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NEIL BELOUFA
PRESSE / PRESS
(selection)

WHAT'S NEW

TODAY

 **kamel mennour**  @kamelme... · 3h ✓
ANNOUNCEMENT

@kamelmennour is pleased to announce its representation of [#NeilBeloufa](#), the Paris-based artist and filmmaker known for works that questions the functions of art and the critical commitment of the artist in society.



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NOVEMBER 21 | NEÏL BELOUFA JOINS KAMEL MENNOUR



Neïl Beloufa joins Kamel Mennour

The gallerist – based in Paris and London – has announced that he will now be representing the French artist. Born in 1985, Neïl Beloufa lives between France and the US, and works mostly with "installations and films about power systems, surveillance, and the circulation of images in an increasingly digital world".

Recently exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo, the artist will see his work presented at the gallery's booth at Art Basel Miami Beach from November 6 through 9. His work appears in prestigious collections including the Centre George Pompidou, MNAM in Paris, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles.

Via [Twitter](#), Kamel Mennour commented that Neïl Beloufa "pushes the limits of Art" and called his works "political, auto-critical, and immersive".



Neïl Beloufa, 2001, 2018. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KAMEL MENNOUR

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NEWS

Neil Beloufa Goes to Kamel Mennour

BY *Alex Greenberger* POSTED 11/20/18 3:50 PM

Kamel Mennour gallery in Paris and London now represents Neil Beloufa, the Paris-, New York-, and Los Angeles-based artist known for his installations and films about power systems, surveillance, and the circulation of images in an increasingly digital world. Beloufa's work will be on view at the Mennour's booth at the art fair Art Basel Miami Beach next month, and will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the gallery next year. Ghebaly Gallery in Los Angeles will continue to represent the artist.

Though Beloufa has yet to turn 35, his work has been exhibited widely in America and Europe. Earlier this year, he had his second solo outing at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, where he debuted a show that he said was intended to function as something akin to a search engine, with works by himself and others brought into conversation with one another. That show was followed by exhibitions at the Maagsins Généraux in Paris, the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt, and the Lustwarande museum in Tillburg, the Netherlands.

In a statement, Kamel Mennour, the gallery's founder, said that Beloufa's work "pushes the limits of Art" and called his works "political, auto-critical, and immersive."



Neil Beloufa, *2001*, 2018.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KAMEL MENNOUR

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PUBLIÉ LE MERCREDI, 13 JUIN 2018



1/6

3 stars françaises de l'art contemporain

À l'occasion d'Art Basel 2018,
découvrez 3 artistes français qui
rayonnent à l'international.

PAR LÉA PAGNIER

Neil Beloufa (Paris, 1985)

Neil Beloufa vit et travaille à Paris.

Sa formation. Il a étudié à Paris aux Beaux-arts et aux Arts Décoratifs avant de partir aux États-Unis, au California Institute of the Arts et à Cooper Union à New York. Il a achevé sa formation au Fresnoy-Studio national des arts contemporains.

Son art. Vidéaste à la renommée internationale, Neil Beloufa est connu pour ses installations vidéo originales et personnelles. Curieux, il explore d'autres expressions artistiques comme la sculpture. L'originalité de son travail lui a valu d'être exposé au PS1 du MoMA en 2015, à la Biennale de Lyon et de Venise en 2013.



© Francesco Roversi

L'Ennemi de mon ennemi, a project by Neil Beloufa

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Text by Leonie Radine

Palais de Tokyo
13 Avenue du Président Wilson
Paris, France
palaisdetokyo.com
Through May 13

The enemy of my enemy is not necessarily my friend. It's not as simple as a wide range of media, advertisements or political propaganda tend to suggest. Although asserting power through simplifying notions and images of good and bad seems to function better than ever before. The more complex and unstable our global political reality, the more calculable and effective, it seems, is the appropriation and circulation of key visuals and slogans through blunt emotional outbursts of shares, likes, or dislikes on social media. It is not by chance that for the show's title Neil Beloufa adopts only part of the notorious ancient proverb, which has been reused as a doctrine in various foreign policy conflicts and wars all around the world, and leaves out the rest. It is as if he is putting us to the test, like the eponymous quest in the video game *World of Warcraft*.

Visitors to Beloufa's exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo are confronted not only with a selection of his past works—as one might expect of an artist given the stage of 2,000 square meters—but moreover with a vertiginous number of enemy images, figures of identification and enigmatic in-betweens. Highly power-political visual material, copied or reprocessed from newspapers and the internet, but also taken from film sets and gaming worlds, as well as borrowed originals from international art, history and war museums, and replicated miniature sceneries of historic events are assembled and collaged on wall charts that are constantly moved, turned, and rearranged around specific buzzwords on the floor by robots.

Having passed a dark room introducing us to Beloufa's lambent mindset and futuristic universe furnished by his ever-changing video installations and sculptures, one is lost in a cacophony of voices, some of which are loud, frightening and aggressive, some of which are subtle and manipulative, some of which you can hardly stand and some of which you might feel passionately about. A replica of Gaddafi's shirt with photos of pan-African

political leaders placed next to portraits of *Star Wars*' Princess Leia mounted on protest banners for Women's Marches is only one example of many that culminate in a replicated bomb simulator from the Tehran Museum of Holy Defense. This exhibition echoes the boundless worlds of images and symbols of power that reach far beyond the bubbles of the limiting networks and algorithms of our individualized news supply.

But what does it mean for a 1985 Paris-born French-Algerian artist to fill these enormous halls of one of France's flagship institutions for contemporary art that is known for its experimental formats like "Carte Blanche" which augur the boundless freedom and autonomy of the artist? What defines the autonomy of an artist today and how democratic, liberal or neoliberal has the (art) world become, now that institutions call for institutional critique and thus internalize the criticism of their own system?

Beloufa first takes us back to the nineteenth century and the figure of Courbet, this proud and pretentious, provocative and highly politically engaged artist, who at the same time declared his independence—for instance by opening his own Pavilion of Realism in 1855 or raging against the Vendôme column during the Paris commune in 1871—but also didn't conceal his own dependence on private capital by caricaturing himself as a social outcast or side by side with his powerful patrons, like in *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet* (1854). A persona that is impossible to grasp in a simplified reading.

Our gaze wanders over to the output of central figures of twentieth-century art history caught by Picasso's Stalin portrait in the Communist cultural journal *Les Lettres françaises* from 1953, Andy Warhol's poster promoting the German Green Party from 1978 (at the suggestion of Joseph Beuys, who also appears in the exhibition), or Robert Rauschenberg's poster for the United Nations' International Conference on Population and Development in 1994.

Artists today are still facing the challenge of finding a unique and stable position not only in a politically and socially complex global art network and its dependencies but also in a constant overkill of visual and textual influences. Overlooking the chaos, they are con-

fronted with the everyday task to develop a unique language of abstraction that takes on the power to change certain perspectives of the international viewer, the critique, the curator, the gallerist and the collector. Beloufa invited some artists to contribute who have managed over the past years to gain consistent credibility by raising urgent issues of current socio-political development, among them Hito Steyerl, Thomas Hirschhorn, and Pope L., and also a younger generation of artists like Katja Novitskova and Camille Blatrix.

Beloufa kicks the ball back. The mass of information and mix of copy and original, fact and fiction that is presented here cannot easily be consumed. Except for extensive labels aiming to capture the contradictions of the exhibits, there are no instructions or suggested methods of perception. One is forced to find one's own way. Even having seen the exhibition twice, it is impossible to perceive it in its entirety, but "that's the game," Beloufa says with his usual nonchalance and cunning modesty. Indeed, this challenging, nervous, maybe piercingly painful game has a serious reference: the exhibition is a commentary on the state of civilization now and points to the interchangeability and contradictions of (empty) power gestures. Today, what we expected to be the entities and basic values of our democratized civilizations is questioned again. So that we come to the point that leaders of authoritarian regimes adopt terms like Trump's "fake news" to obscure their human rights abuse. When it becomes harder and harder to draw a clear line between "fake news," "alternative facts" and propaganda, we are not far away from robots moving content from one context to another. "Strong and stable my arse," as artist Jeremy Deller put it in a poster campaign in London reacting to Brexit, which is also documented in the exhibition.

Whether this exhibition is good or bad is the wrong question. It is a courageous and radically new attempt to lay all the cards on the table. It doesn't offer solutions, but rubs salt into the wounds. It can be questioned and criticized in the same ways that we can question and criticize our own double standards, self-legitimized authorities, easily polarized opinions and everyday appropriation, but that is what makes it so brilliant.

Zach Blas: Contra-Internet

Interview by Ana Teixeira Pinto

Art in General
145 Plymouth Street
Brooklyn, NY, US
artingeneral.org
Through April 21

Zach Blas's exhibition *Contra-Internet* is a queer science fiction whose centerpiece, *Jubilee 2033* (2017), fictionalizes the "end of the internet as we know it." The story begins in the 1950s, when, having taken acid, libertarian philosopher Ayn Rand and two of her devotees, Alan Greenspan and Joan Mitchell, hallucinate an anime-interface AI named Azuma, who tells them that Silicon Valley has built a cult-like culture around Rand's writings. Rand is eager to see the future, her ideas brought into being, but as Azuma leads the

small group around the Bay Area they chance upon a ransacked Google headquarters, widespread mayhem, and a mutilated body whose ID badge reads "Peter Thiel." Inside Thiel's Palantir Technologies, now occupied by insurgents, the group encounters Nootropix (played by postgender performance artist Cassils). Nootropix is a contra-internet prophet, and their victory dance to Andrea Bocelli's "Con te partirò" (Elon Musk's favorite song) is the most earthshaking contrasexual manifesto since Lynda Benglis's 1974 *Artforum* ad.

ANA TEIXEIRA PINTO: Not many people associate your protagonist, Ayn Rand, with Steve Jobs or Mark Zuckerberg, and Alan Greenspan was pretty much forgotten after he gave us the great recession. Did you ever fear *Contra-Internet* would be inaccessible to a wider audience?

ZACH BLAS: When I was a teenager, a relative put a copy of Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943) in my hands and said, "Read this if you want to be an intellectual." I think encountering Rand's literature was—and still is—typical and widespread in the United States. Her fiction is frequently read in American high schools, for instance, which is not surprising, as her tall tales of individual heroes fighting against the strictures of society to pursue their selfish ideals is truly the stuff of the American dream. Her writings even reached me in an isolated, working-class town in Appalachia!

ATP: Still, Randian egotism is hard to reconcile with Silicon Valley's post-capitalist ethos and its (however hollow) promise of community building and direct democracy.

Top - Neil Beloufa, *The enemy of my enemy* installation view at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2018. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Aurélien Mole
Bottom - Zach Blas, *Contra-Internet: Jubilee 2033* (still), 2018. Commissioned by Gasworks; Art in General, New York; and MU, Eindhoven. Courtesy: the artist

EXPOSITIONS REVIEWS

PARIS

Neïl Beloufa

Palais de Tokyo / 16 février - 13 mai 2018

Des fragments de sculptures introduisent l'exposition de Neïl Beloufa dont Guillaume Desanges est commissaire. Réalisées par Joseph Tchaïkov pour le pavillon russe de l'Exposition internationale de 1937, elles furent détruites sous l'Occupation puis redécouvertes en 2004. Leur présence annonce les thèmes sondés par l'artiste. Les relations internationales, l'engagement politique des artistes, l'importance de la mémoire, l'ambivalence de toute action. Une salle est ensuite consacrée aux œuvres de Neïl Beloufa lui-même, trentenaire au parcours impressionnant, de la Biennale de Venise, au MoMA de New York en passant par la Biennale de Lyon et l'IAC de Londres. La vidéo *Domination du monde* révèle des discussions entre responsables gouvernementaux. Elles aboutissent inexorablement à la guerre comme solution à tous les maux, économiques, sociaux ou politiques, et à la nécessaire manipulation des citoyens. Face à elle, les habitants VRP d'une ville nouvelle célèbrent leur cadre de vie.

Dans la salle suivante, la présence de Gustave Courbet et d'anarchistes suggère une autre attitude possible : l'insoumission. En utilisant le système marchand, Courbet invente la peinture réaliste, représentative des conditions sociales de ses contemporains, et les crypto-monnaies tentent de détourner le monopole des banques. Neïl Beloufa plonge ensuite le visiteur dans une profusion d'informations. Sur des structures mobiles, des œuvres côtoient des vidéos, publications, photographies, maquettes glanées sur internet ou dans des musées. Elles racontent les conflits internationaux, les manipulations gouvernementales, les révoltes des rebelles et des artistes. « L'objectif des œuvres serait d'ouvrir des possibilités différentes sans rien affirmer », explique Neïl Beloufa. L'installation s'apparente à une requête sur un moteur de recherche. Au spectateur de choisir entre une attitude passive ou active. Subir les déplacements des structures dirigés par un robot soumis à un algorithme. Ingurgiter des informations certes passionnantes mais parcellaires. Ou explorer les fils conducteurs proposés. Revenir sur ses pas pour saisir l'intégralité d'une structure. Se pencher pour mieux lire. La force de la proposition artistique de Neïl Beloufa réside dans cette relation physique qu'il crée entre le spectateur et ses œuvres.



Perceptibles selon différents angles, les œuvres engagent le visiteur à se déplacer et suggèrent ainsi la diversité des points de vue. Si l'ambition de Neïl Beloufa est de « déverrouiller les systèmes autoritaires dans lesquels nous vivons », il ne propose pas de solution. Il s'empare des matériaux à sa disposition – résines, écrans ou information –, les organise et les expose. Mais *L'ennemi de mon ennemi* conduit à un constat amer. Malgré les insoumissions des lanceurs d'alertes et des artistes, malgré l'accessibilité de l'information, le système de la guerre reste inébranlable.

Aude de Bourbon Parme

Fragments of sculptures introduce Neïl Beloufa's exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo. Made by Joseph Chaikov for the Russian pavilion at the 1937 Exposition Internationale, these works were destroyed during the Occupation and their remains rediscovered in 2004. Their presence announces the themes explored by this artist: international relations, the political engagements of artists, the importance of memory, and the ambiguity of all action. Next comes a room with Beloufa's own works. Still in his early thirties, he already has quite an impressive resume, with works shown at the Venice Biennale, at

« L'ennemi de mon ennemi ». Vue de l'exposition. (Court. de l'artiste et galerie Balice Hertling, Paris; Ph. Aurélien Mole). "The enemy of my enemy." Exhibition view

MoMA in New York, at the Lyon Biennale and at the ICA in London. The video *Domination du monde* (World Domination) shows intergovernmental discussions ending in one seemingly inevitable conclusion: war as a solution to all evils, whether economic, social or political, and with that the necessary manipulation of citizens. Facing this, sales representatives who live in a totally artificial new town celebrate their way of life. In the next room, the presence of Gustave Courbet and anarchists suggests insubordination as a possible response. Courbet used the commercial system to promote his realist painting, which conveyed the social conditions of his contemporaries; today, crypto-currencies are sidestepping the monopoly of the banks. Beloufa then immerses visitors in a profusion of information. Works are shown on mobile structures alongside videos, publications, photographs and models found on the Internet and in museums. They speak of international conflicts, manipulations by government, the revolts of rebels and artists. "The

aim of the works is to open up different possibilities without affirming anything," explains the artist. The installation is a bit like a hunt on a search engine. The viewer can choose between an active or a passive response: accept the movements of the structures dictated by a robot directed by an algorithm, and ingurgitate information that is certainly fascinating but also fragmentary, or explore the underlying themes and move back and forth in order to grasp the totality of a structure, taking the time to read and understand. The power of Beloufa's artistic proposition lies in this physical relation that he creates between the viewer and his works. Viewable from different angles, the works encourage visitors to move around them and physically suggest the diversity of possible viewpoints. If Beloufa's ambition is to "unlock the authoritarian systems under which we live," he has no solution to offer. He takes the materials available to him—resins, screens or information—and organizes and exhibits them. But *L'ennemi de mon ennemi* leads to a bitter recognition. For all the insubordination and whistleblowing, despite what artists can say and the accessibility of information, the war system remains unshakable.

