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Hans Schabus: ‘Let’s Call It Heimat’

By ROBERTA SMITH

Simon Preston Gallery

301 Broome Street

Lower East Side

Through June 15

On first encounter “Atelier,” the brilliant 2010 video by the Austrian artist Hans Schabus seems — at the risk of gender stereotyping — an overdetermined instance of boy movie-love, a guy thing. This nearly 10-minute loop recreates — cut by cut and camera angle by angle — the widely admired final shootout of Sam Peckinpah’s 1969 revisionist western “The Wild Bunch,” using views of Mr. Schabus’s deserted, serenely ordered studio in Vienna, as well as the courtyard, rooftops and street outside. It starts out as a kind of extra-brainy, denatured abstraction, though one accompanied by the original film’s soundtrack. O.K., so Peckinpah’s rapid-fire correlation between camera shots and gunshots is over the top, at once a celebration of and comment on cinematic violence. So what?

But as the sounds of gunfire intensify, and the editing speeds up, the deconstruction of the original’s formal flamboyance and its elaborate use of architecture becomes more complicated. It can suggest a baroque response to Michael Snow’s 1967 experimental-film classic, “Wavelength,” and its relentless single tracking shot through his studio, while also evoking different forms of urban warfare. (I found myself thinking of the failed rescue attempt of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972.)

Eventually the off-camera violence gains in immediacy, along with a more contemporary sense of dread, encouraged perhaps by the staid, self-evidently European setting and the fleeting sight of two chador-wearing women outside. Mr. Schabus’s haunted formalism becomes grim with future implication, or at least xenophobic paranoia. Not to be ignored is the show’s title, “Let’s Call It Heimat,” which uses the German word, exploited by the Nazis, that loosely translates as home or homeland.

“Béton” (or “Concrete”), a longer, soundless video made in 2008 serves as a foil, offering contrasting views of both Mr. Schabus’s studio and his subversive work. Mr. Schabus is 42; this show, only his second solo in New York, comes a decade after his first. May he not wait so long

again.

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