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DAILY



*Jos De Gruyter and Harald Thys, "The White Elements" (2015), installation view at CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco.*

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**Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys CCA Wattis / San Francisco**

For their first solo show in the U.S., the Belgian duo Jos de Gruyter & Harald Thys filled San Francisco's Wattis Institute with varying tones of blankness. Upon entering the main gallery, one is oddly "greeted" by a plethora of tall, stark white, paper-doll-like figurative steel sculptures titled *The White Elements* (2012). Each is topped with a scribbly, pencil-drawn portrait of an indiscriminate face. This sculptural installation is complemented by *Untitled (Public Transport)* (2013), an equally unmemorable yet clearly purposely rendered set of drawings of, as the exhibition's title claims, trams, buses and their plebeian passengers. These are the kinds of faces we pass by each day on the street, in the subway, at the supermarket, the kinds that one ignores so as to avoid having to face — pun intended — the difficulties and complexities of the lives of others. Meanwhile we continue to sink our souls deeper into the screen in hand, the task ahead, the day's impending end.

It is this feeling, this type of knee-jerk reaction, lowering the lids of one's eyes rather than confronting strangers, that Gruyter and Thys bring to the fore. And yet, at the same time, they allow the viewer to further indulge such inattention. The sculptures are there and yet the space feels empty. It is not a particularly fun show to look at, but rather perhaps to reflect upon a week or so later. Strangely, in the adjoining large space, filled with white folding chairs, a large projection of a video titled *Die aap van Bloemfontein [The Ape from Bloemfontein]* (2014) is colorful, historical and somewhat narrative-based. Here ancient and weathered-looking busts gradually morph into real people, though still as random and indistinct as those in Gruyter and Thys's drawings, while a voice-over dialog between two pieces of fruit drags, meaninglessly, on and on.

by Courtney Malick

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