Translation, C. Penwarden

« Discorde » ou l'art du chaos

Par [Sinziana Ravini](#)

Comment navigue-t-on dans un monde redevenu manichéen après que le mythe de la fin de l'histoire cher à Francis Fukuyama s'est dégonflé ? Un monde où tous les mouvements, qu'ils soient de gauche ou de droite, féministes ou sexistes, républicains ou religieux, sont en train de se radicaliser et de prétendre dur comme fer qu'ils détiennent la vérité ? Quelle est à présent la différence entre le bien et le mal, et quelles sont les forces qui parviennent à écrire ou réécrire l'histoire de cette différence ? Le Palais de Tokyo vient d'ouvrir ses portes à une série d'expositions spectaculaires sur les plus grands combats et confusions idéologiques contemporains.

L'une des plus impressionnantes est *L'Ennemi de mon ennemi*, conçue par le *Wunderkind* du monde de l'art français Neil Beloufa, et son Virgile, le commissaire d'exposition Guillaume Désanges, connu pour ses nombreuses expositions à la fois narratives et conceptuelles. La première salle baigne dans la pénombre de quelques vidéoprojecteurs accrochés à une lanterne magique moderne qui diffracte, avec ses nombreux jeux de verres et de lumières, des films sur la société de la transparence et de l'hyperconnectivité. C'est une magnifique mise en abyme du Grand Verre duchampien, sauf qu'ici, ce n'est pas la mariée, mais le vide du monde qui est mis à nu par ses célibataires. Dans un film, un homme fait l'éloge d'une cité idéale, où l'on peut faire du canoë le matin, aller à la plage l'après-midi et skier le soir. Si Marx désirait une société où l'on pouvait chasser le matin, pêcher l'après-midi, s'occuper d'élevage le soir et philosopher après le repas, afin d'abolir l'aliénation d'un travail répétitif, l'homme contemporain ne semble désirer qu'une chose : l'aliénation elle-même. Le désir d'aliénation se retrouve également dans les capsules rétrofuturistes de Beloufa dispersées dans l'espace comme des lieux de couchages pour des explorateurs ou des SDF modernes, annonçant un monde où la différence entre les nomades volontaires et involontaires n'existera plus.

Comment sort-on de cette caverne ? Par la prise de connaissance du rôle ambigu de l'artiste contemporain, déchiré entre désir de soumission et d'insurrection. La salle suivante est vouée à Courbet, le diplomate révolutionnaire, qui sut aussi bien décrire la misère du monde qu'en tirer un profit économique. Beloufa montre ici quelques peintures de Courbet lui-même, des documents décrivant ses combats politiques et esthétiques, son engagement dans la Commune de Paris, ses exils et ses manifestes mais aussi des caricatures de lui, par des gens qui le trouvaient trop imbu de lui-même, et surtout trop contradictoire dans ses actions. Peut-on participer au déboulonnage la colonne Vendôme et, en même temps, se frotter aux mondanités ? Quoi

qu'il en fût, Courbet est le premier en France à avoir mis en place l'idée d'une autonomie hétéronome qui arrive à fusionner le capital économique et symbolique, tout en gardant la liberté artistique. Nous savons tous quels dégâts la philosophie du « en même temps » a produit et produit encore dans le monde de l'art contemporain. Beloufa semble en être plus que conscient car, dans la même salle, il a exposé deux objets qui complexifient les choses encore. La première est un manifeste crypto-anarchiste de Timothy May écrit en 1988 qui annonce, d'une façon absolument vertigineuse, les effets que la révolution numérique aura sur nos vies et nos identités, tout en revendiquant une économie d'images et d'idées qui échapperont aux fils barbelés de la propriété intellectuelle. À côté, une installation, qui n'est pas une œuvre d'art, expose les fluctuations en temps réel du *bit coin*, le capital décapité ultime, qui est en train de révolutionner ou de détruire le monde financier actuel. Qui vivra saura. Mais une chose est sûre : tous ces éléments fonctionnent comme une parfaite cartographie des problèmes esthétiques et économiques à venir, qu'on peut en quelque sorte déjà visualiser dans la salle suivante, qui est aussi l'acmé de l'exposition.

Beloufa a réussi ici à mettre en scène un monde diaboliquement chaotique, où la production du sens et du non-sens entre les œuvres est déterminée par l'intelligence artificielle de quelques robots, engagés tels des Sisyphe infatigables dans un raccrochage incessant de l'exposition. À première vue, on se croirait dans une foire d'art où les œuvres se sont mises à faire littéralement la révolution, car elles bougent dans tous les sens, à l'intérieur d'un espace clos, dogvillien, portés par les mêmes robots qu'Amazon utilise pour ses distributions, ici couverts par des citations et des messages subliminaux.

Mais lorsqu'on s'approche, on se rend vite compte qu'il ne s'agit pas d'œuvres d'art au sens classique du terme que les robots exposent, mais de réappropriations, des documents politiques et publicitaires, qui créent des rapports ahurissants entre la propagande des jihadistes, des dictateurs, des humoristes qui moquent des dictateurs, ou de la Maison Blanche devenue un véritable asile psychiatrique, et les chefs d'entreprises, les activistes ou les politiciens soi-disant éclairés qui ont trouvé le Graal sacré de l'humanité, semblent aussi fous à lier. Ici et là, quelques discours sortent de cette lutte antagoniste entre ennemis en faveur d'une lutte agonistique entre adversaires. Le plus bel exemple est le discours d'Amaryllis Fox, un ancien agent secret de la CIA, au look de femme fatale, qui sort de l'ombre, pour livrer une lecture du monde très complexe et captivante, notamment sur les vrais rapports entre Al Qaida, ISIS et l'Amérique.

Malgré ces zones grises, l'installation reste non seulement une parfaite parodie de l'art supposé « politique » qui a besoin de gommer les nuances et crier haut et fort ses messages dans la crainte de ne pas se faire comprendre, mais aussi de la théorie duchampienne, car ici ce n'est plus le regardeur, mais le robot, qui fait l'œuvre. La Silicon Valley a déjà inventé une application qui propose un psychanalyste 24 heures sur 24, offrant au monde entier de s'allonger sur le divan d'un même psychanalyste numérique – Orwell, lui-même, n'aurait pas pu imaginer pareil dispositif ... Et il ne faudra sans doute pas longtemps avant qu'elle n' imagine une application critique d'art. Si le film *Matrix* présente le désert du réel comme un *ground zero* planétaire sur le plan écologique, mais offre tout de même à Néo le luxe du choix entre deux consciences, le réel qui menace le monde beloufien est un *ground zero* intellectuel, où l'homme a perdu la capacité de croire en ses propres facultés. Les deux scénarios vont de pair bien sûr, et se complètent plus que jamais.

L'exposition montre aussi des œuvres faites par Thomas Hirschhorn et Jean Luc Godard, que je vois comme les deux pères symboliques de Beloufa – le premier pour le côté *horror vacui*, l'autre pour le côté méta

–, des affiches de Rauschenberg et de Warhol, les dessins de Van Nath (l'un des rares rescapés de Tuol Sleng, le centre de torture de Pol Pot), des dispositifs muséaux qui mettent en scène des détonations de bombe, oui, vous avez bien lu, des jeux de vidéos interactifs réalisés par l'armée britannique et, *last but not least*, des œuvres d'art réalisées par les nouvelles générations du post-internet art (Katja Novitskova) ou sur la guerre du combat numérique des réseaux sociaux, où les armes de séductions se mêlent aux armes de destruction. La plus forte et terrifiante reste celle de Grégoire Beil, qui a fait une compilation des scènes diffusées en direct par des utilisateurs de l'application Périoscope – c'est une œuvre qui nécessiterait un texte en soi.

Si l'exposition de Neil Beloufa joue d'une manière ludique et quelque part distanciée sur l'ambiguïté permanente entre le bien et le mal, nous permettant de vivre la dynamique intrinsèque du chaos, où il s'agit de faire du chaos un allié, comme Lao Tseu, sans essayer de le contrôler, l'exposition *L'un et L'autre*, conçue par les artistes Kader Attia et Jean-Jacques Lebel, nous invite à traverser le chaos d'une humanité dépourvue d'humanité et à vivre la continuité des barbaries anciennes dans le présent, tout en nous offrant quelques zones de réconciliation et de reconstructions possible.

Le parcours conçu comme un labyrinthe sombre et théâtral, démarre avec l'extrait d'une vidéo figurant le maître du théâtre cruel en personne, Antoine Artaud, dont les lamentations quasi-indéchiffrables annoncent la folie à la fois violente et douce, destructrice et salvatrice de l'exposition, qui présente deux labyrinthes de nature très différente. Celui de Kader Attia, présent dans le labyrinthe de façon verticale à travers une bibliothèque à la fois gigantesque et austère, l'histoire du colonialisme et du terrorisme de nos jours, comme l'une et la même face de la même médaille ; celui de Jean-Jacques Lebel qui entraîne le visiteur dans des dédales qui nous obligent à nous confronter aux images des horreurs de l'armée américaine en Irak, où l'on peut voir encore une fois les corps des détenus, avec leurs excréments et leur sang, leurs têtes couvertes par des cagoules, leurs sexes à la main, et les visages follement souriants des officiers américains exposant leurs trophées, ici agrandis à l'échelle humaine. La pornographie de la terreur devient ici, encore une fois, objet de contemplation, juxtaposant les regards des colporteurs avec nos regards de consommateurs. Quand « le vieux monde se meurt, le nouveau monde tarde à apparaître, et dans ce clair-obscur surgissent les monstres », disait Gramsci. Comment faire face à ces monstres qui adorent montrer leurs monstruosité ? Aux monstres en nous-même ?

Les salles qui entourent ces deux labyrinthes avec des masques de guerre, des armes et des instruments musicaux, venant du monde entier, et de tous les temps, exposés comme des reliques sacrées, proposent une réponse, car ici et là, sur des vidéos discrètement installées, on voit Kader Attia et Jean-Jacques Lebel, assis, côte à côte avec ces mêmes objets dans leurs mains, se parler à travers eux, exposant ici l'importance de la proximité physique, du lien tactile avec le monde qui nous entoure, mais aussi celui de la parole et de l'écoute, bref, du récit qui pourrait réparer le monde. Alors le récit de ces deux sages, qui arrivent à garder leur calme et leur joie de vivre en plein œil du cyclone, n'est plus totalisant mais subjectif et dialogique. Si le chaos du réel se donne à nous sous le masque de l'unité d'une théorie totalisante qui pointe du doigt un ennemi unique, il faut chercher une autre façon de l'aborder, de l'attaquer car, à défaut de changer le monde, c'est lui qui finit par nous changer. Là où Beloufa expose la politique à son stade le plus caricatural et l'internet comme la création d'un Leibnitz sans dieu (pour reprendre l'idée de Michel Serres), d'un monde sans père ni repères, l'exposition d'Attia et de Lebel réinstaura la possibilité d'un dernier jugement, d'une loi, à laquelle personne ne peut échapper – celle du droit humain.

S'il y a un enjeu commun entre ces deux expositions et les remarquables expositions de George Henry Longly, Anita Molinero, Nina Chanel Abney, Daiga Grantina et Marianne Mispelaëre, qui mériteraient chacune un texte, c'est le désir, cette source d'énergie humaine qui est en train de se tarir, tout comme se tarissent les gisements pétroliers. Est-ce vraiment le capitalisme, le pharmakon numérique, ou l'amour du conflit pour le conflit qui est en train de la vider ? Je dirais non car le véritable mal n'a pas de visage, ni de nom. Et c'est précisément à cela qu'il tient.

Discorde au Palais de Tokyo, à Paris, jusqu'au 13 mai.

Sinziana Ravini

“Neïl Beloufa” L'Ennemi de mon ennemi
au Palais de Tokyo, Paris
du 16 février au 13 mai 2018

www.palaisdetokyo.com



© Anne-Frédérique Fer, présentation presse, le 15 février 2018.



Légendes de gauche à droite :

- 1/ **Neïl Beloufa**, *The Colonies*, 2016, Museum of Modern Art, New-York. Courtesy de l'artiste & Ghebaly Gallery (Los Angeles). Photo : Kyle Knodell. © ADAGP, Paris 2017.
- 2/ **Louis-Auguste Dechelette**, *Le Grand soir, 1ère conférence de l'O.N.U.*, 1946. FNAC 28785, Centre national des arts plastiques © Droits réservés. Photo : Yves Chenot.
- 3/ **Neïl Beloufa**, *Développement durable*, 2017. Musée régional d'art contemporain Occitanie/Pyrénées-Méditerranée, Sérignan. Courtesy de l'artiste & galerie Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo : Aurélien Mole © ADAGP, Paris 2017.

texte de Olympe Lemut, rédactrice pour FranceFineArt.

Neïl Beloufa, *L'Ennemi de mon ennemi* (commissaire : Guillaume Désanges), Palais de Tokyo, jusqu'au 13 mai 2018

Une monumentale exposition qui remet en question les représentations de la guerre et de la violence modernes.

Plus qu'une exposition, « L'ennemi de mon ennemi » est une installation géante, un système de pensée en perpétuelle élaboration : grâce à des robots en forme de caissons et à un algorithme les panneaux d'exposition et les œuvres se déplacent en effet constamment. Ces robots portent sur leurs côtés des citations de Marat et de Sade, une manière pour Neïl Beloufa de faire remonter l'origine de la violence moderne à la Révolution française. Car il s'agit bien de reconstruire ici une autre histoire de la violence et de la guerre, sans s'attacher à une guerre particulière, et loin de toute commémoration historique. Les œuvres, les images d'archives et celles récupérées sur Internet couvrent ainsi toutes les périodes depuis la fin du 19^e siècle, pour mettre en lumière les rapports de force et les systèmes de domination derrière les conflits : qu'il s'agisse de la colonisation, des Khmers rouges ou des dictatures sud-américaines, la violence s'accompagne toujours de propagande et de désinformation. Les nombreux documents reproduits dans l'installation prouvent que les fake news ne datent pas d'aujourd'hui !

Neïl Beloufa se fait alors commissaire voire scénographe, puisqu'il invite plusieurs autres artistes vivants ou morts, dont Courbet, Camille Blatrix, Picasso ou Thomas Hirschhorn : une constellation de pensées complémentaires se fait jour, par affinités électives. Au gré des recompositions par les robots les différentes sections de l'installation tissent elles aussi des liens, à part quelques panneaux qui restent fixes : l'ensemble évoque un désordre structuré, un réseau semblable à Internet où circulent des milliards d'images et d'informations à décrypter. Neïl Beloufa semble inviter les visiteurs à relire à leur manière les manifestations récentes de la violence, sans se laisser abuser par les propagandes de tous bords : à chacun de se faire historien et analyste.

Olympe Lemut

extrait du communiqué de presse :

Un commissariat de Guillaume Désanges, avec Marilou Thiébault, Anahi Alviso Marino et Noam Segal.

“L’Ennemi de mon ennemi” est une représentation chaotique et parcellaire de la manière dont s’écrit l’Histoire à l’ère de la globalisation et du capitalisme tardif.

