ArtReview

Uri Aran *Two Things About Suffering*

Sadie Coles HQ*, London* *1 September – 1 October*

The closer you look at Uri Aran's first exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, the harder it is to name what you see. This is especially so with the three vitrine works, combinations of objects apparently salvaged from derelict interiors. A subjunctive mood sets in. *She woke early and left straight for the bodega. She picked up scissors and glue. She had to let him know how she feels, and an hour before was beautiful* (all works 2016) contains what could be wooden offcuts from an old winery; a drawing of what could be a biological study; metal oddments that may or may not be parts of machinery specific to the location, alongside more identifiable things – a photo of a poodle, a CD of Pergolesi's *Salve Regina* (1736), still shrink-wrapped (the vitrine's security glass further augmenting the hermetic enigma).

Although the vitrines present as still lifes, they perhaps aspire to landscape: objects here functioning as metonyms of place. But the heterogeneous elements don't have the atmospheric charge of, say, Joseph Beuys's vitrines. More successful is the freestanding assemblage *Clock*, whose ingredients are offset with a narrative that evokes a cinematic elsewhere. Two horse saddles covered in black resin lie on an old table-cum-desk, alongside bronze dog biscuits, a belt, a clip-on microphone and, on the floor, a broken steering wheel. A lens provides a view into a drawer containing a poster for a missing dog (the poodle from the aforementioned work). 'Someone come into yard, kill dog, cut head off dog, Ling Ling very good dog, very much want head return', reads this tragic document, imparting an atmosphere reminiscent of a Coen brothers film. Like the assemblages, the paintings also have a salvaged quality, the markmaking of the more abstract works on HDO plywood veering between doodle, diagram and accident, the balance exquisitely struck in *Professor Stork*, an olive-brown polyurethane and graphite study on an offcut of ply formerly used for masking out paint, Aran's modulation of the surface blurring the boundary between the found and manipulated.

The six videos here, though titled as separate chapters, effectively comprise one work. *Two Things About Suffering* is projected in the rear space; the other five are shown at workstations in the main gallery. All feature the same protagonists, two suited men, one of whom supplies commentary as they undertake seemingly unconnected activities – sharpening pencils, playing with baguettes, acting out combat moves – in settings ranging from suburban Texas to desert edgeland, while the other remains silent. *Two Things About Suffering* finds them in a high-walled empty warehouse, discussing Richard Boleslavsky's book *Acting: The First Six Lessons: Documents from the American Laboratory Theatre* (1933), here a touchstone for 'the conditions in which we are expected to act'. At one point we cut briefly to them lighting matches in a gloomy office, an adolescent pursuit that counterpoints their adult themes: "To listen, to look and feel truly is not all," quotes the voluble one. "You must do all that in a hundred different ways." *Welcome* finds them in a rehearsal space playing classical piano. Suddenly they stop, roll up the shutter, step outside to admire a passing freight train, before returning to their entertainment. The implication here, and in the other videos, is that everything – banal or 'edifying' – is of equal interest. Like Bouvard and Pécuchet, the eponymous characters of Flaubert's last novel, who quit their jobs as copy clerks to try a range of pursuits including chemistry, farming and philosophy, they embrace the arbitrariness of their programme. They could do this, they could do that – the subjunctive mood sustained throughout with no prospect of closure.

Sean Ashton
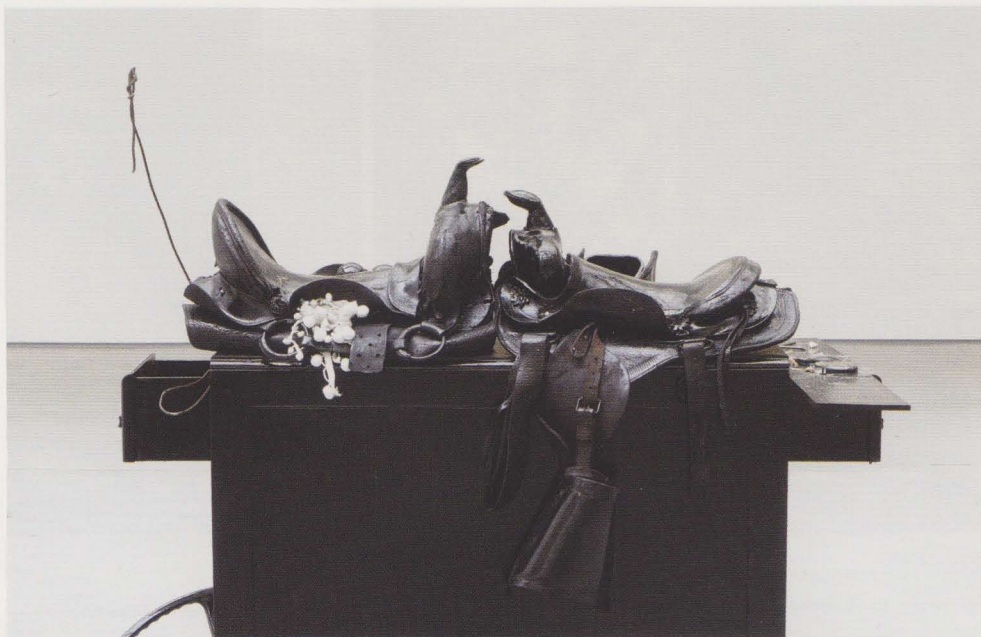
Clock (detail), 2016, leather, wood, metal, bronze, microphones, glass, photo, resin, graphite, ceramic, china marker, plastic, foam, wax, oil, 127 × 132 × 109 cm. © the artist. Courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London