

# frieze

## Edith Dekyndt

### Carl Freedman Gallery

There is a fairytale in which a girl arrives in a terrible thunderstorm late one night at the gates of a castle, claiming to be a princess. The old queen, to test her story, hides a single pea under 20 eiderdown mattresses. The girl does not sleep well. She wakes in the morning with her alabaster skin bruised purple – the visible proof of her blue-blooded sensibility.

There are no princesses to be found amongst the quietly minimal 'objects' of Edith Dekyndt, but the Belgian artist's solo exhibition at Carl Freedman Gallery, her first in the UK (though she has shown widely in European institutions over the past two decades), revealed a similar sensitivity to the faintly perceptible and the perceiving body. Only here it was the sheets themselves, in this case satin rather than fairytale eiderdown, which were bruised. The series 'Mexican Vanitas' and 'X-men' (both 2012) – groups of small, irregularly sized fabric rectangles hung across the width of adjacent walls – were made by stretching lengths of fabric taut across wooden frames and lying them overnight in trays of coloured liquid (coffee and wine in the former; inks in the latter). This simple process causes nebulae of colour to bleed into the delicate fabric membranes, pulled upwards against gravity as a result of the surface tension of the liquid – a process known as capillary action. Made in the sticky Mexican heat during a residency in the town of Akumal, these works could also be blushes, tracing the warm, pink flush across the cheekbones as the capillaries dilate. No two are the same, and their mysterious patterning (a central 'X' frequently appears, more or less pronounced) varies according to external factors that the artist does not attempt to control. They are fragmentary portraits of a given environment over a given period.

Dekyndt's work is the product of interventions so deliberately minimal as to be self-effacing or so repetitious as to become machinic, as in the case of *Untitled Graphite 06* (2013), a long, beetle-black canvas which ripples from the pressure of pencil lines built up and overdrawn over a period of months. But whilst Dekyndt tries to keep herself out of the picture, she does not escape it entirely: everywhere the body is

### About this review

Published on 13/03/13

By Amy Sherlock



Edith Dekyndt, *Untitled, Gold Blanket L*, 2012, gold leaf on blanket, 268 × 62 cm

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silently suggested. Her particular phenomenology takes its cue from that of Minimalist sculpture, whose ambivalent rejection of anthropomorphism was married to a fundamental interest in bodily scale. Also in the gallery were two blankets, one spread wide, sheathed in a fine layer of silver leaf that will tarnish and blacken over time (*Untitled, Silver Blanket L*, 2013); its counterpoint, half-covered with un-tarnishable gold, curled in on itself, sagging against the wall (*Untitled, Golden Blanket L*, 2012); and the suggestively named *Lessons of Darkness 07* (2012), a white cotton sheet pierced with uniform rows of sharp-tipped nails, their silvery points facing outwards. The title refers to the *leçons de ténèbres*, a form of choral lamentation sung at mass on the last three days of Holy Week, marking the days between Christ's crucifixion and the resurrection. The soft white cotton hangs heavy with the weight of these associations; it's hard not to see it as a shroud, to feel its closeness to the body that it bears away to the tomb, carefully, protectively wrapped.

Of course in Turin it has long been claimed that such a shroud exists and, in a way, the miraculous, inexplicable image that it bears is a reference for all of the work in this show. The slow tarnishing of silver and the spread of ink on satin are processes described by the universal laws and neat equations of physics, but Dekyndt seems less interested in the precision of the theory than in the imprecision of the result. The world is mysterious, these works seem to say, for all that we think we know about it. And the universal is also intimate; capillary action is responsible for our sweat and our tears. From the eye-level hanging of 'X-men' and 'Mexican Vanities' to the human scale of the blankets, it is the observer who stands (or lies) at the centre of Dekyndt's investigation: her swathes of fabric remind us that we are wrapped up in the world in a Merleau-Pontian fold, co-extensive with it. With masterful understatement, Dekyndt reflects on the world and on our place in it.

**Amy Sherlock**

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