« S’il fut un temps où les artistes proposaient des images que le pouvoir ne souhaitait pas voir, aujourd’hui il les suscite, les désire, les consomme, et paradoxalement représente sa liberté à travers elles. Comment, alors produire quelque chose d’inutilisable ? » **Neïl Beloufa**

« “L’Ennemi de mon ennemi” est un serpent qui se mord la queue en ayant fait le tour du mur étroit qui sépare le monde géopolitique en deux. » **Marilou Thiébault**

« L’Ennemi de mon ennemi » est un projet conçu par Neïl Beloufa (né en 1985 à Paris, vit à Paris) à l’invitation du Palais de Tokyo, un dispositif scénographique représentant de façon chaotique et parcellaire la manière dont s’écrit l’Histoire et se légitiment les pouvoirs aujourd’hui.

S’inspirant de la communication officielle, des mémoriaux, des musées de guerre, de la propagande politique mais aussi de l’actualité, de la publicité ou des jeux vidéo, l’exposition met en scène l’interchangeabilité des stratégies et des discours. Ce faisant, elle joue sur une ambiguïté permanente entre le bien et le mal, les gentils et les méchants, les postures et les impostures.

Le dispositif scénographique, spécialement conçu par l’artiste pour l’exposition, intègre des œuvres, des documents, des images, des artefacts, des reproductions et des objets réels déplacés en permanence par des robots, selon un scénario de type algorithmique. Il propose ainsi une remise en cause permanente des associations, des perspectives et des significations.

« L’Ennemi de mon ennemi » envisage le monde comme un champ de stratégies contradictoires et pourtant similaires. Ce faisant, elle interroge en sous-main la place de l’artiste dans la multiplicité de ces pouvoirs, entre désir d’autonomie, servitude et propagande.

Après « Les inoubliables prises d’autonomie » en 2012, « L’ennemi de mon ennemi » est la deuxième exposition de Neïl Beloufa au Palais de Tokyo. Ce projet est une manière nouvelle de saisir le travail d’un artiste qui, très jeune, s’est interrogé autant sur son art que sur ses moyens de production.

Les éléments présentés ont été sélectionnés par l’artiste en collaboration avec le commissaire, en associant des personnalités extérieures sur des sujets précis.

Avec : Camille Blatrix, Barbara Bloom, Gregoire Beil, Bibliothèque de documentation internationale contemporaine (Paris), Johannes Büttner, Colectivo Acciones de Arte, Ken Campbell et David King, Ellen Cantor, Grégoire Chamayou, Gustave Courbet, Louis-Auguste Déchelette, Eversim, Jean-Luc Godard, ECPAD - Établissement de Communication et de Production Audiovisuelle de la Défense (Ivry-sur-Seine), Thomas Hirschhorn, Holy Defense Museum (Téhéran, Iran), House of National Works Museum (Koweït, Koweït), Alfred Janniot, Jon Kessler, Elizabeth Lennard, Martyrs Museum (Misrata, Libye), Vann Nath, National Army Museum (Londres, Royaume-Uni), Pablo Picasso, Sigmar Polke, William Pope L., Hito Steyerl, Joseph Tchaïkov...

ART CONTEMPORAIN

Exclusif : Neïl Beloufa s'explique sur le retrait d'une image polémique de son exposition au Palais de Tokyo



PAR CÉDRIC AURELLE - LEJOURNALDESARTS.FR
LE 20 FÉVRIER 2018

Après l'ouverture de son exposition « L'Ennemi de mon Ennemi » le 16 février, le plasticien a retiré une image montrant l'artiste afro-américain Parker Bright, à la demande de ce dernier. En 2017, il avait protesté contre la présentation d'une œuvre de l'artiste Dana Schutz, accusée de capitaliser sur le traumatisme de l'expérience noire.



Neil Beloufa
Photo Thomas Polly
Courtesy Palais de Tokyo

Spectacle », attirait le regard des premiers visiteurs. Visible sur un large miroir, évoquant une œuvre de Pistoletto et reflétant une reproduction de la peinture de Dana Schutz « *Open Casket* », installée en face, elle fut ensuite retirée. Elle n'était plus visible le lendemain du vernissage.

Reconnaissable pour avoir fait le tour des médias et réseaux sociaux, cette image a accompagné la controverse liée à la présentation **en 2017** de cette œuvre de la peintre américaine à la Biennale du Whitney Museum of American Art, à New York. La toile représente le corps mutilé de Emmett Till, jeune homme noir de 14 ans assassiné en 1955 après avoir été faussement accusé d'avoir flirté avec une femme blanche. Des voix s'élevaient alors pour dénoncer une appropriation et une instrumentalisation de la souffrance des Afro-américains par une artiste blanche. Au nom de la liberté de création, certains avaient, au contraire, dénoncé une forme de censure.

Selon **Artnews**, Parker Bright, qui n'a pas été consulté pour l'utilisation de cette image, en a demandé le retrait aux organisateurs de l'exposition parisienne. Il a par ailleurs lancé une campagne de levée de fond en vue de financer un voyage à Paris et en explique les raisons sur le site de crowdfunding **Gofundme** : « *Je veux mettre en scène une autre manifestation à l'intérieur du Palais de Tokyo [...] parce que je considère que Beloufa s'approprie mon récit sans mon consentement. C'est une forme de diffamation à mon encontre en tant qu'artiste et activiste.* »

Neil Beloufa, joint hier par téléphone par le **JDA**, s'explique sur son geste:

S'agit-il d'un geste d'autocensure ?

Au contraire, c'est le sujet de l'exposition. Le dispositif de reproductions, de documents, et d'histoires que nous présentons n'est pas une œuvre. Il s'approprie tout comme le fait notre monde globalisé, notre presse et internet. C'était la règle que nous nous étions fixée d'enlever toute image, toute reproduction de l'exposition si l'on nous le demandait. Nous cherchons une autre mécanique que le conflit et nous avons immédiatement retiré l'image en question quand Parker Bright nous l'a demandé.

Pourquoi avoir choisi cette image ?

L'exposition comporte un nombre très important d'éléments de nature similaire qui reflètent des situations complexes mêlant discours, idéologie et jeux de pouvoir. C'est une image parmi 200 autres. Nous avons décidé d'inclure le musée d'art contemporain comme lieu de légitimation de l'autorité. Cette histoire a dominé nos médias récemment.

Vous attendez-vous à avoir des réactions du public ?

Le dispositif de documents est pensé pour parler principalement avec un public « non averti » qui ne connaît pas spécialement l'art contemporain. Celui-ci ne connaît pas ce cas particulier et l'aurait découvert. D'autre part, nous avons essayé d'avoir des images qui investissent toutes les communautés, donc celle de l'art aussi.

En l'occurrence, Parker Bright a réagi au nom de la communauté noire américaine en s'inscrivant dans la mouvance des « *identity politics* ».

Ce qui nous intéresse, c'est l'ambiguïté avec laquelle les idéologies s'articulent dans des discours mêlant formes, images et réalités sans les séparer. Par ailleurs, l'exposition essaye de contrebalancer les systèmes de représentations des réseaux sociaux. Ces derniers amplifient les juxtapositions de discours binaires, vidant parfois de sens tout contenu et empêchant ainsi de penser le monde dans sa complexité.

ARTFORUM

NEWS



Installation view of Neil Beloufa's "L'Ennemi de mon ennemi" (2018) at Palais de Tokyo. Photo: Palais de Tokyo, Paris.

February 19, 2018 at 9:14am

NEİL BELOUFA REMOVES IMAGE OF ARTIST PROTESTING DANA SCHUTZ'S *OPEN CASKET* FROM EXHIBITION, FOLLOWING PUSHBACK

The French Algerian artist Neil Beloufa removed an image of American artist Parker Bright from his exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris on Friday, February 16, after Bright threatened to travel to France to protest the show. The work in dispute is a mirror that features an appropriated image of Bright protesting Dana Schutz's *Open Casket*, a controversial painting based on the historic photograph of the corpse of Emmett Till—the African American teen who was murdered in Mississippi in 1955 after he allegedly whistled at a white woman. Bright wore a gray T-shirt with the words "Black Death Spectacle" scrawled across his back and stood in front of the work while it was on display in the Whitney Biennial last year in order to raise awareness about "racial injustice within the artworld." The piece sparked a fierce debate about race, violence, and the ethics of representation.

After learning that Beloufa had used his image without his consent, Bright launched a GoFundMe campaign online that is seeking to raise \$1,500 to pay for a trip to France so that he can visit the Palais de Tokyo in order to speak to Beloufa and the show's curator, Guillaume Désanges. "I would like to stage another protest inside the Palais De Tokyo in Paris where Beloufa's piece is on display because I believe that Beloufa is appropriating my narrative

EXPOSITIONS



Neil Beloufa, *Developpement durable*, vue de l'exposition au Mrac, Serignan, 2017.
© Photo Aurelien Mole

LA TRAHISON TECHNIQUE SELON NEIL BELOUFA

Dans une exposition volontairement confuse à Sérignan, l'artiste digère les rebus de la société de consommation actuelle pour en montrer l'absurdité

ART CONTEMPORAIN

Sérignan (Hérault). Avec un titre, « Développement durable », aussi vague et creux qu'un argument marketing, l'exposition de Neïl Beloufa au Musée régional d'art contemporain (Mrac) pouvait laisser craindre un certain ennui. Voire un état d'esprit moralisateur – le pire qui puisse arriver à un artiste. Il n'en est rien. À condition toutefois que le visiteur se laisse prendre aux jeux auxquels Neïl Beloufa l'invite, et surtout en comprenne les règles. Car, si l'on peut reconnaître à l'artiste, exposé en 2016 au MoMA de New York et invité à la Berlinale (festival de cinéma à Berlin) en 2017, un talent pour la facétie, force est de constater que son travail apparaît de prime abord de manière brute et confuse.

Nespresso englué

Mêlant les médiums comme il a cumulé les formations (de CalArts en Californie au Fresnoy à Tourcoing en passant par les Beaux-Arts et les Arts déco à Paris), l'artiste âgé de 32 ans conçoit ses expositions comme des lieux de production, des usines de fabrication « do it yourself » et participatives. Raillant l'industrialisation de l'art, il réutilise les matériaux de la vie quotidienne dans une forme d'improvisation que l'on retrouve dans ses films, réalisés avec des acteurs amateurs. Présentés à Sérignan dans des dispositifs contraignant le spectateur à une certaine distance, *Domination du monde* (2012) et *Monopoly* (2016) montrent chacun un groupe d'individus révélant, lors de jeux de rôle maladroits et absurdes, les rouages du pouvoir, politique ou économique. Une épure narrative qui fait contrepoint au bric-à-brac *low-tech* et imposant exposé

dans la salle du centre d'art plongée dans l'ombre. Panneaux rétro-éclairés tapissés d'emballages à pizza et banquettes « capsules » dotées de prises USB forment un mobilier futuriste et délirant, que l'on croirait tout droit sorti d'une usine de recyclage à déchets contemporains. Reliés les uns aux autres par des câbles électriques laissés volontairement apparents, ils plantent le décor d'une époque ultra-connectée et malade de sa surproduction, au style informe. Celui, notamment, que symbolise la machine Nespresso, objet de grande consommation donnant l'illusion d'un design haut de gamme, dont Beloufa saisit plusieurs exemplaires dans une matière gluante et organique. Incitant le visiteur à appuyer sur un interrupteur inutile ou à ouvrir une trappe vide, l'artiste pointe dans ses objets ce qu'il nomme la « *trahison technique* », avec une autodérision qui prend à rebrousse-poil un formalisme lisse pour assumer une matérialité trash et artificiellement datée.

Dans ce jeu d'associations, Neïl Beloufa assume le rôle de maître d'œuvre au sein d'une équipe de collaborateurs qui prend des airs de collectif. Un esprit de groupe qui l'a amené à créer en 2015 en banlieue parisienne une entreprise éphémère de coopération d'artistes baptisée « Occidental Temporary ». Celui aussi qui l'a incité, pour l'exposition dont le Palais de Tokyo à Paris lui confie le commissariat en 2018, à convoquer des artistes autour du thème de la guerre, lieu par excellence de la confrontation entre la machine et l'humain.

● MAGALI LESAUVAGE, ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE

NEÏL BELOUFA, DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE, jusqu'au 22 octobre, Musée régional d'art contemporain, 146, av. de la Plage, 34410 Sérignan

CRITIQUE

NEIL BELOUFA FAIT GRINGER LES ROUAGES DE LA CONSOMMATION

Par Magali Lesauvage Envoyée spéciale à
Sérignan(<http://www.liberation.fr/auteur/17016-magali-lesauvage>)
— 27 août 2017 à 17:06

A Sérignan, dans l'Hérault, le plasticien livre une critique malicieuse des dérives capitalistes et du marketing aguicheur à travers installations, tableaux et films.

28/08/2017

Neil Beloufa fait grincer les rouages de la consommation - Culture / Next

adaptés à vos centres d'intérêt. [En savoir plus...](#) (/cgvu/#donnees-personnelles)



Vue de l'exposition «Développement durable» de Neil Beloufa à Sérignan.
Photo Aurélien Mole

Elles sont venues de Téhéran par camion, et ont bien failli ne jamais arriver. Un voyage chaotique - de la Pejman Foundation, où elles étaient exposées au printemps, au musée régional d'Art contemporain de Sérignan, dans l'Hérault - qui fait désormais partie de l'œuvre. Cet ensemble de *Capsules noires*, que l'on appréhende de prime abord comme des sortes de cercueils à roulettes, forme dans le vaste espace aveugle du centre d'art un saisissant panorama mortifère de ce que pourrait être notre futur saisi par la crise migratoire. Une vision anxiogène de refuge où des véhicules pour voyageur solitaire connecté prendraient la forme de couchages tout confort agrémentés de caissons et de prises USB. Les *Capsules* du Franco-Algérien Neil Beloufa rejoindront en février le Palais de Tokyo, qui offre à l'artiste un étage entier (soit 1 600 m²) pour une exposition qui confrontera, d'après ce qu'il a pu nous en révéler, les œuvres d'autres artistes à des archives de guerres, dans un face-à-face entre art et réalité.

A 32 ans, Neil Beloufa n'en est pas à sa première exposition dans une grande institution, lui qui a successivement montré son travail, au cours des trois dernières années, à l'ICA de Londres, à la Biennale de Lyon et au MoMA de New York. Il y déployait, déjà, son design trash et organique au bricolage patent, hérissé de câbles électriques laissés volontiers apparents, mêlant objets de récup saisis dans la résine et reliefs en pâte à sel à l'aspect charnel.

A Sérignan, cet artiste des métamorphoses ose un clin d'œil à la notion galvaudée de «développement durable», qui donne son titre à l'exposition. Recyclant les objets de consommation glanés dans son atelier, où se mêlent amis et assistants dans ce qu'il associe lui-même à une PME, Neil Beloufa produit une critique soft des capacités d'absorption du capitalisme par une série de tableaux rétro-éclairés à la manière de panneaux publicitaires totémiques. S'y trouvent pris dans une sorte de gangue trouble des boîtes de pizzas et des cartons de bières, des mégots de cigarettes et des rebuts métalliques. Natures mortes d'une ère postindustrielle à haute teneur toxique, elles sont les directes héritières de celles réalisées il y a près d'un demi-siècle par la génération des Nouveaux Réalistes (Arman, Spoerri, Tinguely), jouant - par leurs effets de couleur, de superpositions et de transparences - d'une certaine séduction formelle. Aux côtés de celles-ci, les *Capsules* font office d'aires de méditation, tandis qu'une imposante structure architecturale imitant un comptoir de douanes, baptisée *Bar Schengen* et semée de caméras de surveillance, coince le visiteur dans la contemplation de sa propre image tout en l'invitant à en pénétrer les coulisses.

