

Reviews /

Richard Sides

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Richard Sides, 'the omega point just ate his brains ...', 2013, installation view

In his 1950 book *The Future of Man*, the French philosopher and priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin introduced the concept of the Omega Point to designate the maximum level of complexity and consciousness towards which he believed the universe was evolving. Since then, the term has been used by theorists and sci-fi writers alike to explore a vast range of cosmological possibilities: from the collapse of the universe to the mass resurrection of the dead. For the most part, the Omega Point has been used to indicate a moment of ontological crisis. And this was how it was invoked by Richard Sides in his recent exhibition at Carlos/Ishikawa, for which he colonized the gallery with an immersive installation.

The young London-based artist has defined his installations as 'time-based, expanded collages, combining media simultaneously to create [...] environments for others to inhabit or generously intrude upon'. He treats space as if it were a sheet of paper, a surface on which to scribble messages through moving image, sculpture and sound. Sides's knack for juxtaposing multifarious media also extends to his prolific collaborative practice, most notably in *Sound Spill*, an ongoing project with artist Haroon Mirza and curator Thom O'Nions, which examines how sound inhabits exhibition spaces and interacts within other art works.

The eponymous work in this exhibition, *the omega point just ate his brains ...* (all works 2013), created an enveloping experience with a remarkable economy of means. There were two main strategies: one was colour, which emanated in solid blocks from two projectors; the second, crucially, sound. The volume was punishingly loud, turning every acoustic ingredient into a form of sonic warfare – whether a friendly 1980s pop song, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* (1801) or an ominous organ piece by Olivier Messiaen.

The prevailing mood hovered somewhere between psychotic and melancholy. This was spelt out by a kitschy T-shirt hung on the wall: 'Something somewhere went terribly wrong', it reads, while depicting the evolutionary process from an ape to an upright human and back to a crouching posture, but this time in front of a computer. A lament lurked amongst hypnagogic clips and precarious

structures, soundtracked by Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (1928). But in the stream of stimuli that Sides hurled at us, the maelstrom of references frustrated any possibility of authoritative posturing, and wittingly turned what could have been a concerned meditation into a parody of sorts, banal and tragic at the same time.

At the far end of the gallery, the two gaping holes of the wall-based sculpture eye-monster ogled visitors and guarded some press clippings on recent cases of paedophilia. On the same theme, and as part of the film, was a YouTube clip of Billy Maloney – a documentary maker who specializes in anti-child abuse films – having a verbose nervous breakdown on camera in the face of defeat and injustice. 'I just want this to stop. The governments are fucked. They cannot lead us,' moans a tearful Maloney as the strings from the theme composed by George Delerue for Jean-Luc Godard's *Le Mépris* (Contempt, 1963) reach a poignant crescendo. This reference seems apt to what Sides concocted here: the overpowering use that Godard gave to his soundtrack has become an emblem of how cranking up sentimentality to the point of melodrama, far from manipulating empathy, creates a rupture with the audience that enables a more detached reflection.

While Sides prodded at several salient issues – political and economic crisis, say, or violence in different forms – he did so without taking the role of the artist as spokesperson too seriously. This might seem facetious, but it is also where the strength of these works lay. In a period where two stances – aloof formalism or the earnest rhetoric of much so-called political art – seem to be polarizing artistic practices, Sides's interplay of materials and ideas managed to dip into both and commit to neither, making space for the viewers to speculate without patting himself on the back for doing so.

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