

KYOTO

LG Williams/Estate of LG Williams SUPER WINDOW PROJECT

LG Williams's caustic commentary on the state of contemporary art is as poignant as it is funny, and his latest show at the Super Window Project gallery in Kyoto was bound to make one do a double take. Yet there was nothing declamatory or political in what he did or how he did it. In the buildup to the "aha!" moment when his ideas finally revealed themselves, one could simply enjoy the pieces on view—fifteen meticulously produced ink-jet museum labels bearing the titles of missing artworks. The labels themselves are perfect, formally speaking; they could thrive purely on their aesthetic merit, but it is Williams's edifying gonzo attacks on the vulgarity permeating art and culture all around us that brought his work to a whole different level.

Aptly titled "In Absentia," the recent exhibition by the Japan-based American artist was about the absence of the artwork, both physical and metaphysical. Each label, mounted to emphasize the conspicuously empty expanse of the spotlight-illuminated wall, at once embodied the work and announced its absence. But unlike Joseph Kosuth's probing of the relationship between words, concepts, and objects, the labels in Williams's show went beyond semiotics; they confabulated their own (for the most part undecipherable) narratives just as they unpacked public-domain slogans and catchphrases. *Angelina Jolie Was Here! / The Museum of Contemporary Art / Los Angeles, CA. No. 6, 2010*, is a clever, if not too surprising, exposé of the burgeoning institution of art-loving celebrities who are bridging the gap between high and low culture. The auxiliary message of this work is the import of the logos and the brands: The star's name on the wall is art enough.

The series, "More-of-the-Same but Better," 2010–, addresses another predicament of contemporary art, one broached by both critics and artists (Lawrence Weiner and Dave Hickey are just two names that come to mind). With the art world becoming increasingly globalized, one cannot help but notice the proliferation of works that, despite varying geographical and cultural provenance, conform to what is known in fashion history as a "modal type." No matter the origin, the dominant feature of these works is that they are variations on some generic idea of an artwork. *Imagine Picasso but Better, No. 39, 2010*, evokes the name of one of the biggest "art stars" of the twentieth century with the dual purpose of branding and recalling the benchmark of greatness. Of course, in the absence of the actual artwork we have to come up with our own idea of what could be better than a Picasso.

"In Absentia" was closely related to "Closed," the immediately preceding exhibition, also by Williams, which comprised a selection of carefully crafted supporting materials announcing the temporary closure of Super Window Project. These were posted on the gallery website while the space was under lock and key for the duration of the show. Among the materials was a piece in the style of the promotional videos familiar from blockbuster museum shows. Such a double-entendre approach, in which the imaginary supplants the real with the purpose of exposing the fallacies of the system as a whole, is Williams's trademark (even the artist's moniker is a binary: LG Williams/Estate of LG Williams). His method is hard to grasp because his process is, essentially, a series of magic tricks—and with Williams, as with any magic act, it is best not to try and follow the sleight of hand but to sit back, watch, and enjoy.

—Julia Friedman

LG Williams/Estate of LG Williams, *Imagine Picasso but Better, No. 39, 2010*, digital print mounted on Plexiglas, spotlights. Installation view.