Tout le paradoxe de l'art de Beloufa est là : mettre au jour, avec un humour dissimulé sous des formes volontiers lourdes, l'imposture capitaliste autoritaire dans ce qu'il nomme une esthétique «*lifestyle*», en référence à un design moderniste aseptisé. Ainsi la cafetière Nespresso, emblématique de l'objet utilitaire dessiné à la manière d'une sculpture abstraite et vendue par le marketing comme faire-valoir raffiné, mais aussi accusée de générer

une pollution démente... L'artiste la décline en une série de machines reliées

expos

avant la révolution

A Sérignan, **Neil Beloufa** sculpte une exposition faite main qui s'appuie sur un sens aigu du collectif pour envisager une insurrection qui finira bien par venir.

J'ai voulu faire une exposition uniquement composée de sculptures, où la vidéo serait pour une fois absente." Neil Beloufa se tient sur le seuil de sa nouvelle exposition au musée régional d'Art contemporain à Sérignan lorsqu'il prononce ces quelques mots. A eux se mêlent déjà, provenant de l'intérieur de la salle où ne pénètre pas le jour, des éclats de voix. Sur un plateau de télévision distant, ça se crêpe le chignon, argumente et s'échauffe. Ces sculptures qu'on nous promet seraient alors dotées de la parole. Une exposition sans vidéo, vraiment ?

Le premier pas dans la salle le confirme. A Sérignan, il y a bien de la vidéo. Il y en a même deux, des œuvres préexistantes, positionnées comme en exergue à l'entrée. Dans *La Domination du monde* (2012), des quidams castés dans la rue improvisent un jeu de rôle géopolitique. A chacun, un continent a été assigné, dont ils devront dès lors défendre les frontières. Très vite, c'est l'escalade et la guerre généralisée. Avec *Monopoly* (2016), c'est un groupe d'adolescents qui s'adonne à une activité similaire. A travers les règles d'un jeu de Monopoly, eux-ci jouent à se partager l'Ukraine, graines de capitalistes rompues aux règles du néolibéralisme effréné et sans plus d'états d'âme que leurs aînés lorsqu'il s'agit de défendre bec et ongles leur pré carré – quand bien même fictif.

En pénétrant plus avant dans l'espace, la déclaration liminaire de l'artiste se précise. On commençait à avoir vu, beaucoup vu même, certaines des pièces un peu gadgets de l'artiste – et entièrement pensées comme telles –, comme les fameux "plug-paintings" équipés de prises pour recharger son iPhone sur les foires. Ici, ces pièces ont leur descendance, mais qui au-delà du gag ajoutent également un nouveau registre à son vocabulaire : des canidés de type "saucisse" offrent docilement le flanc à une rallonge électrique. Comme les machines Nespresso plus loin, leur surface est

recouverte d'une couche de divers emballages alimentaires découpés puis assemblés avec du Scotch de déménageur.

On lève les yeux : une nouvelle série de tableaux nous fait de l'œil et tente de se faire passer pour de précieux vitraux d'églises quand il ne s'agit que du chatoiement fallacieux de cartons de pizza et d'emballages de packs de Kro pris dans du Cellophane tendu. Ces petits objets, totems d'une globalisation soft, dialoguent avec deux ensembles de pièces plus grinçantes.

En écho aux deux vidéos, et comme souvent dans les expositions de Neil Beloufa, un bar occupe l'arrière de la salle. Vide, le comptoir fait surtout office de délimitation séparant deux espaces plutôt que de les réunir. Une pensée qui se précise lorsqu'on y aperçoit des passeports de divers pays abandonnés là. Comptoir de douane autant que de bar, se détache alors en contre-jour, sur fond de la convivialité d'un cocktail de vernissage, la silhouette sombre de l'exclusion géopolitique.

Spatialement, ce sont donc deux aspects de sa pratique qui se retrouvent ici séparés, la vidéo et la forme. *Développement durable*

ces collectifs, workshops de hackers ou ateliers d'artistes, dessinent les contours de poches de résistance

est la première exposition de l'artiste hors de la capitale en France, mais surtout, elle donne l'occasion de prendre la mesure d'une évolution fulgurante. Si l'on se retient à dessein de parler de "retour" sur la scène hexagonale, c'est que sa dernière exposition ne date que de 2015, où il exposait à la galerie Balice Hertling. Pourtant, ce mot-là dérange bel et bien, tant le résultat témoigne d'une évolution perceptible.

L'an passé, le diplômé des Beaux-Arts de Paris s'offrait du haut de sa petite trentaine les cimaises du MoMA à New York. Et, en parallèle, tournait un long métrage, *Occidental* (2017), sélectionné à la Berlinale, le prestigieux festival international du film à Berlin. C'est d'ailleurs dans les décors du film, construits dans l'atelier partagé de l'artiste à Villejuif, dans la banlieue sud parisienne, qu'avaient été organisées

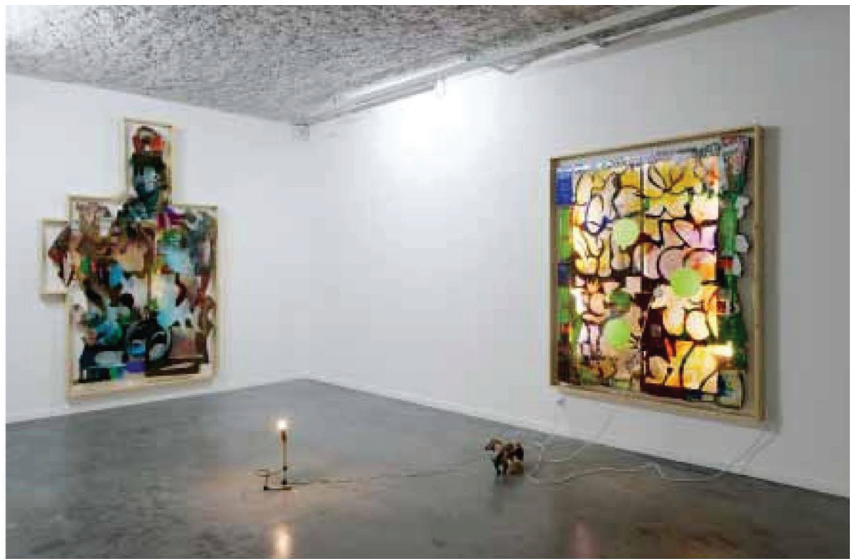
des expositions montées par les occupants des lieux. Accompagnant l'essor durant ces années-là des lieux autogérés par des artistes, *Occidental Temporary*, le nom de la structure d'exposition, révélait comme dans les dispositifs de Neil Beloufa l'envers du décor et les câblages, mettant cette fois à nu les rouages de la vie d'artiste dans une capitale au maillage trop serré pour les accueillir.

Autant dans le long métrage que dans l'espace de création, de vie et d'exposition, l'accent est mis sur la dimension de travail collectif. Evidente dans l'économie de production du cinéma, elle l'est moins chez l'artiste classique, où prévaut encore l'image du sculpteur engagé dans un corps-à-corps solitaire avec sa matière. A Sérignan, on observe dans les sculptures ce système bouclé où les matériaux et les savoir-faire mobilisés proviennent des ressources présentes sur place à l'atelier.

On n'avait jusqu'alors pas évoqué les modules au sol, sortes de capsules spatiales high-tech dont la coque ouverte et la banquette moelleuse attendent un occupant à l'identité indéterminée – visiteurs de l'exposition, touristes de l'espace, réfugiés apatrides ? Trop explicites sans doute même si elles se refusent à l'être, elles tombent un peu à plat. Au contraire, le réseau formé par les petites pièces et les tableaux mobilise un recours au fait-main que l'on pensait rendu obsolète par le mode de production fordiste. Sans la langue de bois des entreprises brandissant à tout-va un providentiel "développement durable", ces collectifs, workshops de hackers ou ateliers d'artistes, dessinent les contours de poches de résistance. Ou se confectionne à partir de bric et de broc le "nous" encore indéterminé qui précède et accompagne toute mobilisation politique.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad

Développement durable jusqu'au 22 octobre au musée régional d'Art contemporain (Mrac), Sérignan



ART | EXPO

Développement durable

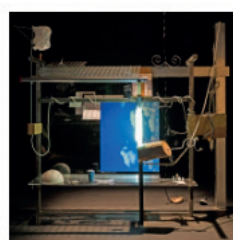
01 Juil - 22 Oct 2017

Vernissage le 01 Juil 2017

MRAC LANGUEDOC-ROUSSILLON

NEIL BELOUFA

L'exposition « Développement durable » au MRAC Occitanie / Pyrénées-Méditerranée de Sérignan dévoile de nouvelles installations de Neil Beloufa qui mêlent films, peintures et sculptures. Ces dispositifs complexes témoignent d'une réflexion sur les nombreux paradoxes de la société contemporaine.



L'exposition « Développement durable » au Musée régional d'art contemporain Occitanie / Pyrénées-Méditerranée, à Sérignan, présente de nouvelles installations de Neil Beloufa qui témoignent d'un regard sombre sur la société contemporaine.

« Développement durable » : les paradoxes de la société contemporaine

Le titre de l'exposition, « Développement durable », illustre toute l'ambiguïté de nos sociétés contemporaines que Neil Beloufa entend mettre en lumière à travers ses complexes installations mêlant films, peintures et sculptures. Le terme « développement durable », servant à désigner dans un langage technocrate un mode de développement qui satisfait les besoins présents sans compromettre ceux du futur, est souvent instrumentalisé par des organismes qui souhaitent recouvrir d'un vernis pseudo-écologique des activités qui ne le sont pas.

Les installations complexes de Neil Beloufa, un jeu de faux-semblants

Les innombrables paradoxes de la société contemporaine sont au centre de la réflexion de Neil Beloufa qui dans cette exposition met en place un jeu de faux-semblants qui les met en évidence. L'espace dépourvu de lumière évoque le contexte aseptisé d'un hall d'aéroport. L'ensemble disparate de mobilier qui y est disposé multiplie les discordances. L'installation *Bar - Schengen* cache sa véritable fonction sous les apparences d'un bar accueillant où l'on imagine partager un verre avec d'autres ; il s'agit en fait d'un comptoir de douane, lieu symbolique de contrôle et d'exclusion.

Plus loin des lits-bancs invitant à faire une pause ont l'allure de lits spécialement conçus pour des migrants tandis qu'au mur, des tags provenant d'Iran sont utilisés comme des éléments de décor orientalisant et ainsi privés de leur portée politique et subversive. Dans le film *Monopoly*, ce jeu célèbre devient une partie de négociations et de calculs économiques entre des adolescents qui se partagent l'Ukraine. Neil Beloufa souligne ainsi comment la société capitaliste conditionne dès l'enfance à penser selon sa logique.





Neil Beloufa, le 28 juin,
au Musée régional d'art
contemporain (MRAC)
de Sérignan.

La Culture

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Vue de l'installation
au MRAC de Sérignan.

AU DÉBUT DES ANNÉES 2010, NEIL BELOUFA, À PEINE 25 ANS, DÉBOULAIT DANS LE MONDE DE L'ART COMME UNE MÉTÉORITE. En presque sept ans, le bouillonnant prodige, né en 1985 à Paris, et exposé actuellement au Musée régional d'art contemporain de Sérignan (Hérault), a coché toutes les cases : nomination aux prix Fondation d'entreprise Ricard et Marcel Duchamp, exposition au Palais de Tokyo à Paris, et au MoMA à New York, participation aux biennales de Lyon et de Venise... Le tout sans radoter avant l'âge, et en se mettant constamment en danger.

La complexité est son terreau. La déconstruction, sa méthode. Dans ses installations vidéo, où le dispositif souvent rêche compte autant que le film exposé, Neil Beloufa démonte clichés et propagande, qu'ils soient télévisuels, cinématographiques, économiques ou politiques. Le familier bandana, par exemple, devient sujet d'étude. L'artiste interroge le message de ce bout de tissu imprimé rouge, supposé autant marquer la singularité du cow-boy, du gangster, de l'anarchiste, du hippie ou du gay.

Pour lui, tout est prétexte à décortiquer, à commencer par lui-même. « Je représente le monde globalisé, dit-il. J'expose à Téhéran, mais aussi au MoMA. Je suis censé être de gauche et sympa et, en même temps, chef d'entreprise. Je suis un outil du système, mais je le critique. Et plus je le critique, plus on m'achète. » Cynique, ce jeune moustachu ? Lucide plutôt.

Enfant de « gens qui ont failli faire des choses », Neil Beloufa a très tôt déchanté. Son père, Farouk Beloufa, cinéaste algérien, est resté l'homme d'un seul film, *Nahla*, tourné au Liban en 1979. En réaction, Neil se consume dans le travail, aligne les écoles d'art : Arts décoratifs et Beaux-Arts à Paris, Le Fresnoy à Tourcoing, CalArts à Los Angeles. Quant au succès, il arrive dès la troisième année. Sa première vidéo, *Kempinski*, tournée de nuit dans un village au Mali, est exposée en 2008 à la galerie WhiteBox, à New York, avant d'être montrée quelques années plus tard à la Biennale de Venise. Drôle de

destin pour une vidéo, « exotique et raciste » de son propre aveu, qui a été conçue comme un bras d'honneur envers ses professeurs.

Depuis, il a réalisé 18 vidéos et enchaîné les expositions. Les yeux grands ouverts, Neil Beloufa n'est dupe de rien. Surtout pas de sa carrière en accéléré. « Si c'est allé dix fois plus vite pour moi que pour quelqu'un d'autre, c'est aussi parce que je suis un fils de colonisé, un Français algérien, dit-il sans ciller. Il y a une fascination pour les révolutionnaires des années 1960 comme pour le "Y a bon Banania". Mais j'essaie de ne pas être l'Arabe de service. »

Le grand nerveux est lucide sur ses propres initiatives. Comme sur le phalanstère qu'il avait créé il y a quelques années à Villejuif, un laboratoire et centre d'art autofinancé. Jusqu'en janvier, une trentaine de personnes s'y affairaient. Depuis, c'est un espace de stockage. « On n'avait pas engagé les gens pour leurs compétences, lance-t-il, provocateur. On avait choisi des amis artistes qui avaient besoin d'argent. Il y a une forme de népotisme là-dedans. » Sauf que l'idée était plus noble que l'artiste ironique ne veut le dire. Ce lieu a produit de l'art pour l'art, sans répondre à des commandes. « Neil avait trouvé un système économique interne et autonome, où tout était matière à produire, saluait le commissaire d'exposition Guillaume Désanges. Son économie de travail est indissociable de sa position d'artiste. » Sauf que ce que Beloufa appelle la « mégalo-manie boulimique » a ses limites. « Je pensais acheter ma liberté, confie Beloufa. Mais en bossant avec des cernes sous les yeux, je me suis acheté mes menottes. Le travail amène le travail. » Et parfois la facilité. « On a tout coupé quand ça a commencé à fonctionner, quand l'atelier est devenu un outil de com', raconte-t-il.

Pendant un temps, Neil Beloufa, dont la cote grandissait sur le marché, produisait des objets pour les collectionneurs, des tableaux-sculptures qui ressemblent à des murs d'escalade ornés de prises électriques. Avant d'arrêter net. « Ces œuvres sont atroces à faire, elles sont fabriquées avec des outils qui ne sont pas adaptés »,

Photos Nanda Gonzague pour M Le magazine du Monde — 8 juillet 2017

“Je représente le monde globalisé. J'expose à Téhéran mais aussi au MoMA. Je suis un outil du système mais je le critique. Et plus je le critique, plus on m'achète.”

