

ARTFORUM

“Solace”

AUSTRIAN CULTURAL FORUM

11 East 52nd Street

February 4–May 15

The exhibition “Solace” could be one of two things: a reflection of the timeless function of art, or a response to the perfect storm of global misfortune that has left us all in need of a little consolation. To judge by its punch-drunk side-programming—a big medley of maudlin and musical performances—the latter seems more likely. Yet the variety of sensibilities offered throughout, which shows real curatorial derring-do, suggests a far more general, and generous, reach.

Curated by Severin Dünser, Christian Kobald, Emanuel Layr, Andreas Stadler, and Rita Vitorelli, the show presents a range of solace-seeking strategies, from the contemplative to the onanistic. Ernst Caramelle’s sun-faded geometric motifs and Ruth Laskey’s intricately woven, Albers-esque canvases occupy a ruminative plane, while ecstasy and abjection are explored by works like Koudlam’s videos of gyrating background dancers (set to his melancholic sound track) and Piotr Uklański’s print of a false-eyelash-wearing glans, which evokes, with virtuosic perversity, the Bataillean big toe *and* eye. Solace in oblivion comes in Tom Marioni’s *The Act of Drinking Beer with Friends is the Highest Form of Art*, 1970–2010, installed in the basement alongside the supersaturated fields in Martha Rosler’s *Super 8 Flower Fields (Color Field Painting)*, 1974.

Yet it is Julien Bismuth’s video of a stand-up comedian tanking in the Forum’s empty concert hall, juxtaposed with Peter Coffin’s hovering balloons in *Untitled (Balloon Equilibrium)*, 2009, that exemplifies the pathos underlying the exhibition: that the greatest reprieve can lie in a little company.

— Joanna Fiduccia



View of “Solace,” 2010. From left: Julian Bismuth, *Dead Air Comedy*, 2010; Peter Coffin, *Untitled (Balloon Equilibrium)*, 2009.