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Johannes Wohnseifer
The Thin Commandments

Being thin is
more important
than being healthy

Whether in a commercial space in New York or a repurposed government building in London, regardless of any interior reconstruction carried out, the white cube is the art-space of choice. Simple, clean and bare it remains the obvious option for presenting artworks, to ensure that the space that inhabits the artworks doesn't interfere in the experience for the viewer. Yet the dialogue between space and the artwork has become a way for gallerists, curators and the like, to explore the potential of that experience, through the exploitation of neglected industrial buildings or architecturally monumental vanity projects. And as we the art going public, visit from one space to another, engaging with a momentary experience hoping against hope to find something that relates to or transcends our daily life, sometimes we luckily find something that we can translate into it.

The Isolation Room is a space within a space; a small removed, yet integrated environment, detached from the "lived world" yet part of it through the engagement of the space as a sculptural project, a kit to build. The space, although small, is consuming through its presence as something to enter, not so dissimilar to the religious associations in the children's book, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. The smallness and structure of the

space enhances the sense of the strictness of the cube, as well as being removed from the movement of the space outside. But it also, perhaps tellingly, evokes child's play of building camp, exploration and the imagining of another world- it is an isolated environment that we entered to find something other than what is outside. The Isolation Room provides a space for contemplation, clinically isolated within another almost public space like a hospital, or place of worship, it being simultaneously part of and apart from the world.

Johannes Wohnseifer's *Thin Commandments* communicates fragments of a social language connected to an illness that remains familiar within the wider social environment. Eating disorders are familiar as representative of the darker side of the contemporary obsession with beauty and fitness, while these simple, yet telling phrases speak of becoming or wanting to become, aspiring to something other than what we are or can be. Although these phrases are representations of the language spoken by those suffering from a specific 'condition', what they represent speaks of something that perhaps we all understand or have experience of. They speak of the constant and intrusiveness of media, of advertising, pushing itself into our private space through internet-generated messaging. They speak of the world of social-networking, online connectivity, the space outside the gallery where the real collides so comfortably with the hyper-real. The reality that provides us with a potential for something beyond our everyday maybe, where we can satisfy our desire to be richer, prettier, thinner. Wohnseifer presents a creative process that provides a multi-layered response to the world the artist finds around him and that which he often taps into. Contemporary mass and advertising culture sit with references to past art movements to create a visual language that is at once in dialogue and conflict with the content of the words, thus hinting towards a criticism of all the worlds he inhabits. The *Thin Commandments*, present words taken from a human experience, you that are recognisable in any 'world', you believe to be part of. Perhaps offering a deeper criticism of the superficial layers of social groupings, contemporary 'tribes' we associate ourselves with.

The silk screen-printed works presenting the *Thin Commandments* result from a psychologist's treatment of people exhibiting eating disorders. Such phrases include "If you aren't thin, you aren't attractive", "Thou shalt not eat without feeling guilty", presented on screens covered with varying tones of the one colour and representative of a painterly movement of the brush. The words present the notion of restraint and control, as something we can all perhaps submit to, while the style and somewhat foreboding colours of the background present a legacy of the improvisational actions of Abstract Expressionism. The words are satisfyingly and uncomfortably poetic and seem representative of those who spoke them in the first instance, but to contemplate these artworks is to concentrate on these words and what they speak of outside the Isolation Room. And yet, the contemporary message that is rendered almost comical by the form of presentation used-subversive and perhaps critical of the experience of encounter in the gallery or museum space. The quiet (maybe religious) meditative moment of encounter is matched with the superficial, yet potent contemporary condition of always wanting something else.