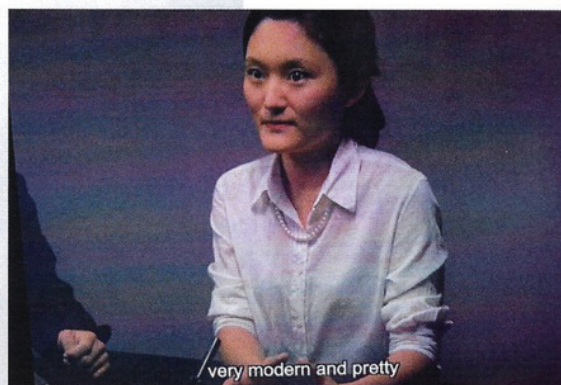
raconte-t-il. Et d'ajouter: «À l'atelier, on tente. Quand ça peut se retrouver chez Colette [concept-store parisien], c'est que la séduction prend le pas sur la pensée artistique, alors on détruit.»

RIEN N'ÉCHAPPE À SA CRITIQUE, SURTOUT PAS LA NOUVELLE LANGUE ET LES CONCEPTS GÉNÉREUX mais creux comme le «vivre ensemble» et la «croissance négative». Ou encore le «développement durable», qui donne son titre à l'exposition de Sérignan. Et de grincer: «On parle plus de développement durable chez Total qu'ailleurs.» Au double langage, Neil Beloufa oppose la double lecture, donnant à voir une chose et son contraire, jusqu'à l'expurger de tout message. Les tags politiques iraniens qui se trouvent à Sérignan sont ainsi vidés de leur message pour devenir des éléments orientalisants.

Cette façon de tout mettre sur le même plan, il l'appliquera en février 2018, pour sa nouvelle exposition au Palais de Tokyo. Il prévoit d'y brouiller les lignes entre pensée autoritaire et pensée libertaire, en mélangeant œuvres d'artistes invités, artefacts issus des musées de la guerre, faux témoignages, magazines de propagande, documents glanés dans les replis noirs d'Internet et des réseaux sociaux extrémistes. «Je ne crois pas aux distinctions moral-immoral, vrai-faux, fiction-documentaire, dit-il, au risque de jargonner lui-même. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est d'engager ensemble des choses qui ne sont pas supposées fonctionner de pair.»

Et puis soudain, l'angoisse vient ronger le discours bien rodé. Il aime jouer avec le feu, tout en redoutant l'échec. «Je suis conscient qu'on n'est jamais arrivé et que tout peut s'arrêter très vite.» Neil Beloufa est moins une supernova, qui scintille de mille feux avant de s'éteindre, qu'un soleil noir, sombre par nature. ☹

Neil Beloufa, «Développement durable», Musée régional d'art contemporain Languedoc-Roussillon, 146, avenue de la Plage, Sérignan (Hérault). Jusqu'au 22 octobre. www.mrac.languedocroussillon.fr



Désordre apparent des installations, profusion des messages, ambiguïté de certains dispositifs... Avec son exposition «Développement durable», Neil Beloufa place le spectateur dans l'inconfort.

les
inRocks

Les 5 expos à ne pas rater cette semaine

15/04/2017 | 14h37



Neil Beloufa, "Data for Desire", 2015-2017 © Chantapitch Wiwatchaikamol

"06 75 72 33 32, Live a message"

Depuis 10 ans, les Audi Talent Awards récompensent et accompagnent les forces vives de la création contemporaine. L'une des spécificité de ce prix annuel est de n'avoir pas voulu choisir entre les disciplines, englobant aussi bien l'art contemporain, le design, la musique à l'image que le court métrage. Une interdisciplinarité que l'on retrouve lors de l'exposition anniversaire qui se tient actuellement dans la galerie pop-up investie pour l'occasion dans le Marais, où dix lauréats ont répondu à un appel à projet visant à réfléchir sur les traces que nous laissons derrière nous. Explorant aussi bien l'habitat contemporain que la mémoire numérique, les œuvres ont été produites au cours de deux ateliers collectifs. Dont les pièces qui en résultent, souvent collectives, toujours processuelles et parasitaires, démontrent la vivacité d'une jeune garde créative – dont la plupart sont aujourd'hui des figures reconnues.

"06 75 72 33 32, Live a message" (avec Wilfrid Almendra ; Arnaud Astruc & Benjamin Fournier-Bidoz ; Neil Beloufa ; Jérôme Dumetz ; Alexandre Echassieriau ; Franck Fontana ; Constance Guisset ; Grégory Hervelin ; Thomas Karagiannis ; Arnaud Lapierre), jusqu'au 28 mai à la [Galerie Audi Talents à Paris](#)

Reality Check

TEHRAN 02.20.17

ARTFORUM



Left: Artist Neïl Beloufa and Mehdi Moujane. Right: Collector Hamidreza Pejman and artist Mamali Shafahi.

"I DON'T THINK I'M GOING," I told a friend the day I was supposed to fly to Tehran. The White House had just released a draft of the executive order banning entry to the United States for nationals from seven majority-Muslim countries, including Iran. The order wasn't final yet, so on top of the profound despair over global politics, there was a certain confusion about concrete travel processes, especially for holders of passports from other majority-Muslim countries—including yours truly.

"If you don't go to Tehran you'll regret it," said my friend. "And eating kebab in Westwood won't make up for it. Believe me, if they don't want to let you in, you wouldn't want to get in anyway."

I took the advice (and a Xanax), and there I was a few hours later, wearing a headscarf at the immigration booth of Imam Khomeini International Airport. "Can you put the visa on a separate sheet?" I tried. "What are you afraid of?" asked the agent. "You're not on 'the list' anyway. Welcome to Iran!"



Left: Curators Hicham Khalidi and Martha Kirszenbaum and Mamali Shafahi. Right: Curator Azar Mahmoudian.

How ironic that the occasion for my visit was a project by French-Algerian artist Neïl Beloufa, a master in deconstructing geopolitical representations and global systems of control. Among other works he was installing when I arrived was the trailer of a movie shot in Iran in 2016. Conceived as a reality TV show, it features a group of young Iranians speaking in Farsi (about food, relationships, and how to eliminate each other) with an overlapping English voiceover that sounded half-*Big Brother*, half-Barack Obama. This mesmerizing oddity was titled *Restored Communication*. "As you can see, the world changed since I chose the title," said Beloufa, typically impassive.

Beloufa was offered the inaugural exhibition in an industrial building in downtown Tehran. The space, a onetime brewery B.K. (Before Khomeini) called Argo Factory—after the beer that was produced there, not Ben Affleck's Hollywood blockbuster—is the new headquarters of Pejman Foundation, an exhibition and residency program founded by the young and ambitious collector Hamid Reza Pejman. "Collecting was not enough," he told me. "And putting works into a building is not enough either. Here students and young artists can't travel easily. I want them to see something else. I want them to interact with other works and other practices."

One of the conditions of Beloufa's project was that he spend time in Iran and work with an Iranian crew of actors, technicians, artists, and installers. The exhibition was a success: A mix of video installations and CCTV cameras interacting with the artist's signature wire sculptures covering the unfinished facade, the whole enterprise looked like a UFO—especially in the context of an Iranian art scene still largely dominated by painting.



Left: Artist Parvaneh Etemadi. Right: Curators Léonie Radine and Cloe Perrone.

For the opening the foundation gathered a group of international curators for a series of talks and screenings organized by Pejman's right-hand man, artist and curator Mamali Shafahi. Among the guests were Museum Ludwig's Léonie Radine, Hicham Khalidi from Fondation Lafayette, Fondazione Memmo's Cloe Perrone, and curator Martha Kirszenbaum. "A few other people were coming but had 'last-minute impediments,'" said Shafahi, half in jest, highlighting the strange sense of purpose that this trip was taking. Of course the visa ban was the designated small talk for the week, but Iranians, accustomed to geopolitical isolation and to the consequences of an over-thirty-year embargo, seemed less worried than the rest of us. "It gives a new meaning to what we're doing," said Sazmanab art space founder Sohrab Kashani, who has been working on a television sitcom between Tehran and Pittsburgh since 2014. Artist Parvaneh Etemadi, a major figure on the Tehrani scene and a mentor to many young artists, was even more resilient. "It's all vanilla ice cream," she said. "It always melts eventually."

We spent our first days cruising from museums to artist studios, as dumbstruck by the taxi driver's racing habits (hello Jafar Panahi) as we were by the breathtaking sight of the Alborz Mountains. Tehran's streets are puzzling, clotted in architectural anachronism and punctuated by hundreds of bucolic murals commissioned by the Bureau of Beautification—even as the capitol bulldozes traditional buildings and outdoor spaces. Artist Nazgol Ansarinia, whose studio we visited in the northern neighborhood of Dar Abad, showed us miniature models responding to that irony as well as a new video work reflecting the city's many layers of memory, from the '70s ersatz muscular modernization to today's real-estate boom. Ansarinia's project was supposed to be shown at New York's Armory Show in March, but of course everything was now in diplomatic limbo.

Over the next few days, talks were held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, home to the outstanding collection of Western art assembled in the '70s by former Empress and local Peggy Guggenheim Farah Pahlavi and her architect cousin Kamran Diba, who designed the museum. It was quite exhilarating to think that we were sitting above one of the most dazzling collections of Abstract Expressionist and postwar art, recently in the spotlight due to the sudden cancelation of its traveling to Berlin's Gemäldegalerie and Rome's MAXXI. Diplomatic limbo, the sequel.



Left: Artist Shabahang Tayyari and dealer Niloofar Abedi. Right: Artist Shahla Hosseini.

Friday was opening night at Pejman Foundation but also in galleries across the city. We sampled the burgeoning scene, trying to force our way through Tehrani traffic "uptown," where most of the new spaces are. As usual, the most interesting works weren't performing "tradition" for the sake of commercial success. Noteworthy among them were the delicate drawings of Shahla Hosseini at Emkan Gallery as well as several gems in the hidden, one-room apartment gallery where Morteza Zahedi assembled an impressive collection of Iranian outsider art, from Amir Kamand's incongruous wooden sculptures to the earnest erotic drawings of Reza Shafahi, a seventy-seven-year-old retired gambler.

Off the multilane Valiasr Boulevard we passed AG gallery, where we sat with artist Peyman Hooshmanzadeh around the traditional tea/dates/pistachios combo before heading to the three-floor Mohsen Gallery for a sight of Mehrdad Afsari's clunky photography. We finished up at Dastan, a gallery founded by the proactive young dealer Hormoz Hematian, with a basement for experimental projects as well as a program of art interventions throughout the city. "Iranians are better off in Iran," confessed Hematian on a ride between his two spaces. "There are so many opportunities. It's really a giving country. What we are lacking right now is a nonprofit museum and more critical writing."

Later at Pejman's opening, his reflection was completed by curator and local figure Ali Bakhtiari—Hans Ulrich Obrist if Obrist could lip-sync to Iranian diva Googoosh. "Visual culture here builds up through pictures and the internet, which creates a peculiar aesthetic. It's a chance that some of us had to be able to travel and see things, but for the majority, art is an incomplete experiment," he said. "We need to send people outside and bring shows inside," he continued, echoing initiatives like Pejman's endeavor and artist Tooraj Khamenezhadeh's Kooshk residency program.



Left: Curator Ali Bakhtiari and collector Mahdi Rahmanian. Right: Artist and Kooshk residency director Tooraj Khamenezhadeh..

The next day, Pejman Foundation held a talk between Beloufa and curator Azar Mahmoudian. The conversation was heated but the space was not, which didn't prevent an attentive crowd from sitting for four hours in the cold to listen. Resilience, some would say, or was it just *taarof*, that fascinating Iranian form of extreme civility?

"I don't understand your art," hailed an audience member to Beloufa. "You could at least have used a Persian toilet seat instead of the Occidental toilet seat in your installation. It would have made it more familiar." The translator got lost while the debate expanded among the audience, the voices ping-ponging in Farsi about the need for contemporary art to adapt (or not) to a given context. "Iranian artists aren't really liberated from tradition," Mahmoudian said later, reflecting on the "Toiletgate." "If at the end of the day people think about the show, even if they're puzzled about what they saw, we did our job," Pejman added. QED.

— Myriam Ben Salah



Left: Mohsen Gallery founders Ehsan Rasoulouf and Narges Hamzianpour. Right: Dastan Gallery founder Hormoz Hematian.



Left: Curators Martha Kirszenbaum, Hicham Khalidi, and Cloe Perrone. Right: Curator Sohrab Kashani.

, Even

, Interview

Neil Beloufa

When he was just 22, the French-Algerian artist Neil Beloufa made one of those student artworks that defines a career: *Kempinski* (2007), a tour de force of improvised science fiction that offers a glimpse of utopia in a dusty Bamako suburb. It was the first of many shotgun marriages of fact and fabrication that Beloufa would arrange over the last decade. His numerous films, as well as the ramshackle and often modular

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environments he builds to display them, don't deconstruct Hollywood formulas and digital commonplaces; they capitalize on them, redeploing conventions to often anarchic ends. This spring, after previous outings in Los Angeles and London, he's presenting a new work at the Museum of Modern Art that continues his investigation of politics, desire, and the technologies that broadcast and shape them.

Beloufa was born in Paris in 1985, and he works in a massive studio just south of the city—which he recently kitted out as a 70s-era hotel, the backdrop for a new film and a 30-artist group show. We meet two days before Christmas, at a dive of a café next door to the Théâtre de la Ville. He seems bemused that I speak French; he talks fast, chases ideas as they come. The country is still under a state of emergency, and the streets are quiet, with

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fewer tourists than the season would imply. A few hours after we part, the prime minister holds a press conference to announce a new constitutional reform: people who hold two nationalities will be stripped of their French citizenship if convicted of certain crimes. To be French is an unsettled thing these days; what was once unsayable now is aired on the nightly news, and *égalité* doesn't mean what it did in 1789.

× *Jason Farago*

× Your installations are usually precariously constructed and made with cheap materials, but the films you show within them are rather more polished. Was cinema your first love?

I was doing graphic design from the age of 15. I didn't want to be involved with cinema. I went to art school in large part to *not* do cinema. My father made a film, just one movie in 1979, and went crazy. He was a director in Algiers—he was very passionate about the Tricontinentale, the Non-Aligned Movement, international networks of developing countries. So he made one movie, set in Beirut during the first phase of the civil war, and then it was cut out of my history. I saw it when I was 18, but by then I didn't live with my father. My mother was a film editor until I was four, but I didn't know much about her work. I must have been frustrated, I think. I come from a cinema culture; my mother was showing me films; but I was defining that as something I didn't want to do.

× You were doing graphic design as a commercial proposition, as a teenager?

Yeah, to make money. First I was doing it for fun, and then I wanted an income. I wanted to make cartoons, but I'm bad at drawing—so the cartoon school said no. I ended up applying to go to Arts Déco [*École nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs*, one of France's leading art schools] to study graphic design. I was admitted, and at that time I was also selling cars. The first month of my studies coincided with the annual car show in Paris, so, you know, I wasn't really going a lot to Arts Déco. Besides, I really hated it—it was so scholastic, and they were really heavy into applied arts.

And since I had been admitted to Beaux-Arts as well, I started my plan B. I was bored of the applied arts aspect of graphic design, and they were not nice to me, since I never went. I ended up going to both schools—I was hyperactive when I was younger—and then at Arts Déco I switched from graphic design to video.

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- × You completed *Kempinski* (2007), your first major work, when you were still a student.

Yes, I was a third-year.

- × Had you been to Mali before?

No, I was sent there. Arts Déco sent my whole class. Until I was six I went back and forth between France and Algeria. I had been to Senegal, and I lived in Egypt for a very short time.

