for the past 2 (?) years. We grab some Starbucks for takeaway and go for a walk around central London. Around 8pm I suggest that we go to ICA and check out what's good in there, since it is open until 11pm, we agree on that.

Exhibition by Cameron Rowland is called 3 & 4 Will. IV c. 73; we just buy tickets without thinking too much and are given two handouts: A4, around 10 pages, lots of writing, even more footnotes. We are told: 'Guys, like, it's real good'.

First glance at the space makes me confused, I am not used to seeing it so empty, ICA exhibitions are usually different. It actually makes me so confused that I mistakenly think of wheelchair ramp as of an exhibit, George laughs at me, but well, well, well, after 20 or so minutes, on the 1st floor, we get to know that the stairs are an exhibit as well now, sooo, I don't know if I was completely foolish with this ramp no more.

As mentioned before, space is very minimalistic, for me it is really hard to understand what it is about, especially when I don't really know what exact focus area in the practice of C. Rowland is.

First thing we get close to is some sort of chain, neither of us are aware of what it is exactly, and since there are no names next to exhibits, we go through the pages of the handout and read: 'Pacotille' 2020. We get to know that it is brass manillas manufactured in Birmingham, 18th century; glass beads manufactured in Venice, 18th century 103 x 68 x 3 cm.

It is difficult to discuss any of this, because neither of us (yet again) have enough of the concrete knowledge about it. We read together and then we go 'ohhh'. It is hard to keep the conversation flowing as we move towards other exhibits: we don't know what it stands for and there is so much reading to be done.

It is not the same as observing Whitechapel's 'Radical Figures' where you can just look at things and give it your own meaning, where you observe materials used or possible methods executed, for example.

I literally just took bunch of pictures when we were walking throughout the building and the only pieces we actually were able to talk about were 'probability of escape, 2020 Police car searchlight', I remember making a remark that it reminds me of the film 'The Hate U Give' directed by George Tillman Jr. It was because of the very strong impression film left on me: police violence. I have heard from my black friends who reside in US that 'they are afraid to die because of the police violence' and I remember it breaking my heart quite literally; but the movie was even more affecting, I remember crying my eyes out after I saw this exact scene where innocent, a bit rebellious teenager, is shoot for no reason.

I would say that I made a mistake by going to this exhibition with somebody rather than by myself (no offence George, it was fab to see you one way or the other), but it is hard to immerse when you are there to entertain somebody else with a discussion and apparently I am not the only one who thinks that: 'this is a show you go to alone, but not one that you process alone' says *white pube*. I agree to that: you go there, you read, you research and you discuss it only then: to fully understand the exhibition you need to be knowledgeable within very certain period of history, within symbolism and also within the problems that artist tackles.

Exhibition is curated through lower and upper galleries, as mentioned before it contains very few objects, some of them are not even objects, but rather constructive parts of the building. As I am writing this I do not know what else I could add when it comes to exhibits, I do not even know what to add when it comes to the way they were made or the way they are displayed, I am not even sure what to say about the impact they bring with themselves as a collective piece of influential shift for thinking. I am not sure if I see it as an exhibition or rather political statement, if I see it as a reminder of history or a reminder

of how consequences of it are still visible *now*? I write this text as a long question, which is for everybody: for those who are and are not socially aware, for those who are in the position of privilege and those who feel social injustice creeping into their daily lives, for those who would never care and would never bother to read all of what Cameron Rowland wrote in the handover sheets that are given at the entrance, and those who would go to every single reference. I write this as an invitation to contemplate and discuss and please correct me if I am wrong or if my opinion is highly lacking experience and knowledge.

In my opinion unconditional willingness for full-immersion to the space is very important – white cube approach really distinguishes objects that are exhibited; on the one hand it looks quite disturbing: some might say that this amount of minimalism is a joke and a complete ridicule that art can sometimes become, however, in this instance I completely disagree. I think it is definitely about seeing bigger picture, about literally showing how much effort it is needed to understand and fully comply with this artistic expression.

I read the only reviews I could find online and they were by the *white pube* and The TimeOut, both so different and completely opposing. (I must admit that I am not the biggest fan of the *white pube*, most likely because they are more radical than I can take for now, but I understand their youthful approaches and I understand their importance). This time I completely agree with them when it comes to the opposition of what Eddy Frankel wrote after rating exhibition 2/5 which involves: ‘But for something so interesting, so important, it misses the mark so badly. A couple of almost empty rooms and a dissertation don’t make for an engaging, affecting art experience.’ or ‘Rowland's work holds you at arm’s length, refusing to let you in. It’s the kind of academic, unyielding exhibition that makes people hate contemporary art. It feels like art for people with degrees; it feels like it’s saying: ‘If you don’t get it, it’s not for you, and that’s your fault, not mine.’, and finally it ends with ‘It’s elitist, and it stops people from engaging. Rowland has powerful ideas; they’re just expressed really weakly.’ Well, in my opinion, that’s just bunch of words coming from somebody with a very outdated views, let’s upgrade.

I think this approach is so wrong, I do not understand how people expect everything to be silver-plated-delivered to them? I do agree that culture is for everybody and that cultural expressions or comprehension of it are as well, but for god’s sake – people are doing degrees on it, people are paying huge money to be able to call themselves artist and curators, etc., they are literally studying for 3-4 years *at least*, to actually know what is it that they want to say and what is the best way to do it? And then there are people who want complex and extremely deep sociopolitical ideas be squeezed into something that can be read while walking around the space, slurping frappuccino with double cream, taking selfies and having a chitchat about John from the *love island* (I don’t even know if there is any John, but you get my idea). No. You want access to something which is deliberately important, educating, touching and disturbing? Something that might change the way your thoughts flow for the following week, two or maybe the whole life? You want to comprehend and immerse? Go and put some work and effort into it: read and listen, discuss and ask, and write and listen again, and be open.

White pube says: ‘Frankel says it himself, ‘It’s saying: ‘If you don’t get it, it’s not for you, and that’s your fault, not mine’’ and there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that! I will defend Black artists’ rights to opacity till my dying breath!’ and then they add: ‘This question of opacity is still a valid one, but my GOD, it is not for the Eddy fucking Frankel’s of the art world to gesticulate around, not for him to offer jurisdiction over - reader, it isn’t even for me. If there is a gap in understanding and engagement, then there is the potential for it to be closed within the space of the live program that’s part of this show.’

To conclude and go away from factualities and institutionalism that this exhibition is surrounded with I want to say that I liked it. I liked it in a very strange way: it made my heart go soft. I was sad, but at the same time happy, inspired to talk about it, to ask and see if I understand things the way they are, or not. I was also really scared to write all of this, because of the possible mistakes that I made along the way, but this is the way I see now, the way I think, and please, correct me if I am wrong about any of that.

No pictures, because go and look at it.

Cameron Rowland is an artist making visible the institutions, systems, and policies that perpetuate systemic racism and economic inequality. Rowland’s research-intensive work centers around the display of objects and documents whose provenance and operations expose the legacies of racial capitalism and underscore the forms of exploitation that permeate many aspects of our daily lives.