There was a partnership with the development bank. We were supposed to do something in the new hospital. Imagine a whole class of French people, coming through with cameras. Basically, I wanted to send a fuck-you to my teachers—well, not to my teachers, I liked them, but to the idea of being paternalistic, of going to Africa with a camera and filming miserably poor people in a hospital. I wanted to do something cleverer.

- × It is an ingenious conceit: the Malians you speak to describe their visions of the future, but they use present-tense verbs while doing so. *We have light-speed travel. We have telepathic sex. We communicate with the stars.*

52 *Kempinski* is a documentary, but it doesn't take anything from them. The way I was proposing my idea to people on the street was to say, "Let's say 'fuck you' to the west." I used my dual position, and I wanted to play with that ability to go between north and south. Let's not play the game of these French miserabilists, and let's say, "We live in the future, you don't."

- × This is the first of many works in which you worked with amateurs. Why did you want to work with not-trained actors?

At the time of *Kempinski* I still wanted to make documentaries. But I've always liked working within constraints, and I guess non-professionals appealed because it was the easier way of producing something. I

wasn't good at writing, and I liked the qualities of these characters that I would never have been able to invent. If you talk to someone and try to bring him somewhere, where he goes never correlates with any of my presumptions.

I thought everyone at Arts Déco would be pissed off, and instead they were so happy. My point had been to rebel against the program's expectations, and to be able to defend fiction *as* documentary. I tried to say: *No, no, this is a documentary. I never wrote anything. It's just a grammatical mistake.* But my teachers didn't even care about that, it was already over. For them it was a fiction.

× It had become a science fiction film, almost. The quality of the images, the fact that you filmed at night, gives it the appearance of something closer to science fiction. But there's no invention on your part at all. They're just holding a neon tube you provided.

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No, it's just a live reaction. What makes it feel that way is the neon light. I always say this, but if you look at cartoons from the 1950s, there's always this game they play: you know it's drawn, you see the layers. If Bugs Bunny is going to open the door, it's not in a wall, it just stands there in space, like an outline. When you're a kid, instead of watching the cartoon and being absorbed in the fiction, you look at that outline of a door, and you're like, *It's going to open, I know it. Something is going to happen.* What happens is that you double-cross the fiction; the film becomes real. That's what happens with the neon light, that's what happens when you leave the wire visible. It's not science fiction—it's just a neon light—but it is.

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× It's interesting to hear you say all this, because you were a student at the exact moment when the art scene in Paris was regaining international visibility after decades in obscurity. So much of the work that was around at that time—Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parreno, but also lots of other people from the early days of the Palais de Tokyo and such—were playing with these questions of how cinema can intercede in reality, how fiction can infect the real.

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Neil Beloufa. *Kempinski*. 2007. Video, color, sound. 14 min. Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

In one sense I'm totally a child of that generation. I make super-Frenchy work. But I was quite uneducated about that generation when I was a student, to be honest. It was in the air, more likely. I was an assistant to Laurent Grasso, one of the artists of the generation under them. When I was at school, Laurent would insult me because I didn't know anything. The thing is, the world of fine art wasn't connected up then in the same way it is now. Arts Déco was really remote from the art world, and we didn't have things like Contemporary Art Daily. Our connection to the art world was almost folkloric. I saw things shift in my fifth year in art school: suddenly the freshmen were much more plugged in. It was the internet, but also they became cooler, they knew New York, and they spoke English. But when I first arrived, looking up at the people five years older than me, I miss that time. You were producing some shit that looks like a Thomas Houseago, but you were a loser. No one knew anything.

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× That's part of being a student.

It was part of being in a less globalized, less connected world. People were bad at making things that looked like what art was "supposed" to look like. And then people started to know everything. Boom, boom, boom.

× In *Brune Renault* (2010), you have this bitter portrait of Parisian youth—driving aimlessly around town, mousing a few superficial observations. Then you see that the Renault is sliced in pieces, so that you can shoot in on a soundstage.

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That was my thesis work. It was two years after *Kempinski*, and I had only been making movies with non-actors. That had become easy, like a formula, so I was a bit scared. I decided to switch my endgame, and to rethink that balancing line where you don't know if it's fiction or not. When you see the car is cut into four parts, then the actors are not acting anymore; they're *people who are actors* who are trying to act, and they're caught on a set.

- × But what's the motivation behind a cinema that's always questioning itself? To expose the mechanisms by which movies work—to show that actors are only actors—is not much of a goal in itself. It has to be the means to get somewhere else...

Now that I've done 18 movies, I can see that many are shitty, but I like the ones that are not successful. What interests me in life is relations to representation and relations of power and authority. It's the system. What interests me is having something that doesn't affirm, but still produces something that makes your suspension of disbelief your own decision, a conscious decision. You know what you're doing. If you get absorbed, that's something you *choose* to do. So the metafiction becomes a kind of political gesture.

- × Sure, and all of this is alongside an often global examination of politics, colonialism and economic systems. *Kempinski*, like you said, is an act of postcolonial one-upmanship. In *World Domination* (2012), games are being played with the language of representation, and yet the improvised dialogue is shocking.

56 If you look at all the works chronologically, you can see that each work is always trying to undermine the success of the work before it. In *World Domination*, I threw out the whole question of fiction and documentary. There's no mystery anymore. *Kempinski* has this all-encompassing world, a mysterious world with nice music and strange lighting. This one is pure, flat, radical. It's like vomit. And you understand its principles in three seconds. The tension derives from how far they're going to go, what they're going to say next. The participants are totally racist and violent, and you want to laugh, but you're not sure you're allowed.

- × The non-actors are in the roles of presidents, foreign ministers, security forces—and almost every one of them sounds like a dictator. Everyone wants to go to war.

There was a screening during the Nuit Blanche one year, right next to the Hôtel de Ville, on a big screen by the city hall. All of these passersby were watching these political speeches right next to a major political building, and people were stunned by the violence. One character talks about Turks in Germany and actually uses the words “final solution.” Some people were pissed off. An old woman said it was not funny for me to do that. I like that she can refuse the movie.

× *How do you get from cinema to installation in galleries? A lot of your early work was shown in a black box; now they almost always appear as part of janky, makeshift installations. How did you begin to think of these things as sculptural?*

I don't like authority, but I believe in conventions. I've enjoyed building things since I was a kid. But I always built poorly. When my mother saw my first show, she said, “When you were making those wobbly shelves, and I was throwing them away, was it art?” My father went to a show and said the gallery must not have had much money because the benches were shitty. And I said, “No, that's my work.”

If I want to do cinema I do cinema. I take responsibility for where my stuff is shown. But the art gallery offers a certain critical distance that you can't get in cinema. Maybe in the 70s it was different. But today cinema is a global industry, with the constraint of a certain audience. Today, if you refuse the conventions of the screen, you're a douchebag. Whereas in the 60s and 70s they were really thinking about it. The Nouvelle Vague, or Pasolini, or even Nicholas Ray—*They Live by Night* is beautiful for that. Those guys wanted to be artists, and now it's the opposite. Artists want to be in film.

× *Tonight and the People (2013), this bizarre riff on American film and TV which you made during your Hammer Museum show, begins as a work of video art, and then the components cohere into a feature film.*

It's a meta-feature film. The purpose was to look like a feature film because it was about Hollywood. The history of America is

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View of "Hammer Projects: Neil Beloufa." 2013. Courtesy the artist; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

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contemporary with the fictionalizing of the history of America. Griffith's westerns, for example, the first western movies, were happening when the American west was still full of cowboys. So if fiction and history are written at the same time—if the big American myth, especially in California, is written through fiction—then I am allowed to say my fiction is reality.

× You set up your shots with an almost pitiless *mise-en-scène*—sitcom lighting, flat stage sets—and what's amazing is that your performers play along so seamlessly. It's like reality TV in reverse.

Everyone wants to be something else. My actors are real gangsters, or real cowboys, but they want to be actors. I found them on Craigslist. We cast cowboys with horses, their own horses. It's really an experiment with ideology, the same ideology that Griffith was working with.

I can take for granted that whatever I film is real, because everyone wants to be an actor in LA. It was the first time in my career where meeting non-actors was hard. Everyone was an actor, even the gangsters. One of them was an extra on *Training Day*. He's a gangster, and all he wants is to be an actor.

But I feel as if I missed the target with that work. I wanted it to be flat, sure, but usually, even if it's flat, there's a meta-question, something in the structure of the film that makes you want to keep watching. For *Kempinski*, it's: is it real or fake? For *World Domination*, it's: what are they going to say next? And it becomes hypnotic. And with *Tonight and the People*, that didn't happen. No one realizes it's not written, there's no screenplay. So it just looks like bad fiction.

× But that's its own kind of success, isn't it? When non-professional actors slip into the language of Hollywood—when *real* gangsters talk like *fake* gangsters *pretending* to be real gangsters—that's actually quite successful.

They were bad versions of themselves, which I like. I took every community that is widely represented in Hollywood, for me—I'm a tourist, I learned about America from the movies. I had my McGuffin:

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a red handkerchief, because I was fascinated that so many different communities use the same accessory to signal that they're different. So I imposed this rule: every community that wears a red bandanna and that is in movies, was in my movie. I cast activists, Occupy Wall Street protesters, revolutionary ultra-left types, and I wanted to make a movie about ideology and singularity, and to see how they would connect. Everyone has the same amount of time to speak. People who are boring, I let them talk. I wanted to establish no hierarchy between any ideology. That was the idea.

If you compare it with Thomas Hirschhorn—I mean, he's one of the best artists in the world, but he should be one of the worst. He's into propaganda, and I hate propaganda, whether it's left or right. When an artist starts to denounce historical violence, I want to kill him most of the time. What is beautiful in Hirschhorn's work, I suppose, is that it becomes poetic *because* it's so heavy. He pushes you to a point where the work is you. That is a kind of beauty. That should be something I hate, but I'm always taken with it.

× Was Los Angeles intimidating for you? Having spent years deforming or irritating the mechanisms of Hollywood cinema, did you feel that pushing back while in Hollywood was futile?

60 I wanted to play with my frustration with cinema—I have this frustration, like many people. I have this fantasy that it's the last glittering place, or it's one of the last. I think in our parents' generation, it was still seen as impressive to be a writer or a doctor or a lawyer. Now, in society, everyone is a singer or a filmmaker or an actor. Art is coming back, as a social category. Being a doctor, it's like, *why*? So the work plays on the fact that I was making a wannabe movie; I'm a wannabe director, and it's a wannabe film set. Also because in certain contexts I like watching shit. If I'm on an airplane, I'm happy there's no video art.

× Nobody wants to watch Godard in coach.

And I'm happy there's *The Avengers*. I would be super pissed off if Hirschhorn's works were shown on the airplane.

- × The thing is: if you're right about art's "comeback" as a social category, it's no longer artists starving in garrets who are in vogue. The prestige we now afford to artists is tied up with their economic power.

Exactly. At my studio in Villejuif we started to produce other people's works, and we even organized a big show about gentrification—criticizing what we ourselves were indirectly doing. The show [*"C'est la vie?"*, a 30-artist show presented in 2015] was about how we were the bad guys, because we were gentrifying the neighborhood. We self-produced a feature film behind the show, without asking for money or permission or help. And we produced it without anyone noticing it. The goal was to make it outside the rules of the art world, in a pirate procedure. It's not going to go to the art world; it's going to theaters. Maybe it'll just remain on my computer, but if it doesn't go to theaters, it won't go to the art world. We'll see.

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- × Something of your own resistance to authority comes back.

Yes! My own authority is as bad as any other. Increasingly I want to make projects without a set purpose, without an exhibition in mind. Finance a video without knowing whether I'll show it. Start a production of a sculpture that I have no place to exhibit. The biggest danger is using art as a way to communicate some clear message, like it's propaganda. I think that's the true enemy.

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- × That kind of easy consumption is not just a risk in galleries. There is also the communicative aspect of art when it's experienced online, as JPGs or Instagram hits.

It's so weird. I was in Tehran, and I met a super artsy 23-year old. Being interested in art for him is the equivalent of a New Yorker being a skateboarder in the 80s. He'd read everything. He did a talk with me even though he had never seen one of my shows, and using the Internet in Iran is complicated, so he has to really dig. This kid did Iran's first Harun Farocki retrospective by himself, at 23, in a non-profit space, financed by other artists from abroad. And this guy, he

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Views of "C'est la vie?"
Neil Beloufa's studio, Villejuif.
2015. Courtesy the artist.

talked to me only about documents because he said the new art is the art of the document, because his relationship to Contemporary Art Daily is a political relationship. He doesn't have access to the shows. For me this was beautiful. He's aware of the global discourse, but he's constrained by politics—so it means something totally different to him. For me Contemporary Art Daily is just fashion, but for him it becomes political. I really loved him.

× On the subject of geography, can I ask you about Paris? It's exciting to see more and more French artists stay here. People now go to New York, to study, or California, but then come back.

I think I have a love/hate relationship. I want to leave, but I've been saying that for ten years. Paris has become a good place to work, or maybe it's that other places became bad places to work. I'm spending more time in New York now, because I have projects coming up in the US, and I have to show my face at MoMA, but I think New York is not very good for a young person. Berlin is not really good, and there is no market, like Paris. It's cheap, but it's not that cheap anymore, and there are too many artists. And then there's Brussels, where they start drinking, rather than working, because your life is too easy.

× And a lot of the work that you do is about colonial history and racial difference, and that's quite rare in the French art world. I see a lot of provisional, poetic sculpture, and a lot of easy formalism. One of the reasons I find your work so interesting is that I don't see a lot of artists in France really probing questions of citizenship, of belonging.

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One of the few things I really like about this country is the tradition of the essay. Not "French theory," but a fresher, faster, less grounded sort of thinking. People like Serge Daney...

× He's one of those major French figures who has no foothold in the English-speaking world. Unless you're a student of *Cahiers du cinéma*.

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In the 80s, he would watch TV and then he'd write about what he saw, every day, for the newspaper. That culture of fast, ungrounded thinking, that is political and also conscious of itself: that's the French culture I feel close to. But I'm a product of a double culture. I'm not a migrant, but I have a migrant's story in a way. I have two passports; I was not supposed to live in France. I am the son of nationalist Algerians.

× Were your parents in the FLN?

My grandparents. My parents are too young. I have this history: I happen to have been born in Paris because my father was supposed to make a movie. When they split up, my mother and I went back to Algiers until I was six. There were tanks in the street, and so she took us to France, but in her mind, it was temporary, and I wasn't French. For her, France is the enemy. That is her culture; she is afraid to deal with French public services because her father was interrogated by the French. Even in Paris, when I was a kid, my grandparents encountered graffiti that said "The OAS Knows"—the Organisation de l'armée secrète, the nationalist paramilitary.

× So many of those latent questions about who is French and who is not have come back with a vengeance. Over in the Place de la République I saw a sign on the makeshift memorials: Algerians stand with France...

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You know that they archive all of those offerings every day? It's crazy. They're already archiving for the future.

× We did that after 9/11.

I guess it depends on the scale of your city. It felt so weird for me that they were taking all that stuff in République, storing it, framing it, as if it were already history. It soon will be, but I never thought people were thinking about it now. Nearly planning it. Tomorrow I will go to grab the thing that has not yet been produced, to keep it for the future.

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Issue #26 Winter 2016

An Interview with Neil Beloufa

by Camille Blatrix

A conversation about laziness, decision-making, success, and presenting the spectator with questions rather than explanations.

You don't listen to music, at least not unless you have to dance; you buy a coat only if you're cold, and then only in the nearest shop; you've long resisted looking for color in your work. So at what point do you make decisions in your sculptures? When do you actually take pleasure?

As far as music is concerned, when I was in junior high, I realized that music was a way to affirm my identity. But as my listening habits proved restless, constantly changing, I became aware of the fact that I didn't have specific tastes. So I just let it go.

Later, taking the underground, I would see people listening to some epic, very emphatic music; it allowed them to space out and forget their banal circumstances. It seemed to me a way of controlling people. I think it explains why the English were so effective in pop music, Beatles-style: it deadened people into a lord system; it justified Margaret Thatcher. It's like Woodstock during the Vietnam War, driving people to go to gigs and "protest" through music rather than protesting for real. At that moment, I truly agreed with my adolescent choice.

Now that I don't care so much about "radical" positions anymore, it's too late to get back to it; a whole musical education would have to be set up, and to be honest, I'm too lazy. I do love music when it's there—I just don't want to be responsible for what's being played.

Regarding clothing, for long time I tried to be cool, but it didn't work. So I quit caring about it and focused only on the function of what I wore. At present, I like having a dress code that's perhaps not approved socially but always easy to recognize. I like to think Obama's trick is to choose neither his clothes nor his meals, in order to eliminate those decisions from a day already filled with decisions.

I can actually ask you the same thing: what does it mean for you to steal the accessories of ultra-chic barbers while you're completely beardless? Is it more enjoyable to have a barber kit when you have no beard, or to have a beard and no kit, simply because you don't care? To me, it'd be a trick, reproducing some romantic cinematographic figure through your actions and accessories. For instance, you might see a Starbucks cup in a film. For you, that becomes a romantic image, a virginal and new relationship without questions of consumption and corporate product. As I include myself in my practice, you include yourself in yours, and just as I never differentiate between what's true or

false, fictive or real, pop or noble, the same is true for you. The only difference is that I invest everything with political value, whereas you charge everything with an emotional one.

I completely agree—although if I don't regularly shave my "non-existent beard," I'll end up with a terrible preteen goatee. I'm obliged to shave every day to look my age. If I had a real beard growing, not just three hairs, it might give me a bit of the refined, careless artist look that you have. Then, the kit would surely be obsolete. This brings up something that has always fascinated me in your work: your ability to achieve a real productive force using ineffective tools.

My sculptural practice is that of an assembler rather than that of an artisan; it's more about putting together forms and ideas than about technical skill. This way, a pragmatic condition takes over an aesthetic one. I think that when one masters a form, when the form becomes too seductive, it leans towards communication, manipulation and industry, which to me are the enemy. I do the same in my films: I want the viewer to be able to see how it is made. I reveal my aptitude to spectators so that, in the end, they're not able to believe me.

Getting back to your first question, regarding the choices I make in my sculptures: one of the roles of art is to have a critical distance from the world and its phenomena, allowing us to see, to be neither completely in or outside it. As I truly believe this, making decisions in a work of art is a heavy responsibility. In the beginning, I tried to eliminate them as much as possible, especially as they relate to communication's disciplines (design or pop music) and all the other things I reckon one should view with suspicion. But the problem is that this tough position never lasts very long. In mastering a technique, you get a formal pleasure from what you produce, and there's nothing wrong with that. It took me a long time to understand that a major part of art's social role is its being able to hang in people's places, which I now accept with pleasure.

I wonder whether one can grow older without getting sweeter.

I think it takes too much effort not to get sweeter. Roughly, you either choose to be part of society and consequently be less binary—which is the position I chose—or you refuse it completely, which leaves you to suffer and fight all the time. When I read interviews with some "great people" at the end of their lives, tears come to my eyes—I know that I don't want to resemble to them. At 90 years old, Godard keeps on addressing the institution as the enemy; Orson Welles said that Hollywood destroyed him. Nicholas Ray ended up homeless. It's interesting,

though: I have the impression that there's less of this violence and sourness among old great artists.

In the end, I think the ideals of youth always stay with us, growing less severe, more pondered and measured. It may be puerile, but I don't want to lie to myself: I know I am part of this world and its systems, and that deep down, I'd love to have a Porsche and a house with exterior glass walls, were it possible.

Your father made an important film in Algeria at the end of the '70s and then stopped abruptly. Your career started with a short film you made as a student in Africa and never stopped; ten years later, you keep on linking things together without a break. I have the impression that rather than just a cool pursuit of success, you're in fact motivated by a fear of failure. Am I wrong?

Failure doesn't bother me. I love it, because it's motivational. I actually have a productive neurosis linked to my history and those close to me which makes me value the act of doing something, the absolute merit of work, above all else. I am afraid of not being able to do things anymore, or of not being allowed to do things anymore. I am aware that nothing lasts, that it's a privilege to be able to do what I do, although I do get bored or frustrated at times. But again, I think that I've calmed down quite a bit and fixed these issues over the years.

In a James Bond film, would you more likely be the villain seeking revenge, or James, who wants to succeed simply in order to hang out with girls and have drinks?

I don't really want revenge—what I want is not to be disturbed. Nor do I particularly want to succeed. I just don't want to stop. And in the end, I surely want to hang out with girls and have drinks as well. (laughs)

(<http://kaleidoscope.media/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Neil-Beloufa-Mono-30.jpg>)

But when I ask you how is it going, you usually reply, "C'est la guerre," a French idiomatic expression that literally means "it's war" and describes a feeling of constriction as if an interfering force (even laziness) may prevent from accomplish a task.

I often use a slightly strong, almost militaristic vocabulary in talking about production. Generally, I think my practice is often driven by feelings of constraint and urgency, which allows me to do things directly instead of thinking what I should do, which can often lead to depression. It allows me not to let doubt interrupt my projects. It also forces me to accept that certain projects are not worth it, which is not bad in the end. This is my method at the moment. I often wonder how it would be to have less to do, but honestly, I don't know if I'd be able to work pushed only by my self-motivation.

You're able to summarize a book without having read it, and you have an extremely personal theory about anything you discover. At times, I have the impression that you work the same way as you speak, as if you were offering an illustration to look at, through the immediate construction of shapes and your rhetoric on world and society. It's a very pictorial attitude.

I love to see art as a laboratory of "uncultivated" sciences; there's nothing to know, nothing to search for, but it's still done. I'm fascinated by the functional systems of the very simple things in our society, always with some representational tricks, a bit of politics and a perverse loop. Today, for instance, I think that those games on iPhones in which you can pay to be stronger than other users are very perverse. They describe a violent neoliberal society where those who win are usually those who already had the most effective means to begin with. This is not set as a basic rule in the society—it's not written in the American Constitution, for instance, that the person with the biggest resources will be president—but in reality, that's undoubtedly what happens. So these smartphone games affirm something extremely harsh, something that goes against the very notions of game or sport.

I feel that my work is not an illustration, but rather a sort of mirror, a bricolage of phenomena that interest me. I show the system as I perceive it, but since I never fully understand it, I present it to the spectator as questions rather than an explanation.

Speaking of mirrors: you spend half the year in hotels, due to exhibitions or fairs where you present your work; then, once you're back at your place, you construct a hotel in your studio as a film set.

Put simply, it's quite fun. It's basically ground zero of representational art: you reproduce what's in front of you. I saw an interview with Scorsese in which he was asked why he was not showing Italian bad boys in his films anymore. He replied that at the present time, when he opens the shutters and looks out of the

window, he doesn't see gangsters—he sees his garden and some deer in it. At the same time, I love hotels as places—they're at once neutral and politically charged. The touristic resorts are all a bit like this, but they have magniloquent names: the Imperial, Best Western, Continental. They're all sort of symbols for the replacement of imperial systems by mass tourism—they're now suffering due to the emergence of Airbnb, just as the occidental societies economically suffer from "Uberisation," and so on.

Do you wish to talk about your film, its purpose?

This film, *Occidental*, is the biggest project I've engaged in my whole life, but it's also one of the first projects that I've undertaken with no specific purpose in mind. I'm tired of always producing for things—an exhibition, a context, an opportunity, a fund. What I wanted to do with this project was to break the traced path. No one is expecting the project, there's no recipient, no one asked for it nor sponsored it. We self-financed the project, and though it has been done slowly, it's been done on our own.

This is the project that's taken up the biggest amount of my time, energy and stress. When you produce within the "hell circle," you slowly start to interact with an audience, which I find dangerous. Here, I tried to embrace the risk, which could allow me to produce in order to produce, and ensure that the conditions necessary for my project to exist were those enacted by the project itself, autonomously. It's a way of defining a form of independence from the artistic practice: it is not the work of art that needs the institution to exist, but vice versa.

My hope is that this work becomes a little popular. It would mean making a fictional film in a pirate system which could be seen by all, and which addresses the constrictions of the industry without having been constrained by them. I want it to come out publicly. I want it to live autonomously, without having to lean on the art context, and that people laugh, cry or are frightened while watching it.

Usually, in my projects, there is neither empathy nor the vocation to move people. Here, there is. I know that despite the effort, it's possible that the film will be a big failure, and that it will stay on my personal computer. I'd be disappointed, of course, but at the same time, that's what this system allows: to be satisfied with having made it, having tried. Its "public" success (or lack thereof) won't change that.

If an end should come, a sort of revolt in the Beloufa studio, what would it be like?

It happened already! I found myself all alone, like a fool, in my huge studio with no electricity.

So what did you do?

I waited for the end of the day on the couch.

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On Neil Beloufa

by Myriam Ben Salah

Making films, sculptures and installations informed by his rejection of hierarchy and unapologetic mix of influences, French-Algerian artist Neil Beloufa has an intense 2016 ahead of him, with a major institutional show coming up at New York's MoMA along with exhibitions in Los Angeles and Shanghai. We visited him at his studio, a messy warehouse in suburban Paris populated by a busy crowd of collaborators and fellow artists, and took a sneak peek at Hotel Occidental, the setting of his ambitious, soon-to-be-released movie.

Having a conversation with Neil Beloufa feels quite like experiencing his work: the flow is swift, the ideas are atomized, the connections are uncertain, the tone is candid, and the information doesn't follow any kind of hierarchy—or any order, for that matter. Aby Warburg casually meets Angelina Jolie in the course of a retort: you feel confused at first, but in the end, you realize that everything boils down to a cohesive and sharp argument.

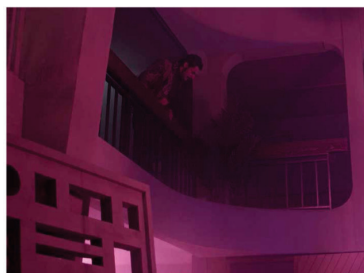
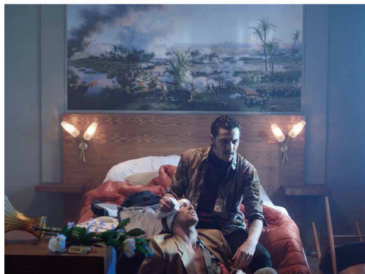
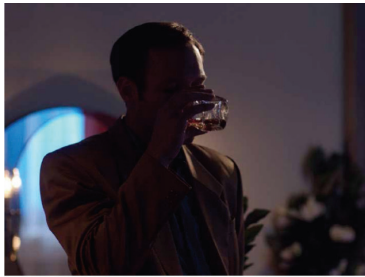
The French Algerian artist (b. 1985) has an off-putting ability to bring together the customary disenchantment of his generation with a sincere belief in alternative systems. "I spend 60 percent of my time stressing out about money, which is sad," he says, underlining the ever-present concern that put him through a dauntless search for productive autonomy. "I'm trying to find a way to reach independence so I don't depend on people to produce my projects." Obviously, Beloufa has no issues whatsoever talking about money, a necessary convenience he constantly re-injects into the production of art—"taking and making," as he puts it. The time he spent in the United States (he studied at Cooper Union in New York and at CalArts in California in 2007 and 2008, respectively) almost certainly has something to do with his openness towards mundane economic matters. In conversation, Beloufa turns, somewhat surprisingly, to the Wu-Tang Clan. Indeed, his ideal business model takes its cue from the American hip-hop crew that launched the careers of a number of affiliated artists, collectively known as the Wu-Tang Killa Bees. "They laid down a certain number of rules to create a hip-hop dynasty that would last for centuries," he says. "They didn't depend on the market or on institutions, but rather on one another. It would be great to imagine a similar system for the production of artworks, with established artists helping younger ones."

Just as the Wu-Tang was associated with Staten Island, Beloufa settled in Villejuif, a suburban area south of Paris (and, like Brooklyn, likely a future fiefdom of gentrification). At first glance, his studio—a 7500-square-foot warehouse—looks more like an industrial garbage dump than a proper production platform: piles of resin foam, remains of plywood walls, screws, nails, blowtorches, houseplants tangling with MDF, Coke cans and coffee filters melt into a merry chaos that leaves the outsider dumbstruck. Soon enough, though, one finds a human presence, crossing paths with (and probably bothering) a busy crowd of collaborators who cover a substantial spectrum of skills: from builders to film editors, set designers and cooks to movie extras and multitasking artists, the team seems efficient, forceful and totally hermetic towards outside interference, be it a visiting collector or a pizza delivery. Apart from direct collaborators, parts of the studio are sometimes rented by fellow artists, a list of whom reads like a veritable Who's Who of the young French scene: Camille Blatrix, Jonathan Binet, Mohamed Bourouissa and Oscar Tuazon, to name a few, have shared space, and possibly beers and ideas in the vast and unheated former car factory. In October 2015, during the last edition of FIAC, Beloufa took advantage of the studio's ongoing remodeling by organizing a temporary exhibition in the space, gathering the works of all the artists that passed through the workplace, from interns to long time collaborators. Beyond the outlandish sight of museum directors, advisors and collectors stepping out from the Villejuif-Léo Lagrange subway station for the opening, the show was notable for its generosity: with its open roster, it was a true "proposition," a refreshing format for the Parisian landscape, which is sometimes fossilized by a constant craving for hierarchy.

I work with failure.

As outlying as they might seem, the gravitating systems Beloufa builds are not completely disconnected from his practice as an artist *stricto sensu*. "In the studio, as in my work, I address the notions of work protocol, authority and human relations." Beloufa has spent the better part of the last decade thinking about what is at stake when one apprehends reality and its representation. The main raw material of his films, sculptures and installations is what actually exists and how it is interpreted, a subject he explores without moral judgment, cultural cynicism or any kind of irony. He places himself on the same level as the images he is catching, playing on their ambiguity, promising them a new fate and, in the process, scrambling the lapsed dichotomy between fiction and reality. He establishes an implicit pact with his viewer, who agrees to play the game of credulity, just as we do when responding to everyday media stimulation. For his

2012 solo exhibition “The Functions of Light” (Balice Hertling New York), he stated, “When Superman puts on his glasses, nobody recognizes him as Clark Kent, even if it’s obviously the same person.”



By accurately grasping and controlling his viewer's suspension of disbelief, he manages to bare the processes of representation that make ground for contemporary stereotypes and conventions (People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water, 2011). In many of his films, Beloufa sets one simple rule as a formal constraint, creating situations in which characters convey things that may or may not have happened. He then steps aside and watches the situation unfold and run idle until it becomes something else, until his object's status is transformed and put back into play.

In one of his earliest works, the fourteen-minute video *Kempinski* (2007), Beloufa lights his subjects with neons that are visible onscreen, the beams of light appearing like laser swords, leaping from function to fantasy. Along the same lines, he asks his subjects, ordinary Malians, to speak about the future in the present tense. The effect of these simple tweaks of tense and lighting is eerie and dystopian: our exotic expectations (cinematic and otherwise) are unsettled as science-fiction reveals an odd form of truth about what's going on outside of the screen rather than inside, underlining paternalistic Western expectations (of the viewer) and the circumstances of the filming (of the artist), stressing our permanent speculation on situations rather than giving a hint to any documentary attempt.

To go one step further, the films often literally operate as a "reflection," as they look at themselves through the very exposure of their own illusory codes, reinforcing the conditions in which they were produced. In *Brune Renault*, a 2010 video shot in a typically French low-tech teleplay aesthetic, four teenagers flirt and simper during a car ride over a Johnny Hallyday soundtrack. As soon as the viewer notices the shabby off-camera special effects included in the frame, the car becomes a sculpture and the video becomes a comment on the making of an artwork. The fiction, the commentary on the fiction and the commentary on the making of the fiction overlap into a dizzying meta-discourse, confusing the boundaries between documentary and fiction, blurring unrealism and credibility, and ultimately breaking any remaining norm or convention.

I don't like authority.

Beloufa's movies have both the strength of sharp observation and the unobtrusiveness of an approach that refuses any position of authority. He asks us to engage with his propositions, removing himself as if to say, this is your problem now, you deal with it. "I don't like authority," he says. "My movies are

neither true or false, and I try not to communicate my own view of the world. They put the viewer in a free but uncomfortable position that should lead to thinking about what is shown instead of believing it.” It is indeed quite uncomfortable to step upon visible wires or pass between unsteady plywood rails, to try and embrace a moving image diffracted and atomised between several supports. Beloufa embraces such strategies of installation to challenge the authority of the black room/white screen theatrical convention and deny the lure of the cinematic or simply photogenic—integrating and fragmenting his videos into irregular environments that are either meticulously detailed or arbitrarily mismatched, in which precarious sculptures, pop-culture references and everyday objects become the frame and setting for the video projection. “We’re in a world in which there is no more hierarchy between images, content, and sources,” he notes. Reflecting a landscape wherein Google, Wikipedia, and YouTube are the models of a horizontal platform in which films, objects, viewer and artist are placed on an equal flat level, the artist insists on a similar reception for his work. “My shows should be a mess where you can decide what you want to look at.” Indeed, his presentation is a visual *cadavre-exquis*, including items as eclectic as frames without a surface, tubes, balls of glue, plants, cigarette butts alongside tubular steel structures, shelves and hangers. The status of the objects is similar to their position within the space: unstable, shifting and fragile.

Beloufa’s gestures employ a vocabulary proper to the practices of our information processing era, often defined by the hackneyed term “post-Internet.” Although he participated quite early in setting such standards, he denies that any specific style or aesthetic has ever defined his work. Though his pieces are, at this point, quite recognizable and starting to constitute a proper and cohesive body, Beloufa’s practice is not about mastering one single form that would become a signature. Quite the opposite: as soon as he is comfortable with a material, technique or format, he will actively put himself at risk, challenging his own systems in order to move forward. He goes fast—earning him the apposite nickname “Beloufast & Furious”—and is not afraid of failure. “I’d rather fail doing something I like rather than succeed doing something I don’t believe in,” he says. “I work with failure because I don’t know how to succeed. I like when things get stuck, when there is something to unblock. As soon as it fits in, I need to move on.” From docu-fiction to fiction, from plywood to wire sculptures, from Beyoncé to cigarette butts and from wooden volumes to resin foam, Beloufa’s

practice expands while remaining manufactured within the studio, flawed and man-sized, as a form of resistance to some sort of industrial and mass produced superego.

Beloufa is often considered the heir apparent of artists like Pierre Huyghe or Philippe Parreno. Having studied art in France in the 2000s, he was obviously influenced by their input: their experimentations with exhibition formats, as well as the rehabilitation of the viewer as an active subject and a vigilant presence in a given space, are things Beloufa has absorbed into his own practice. Describing Huyghe's 2013 exhibition at Centre Pompidou in the French magazine *May*, he wrote: "Moving through the exhibition, one perceives that the pieces that one recognizes have changed in nature through contact with the others and are muddled... They have given way to more open-ended forms and combinations, like a musical score played freely by someone who knows it so well that they can attempt to reinvent it, even to the point of forgetting it altogether." But this might be where Beloufa parts ways with his elders: as far as he's concerned, the pieces have to exist independently of context, exhibitions or otherwise. He doesn't consider the exhibition as a medium per se, although he acknowledges that, like his films, it can become a meta-work, a self-generated system responding to a constraint, technical, financial or formal. For his solo show "Les inoubliables prises d'autonomie" at Palais de Tokyo in 2012, his challenge was to integrate the conditions of making of exhibition (the institution, the budget, the PR requirements, the communication) into the exhibition itself. Each gesture in the show connected back to a sense of meta-narrative about what it was to produce such a project, and what it was to challenge and reverse that system by using a pirate economy.

His current work in progress is a movie. The ultimate achievement—or is it? "It isn't so much about making movies as about having art allow me to make movies," he explains. "I like inverting the system." With his team, Beloufa transformed his studio into a hotel set to shoot *Occidental*, a long feature entirely self-produced (and self-commissioned) and currently in post-production. Although cinematographic attempts would sometimes poke out in previous works, the formal challenge here was to create a popular object, a film with a narrative continuity from the beginning to the end. "I think there are good movies and bad movies, but I don't think there are art movies and cinematographic movies.." The issues raised by the plot are a clever metaphorical combination of the ideological debates appearing through his other works—surveillance society, religious and ethical expectations, gender representations—but this time, the dialogues are scripted and the actors are casted professionals.

“I don’t think there is a difference in value between a beautiful mannerist image and a goofy close-up, as I don’t think there is a difference in value between a Robert Bresson movie and *NCIS*, except that most of Bresson’s movies are good and most *NCIS* episodes are bad.” This would explain the unapologetic mix of influences that discretely transpire in this new work: from references to Nicholas Ray or Douglas Sirk in the scenery to Alain Resnais in respect to the distanced stage direction and spontaneity of dialogue, as well as some goofy French teleplay gimmicks echoed in the DIY special effects. When asked about artists’ longstanding fascination with movie production, Beloufa retorts, “It’s the last job that glitters. Artists want that, the same way filmmakers wanted to be artists in the ’70s.”

It is quite funny to hear him speak about the glitter and the glam while cultivating a constant escape from any outward sign of achievement. His singularity—a word he loathes—probably makes for such a lucid view of the world that he rarely takes anything for granted. He is that severely opinionated guy who frowns at compliments, who uncomfortably makes jokes to deflect questions regarding his upcoming solo show at MoMA. Raised between Algiers and Paris, he somehow kept the *je ne sais quoi* of overrunning humility that comes with “that” identity. He is the kind of artist that can strengthen, if not restore one’s faith in the art world; not so much for the goodness of his intentions but for the truthfulness of his enterprises.

Neïl Beloufa (French and Algerian, b. 1985) is an artist who lives and works in Paris. He is represented by Galleria Zero, Milan; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo; François - Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles; and Galerie Balice Hertling, Paris. He was nominated for the Duchamp Prize 2015. Upcoming exhibitions include “Project 102,” part of The Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series at MoMA, New York, from 12 March–12 June; as well as solo shows at Pejman Fondation, Tehran, and Mendes Wood DM in September; at K11 Art Foundation, Shanghai, in October; and at François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, later in 2016.

Myriam Ben Salah is Associate Editor of KALEIDOSCOPE. A curator and writer based in Paris, she has been coordinating special projects and cultural programming at the Palais de Tokyo since 2009. As an independent curator, her recent exhibitions include “Shit and Die” in Turin; “Dirty Linen” at Deste Foundation, Athens; and “Like the Deserts Miss the Real” at Galerie Steinek, Wien.

Images: Installation view at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest; *Entre-temps, Brusquements ... et ensuite*, 2013; Installation view at 12ème Biennale de Lyon; *Occidental*, 2016 (film stills); *Hopes for the best*, 2015. Photo credit: Andreas Rossetti; *Kempinski*, 2007, video still; *Data for Desire* (installation view), 2014. Photo: Rita Taylor; *The Dancing One, Secured Wall Series*, 2014; *Late Lady dating, curve*, on voicemail, 2013. Photo: Gaea Woods; *Belief, Definition, Architect*, *Puzzled Bliss*, 2014; *Hammer Projects: Neïl Beloufa*, 2013; Installation view at Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Brian Forrest.

Neil Beloufa *Democracy*

Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles 11 June – 30 July

Who are you? Or rather who do you think you are? Or even who do you think you're supposed to be? What changes when somebody's watching, the cleverness you display in your media avatar, the difference between what you wish you were and who you really are?

In his videos and installations, Neil Beloufa is always playing with this permeability between fiction and reality, with the performances that come with living up to what we think we are or should be. In his videos, actors often make up what they think their characters should be doing, sometimes performing fictive versions of themselves. The fact that their performances are self-consciously constructed is never absent from the spectators' view, from the cinema lights that sometimes appear unhidden on his sets to the elaborate frames and screens he concocts to display the videos. Every part of what was made and how it was made is on view, down to the empty boxes of cigarettes that were smoked during the installation. A whole set of wallworks here, *Chutes d'Atelier* (2016), is just things made

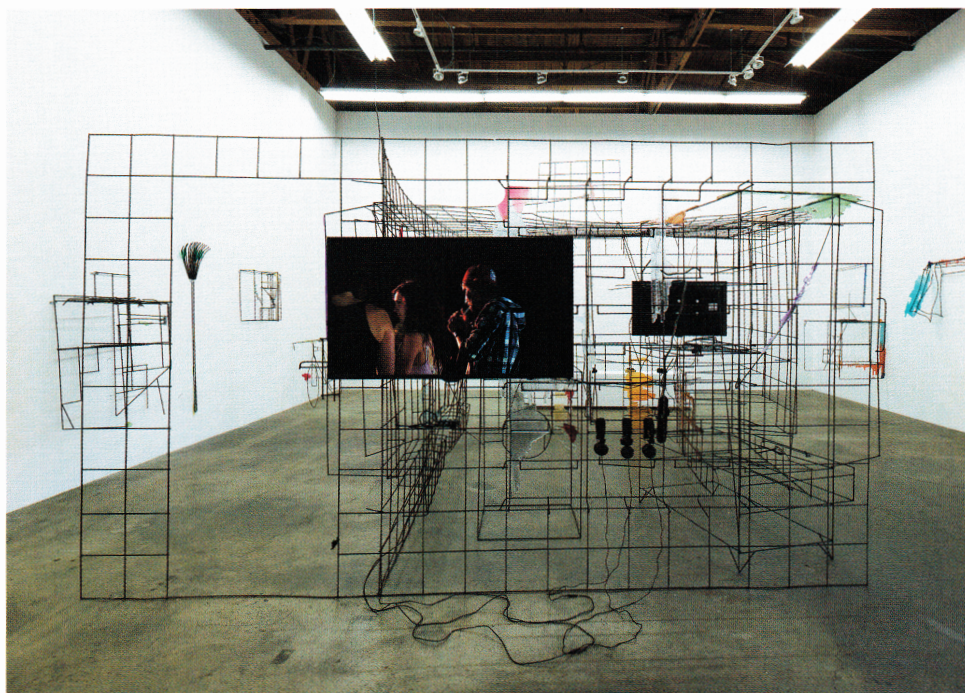
of scraps from Beloufa's studio: leftovers from other works.

A whole (albeit small) house, made from rebar and translucent resin, frames the video *Data for Desire* (2014). The house comes complete with all the accoutrements of domestic life, from a television and computer to a broom and dish-drying rack. These things that we own and that own us articulate a role we play as active members of modern life, shaping us and our day-to-days with their symbolic value. As rebar constructs, the house and all its objects are totally useless, just cheaply reproduced simulacra of the real thing, and all wholly empty. The whole is less like a glass house and more like those old Dutch homes with huge front windows that allow everyone to see what you own and how well you're performing your role in society. The video depicts two groups of six twentysomethings: a 'pseudo-scripted' party of flirting resort-town workers in Canada, and student mathematicians in France trying to get an algorithm to predict who will fuck whom at the party, all of this interspersed

with spooky scenes of life in the resort town: tourists snapping pictures of white-tailed deer and elk eating foliage next to giant satellite dishes. The natural and unnatural rub against each other in long, languid shots.

Alongside all the studio-scrap wallworks, a video titled *World Domination* (2012) is projected on a huge mechanical dinosaur, a fake fossil made according to what the artist vaguely remembers a dinosaur is supposed to look like, composited from pictures he saw online. The video depicts nonactors pretending to be world leaders trying to decide how to solve their political problems by invading other countries, nuclear options hinting at possible extinction. The things they say sound like the kinds of things uttered by politicians, but listen closely and they don't actually make any sense. Not so different, really, from what politicians actually say while they perform their roles as politicians, like a reality-TV star running for president. Little wonder that Beloufa titled his show *Democracy*.

Andrew Berardini



Democracy, 2016 (installation view).

Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy the artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

e-flux

The Museum of Modern Art, New York



Neil Beloufa, *Superlatives and Resolution, People's Passion, Movement and Life* (detail), 2014.*

Projects 102: Neil Beloufa

March 12–June 12, 2016

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street
New York, NY 10019
USA

Hours: Monday–Sunday 10:30am–5:30pm,
Friday 10:30am–8pm
T +212 7089400
moma.org

From March 12 through June 12, 2016, The Museum of Modern Art presents the first solo New York museum exhibition of the work of emerging artist Neil Beloufa, who combines moving images and sculptural forms to create immersive viewing spaces. *Projects 102*, part of The Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series, features *The Colonies* (2016), a custom-built architectonic installation the artist made by hand with a small crew using inexpensive construction materials and techniques. Within this environment, Beloufa deliberately obstructs and refracts images, diffusing them onto multiple surfaces. By revealing the cables and cords in his works and looping in images of viewers through closed-circuit television, he makes technology visible and incorporates the spectator as both participant in and producer of surveillance culture.

The video at the center of the presentation, *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water* (2011), features a group of people in an unnamed city enthusiastically describing their fantasy of bourgeois urban culture. Beloufa works collaboratively, and in this instance he teamed up with the actors to generate scripts that imitate such popular genres as the infomercial and science fiction. He has repurposed this video in different custom-built environments, installing it at MoMA with a view of Midtown Manhattan. Combining onscreen fantasies with the real world of galleries in which he places his works, Beloufa insists his "work isn't the actual object but the relations I have built with it."

Beloufa is a French Algerian artist who received his Visual Arts National Diploma at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris (2007), and studied at Cooper Union, New York, and CalArts, Valencia, California. He has had solo exhibitions at institutions including the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2015); the Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany (2015); La Casa Encendida, Madrid (2015); The Banff Centre, Canada (2014); ICA, London (2014); UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013); and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012). He has also been included in major group exhibitions such as the Paris Triennale (2012), the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), the Lyon Biennale (2013), Fruits de La Passion at the Centre Pompidou (2013), and the Taipei Biennial (2014). Locally, his work has been shown at Anthology Film Archives, the New Museum, SculptureCenter, and WhiteBox, among other venues.

Organized by Thomas J. Lax, Associate Curator, Department of Media and Performance Art, The Museum of Modern Art.

The Elaine Dannheisser Projects Series is made possible in part by the Elaine Dannheisser Foundation and The Junior Associates of The Museum of Modern Art.

*Neil Beloufa, *Superlatives and Resolution, People's Passion, Movement and Life* (detail), 2014. Video (color, sound 10:59 minutes), plexiglass, steel construction, digitally controlled motor, computer prints on paper, tape, plastic sheets, medium-density fiberboard, and clay, dimensions variable. Installation view, Hopes for the Best, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, 2015. Collection K11Art Foundation, Hong Kong. Courtesy the artist; François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles; Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo; and ZERO..., Milan. Photo: Andreas Rossetti.



Projects 102: Neïl Beloufa

By Danny King

The French-Algerian artist **Neïl Beloufa** operates by making short videos and then custom-tailoring their exhibition to individual physical spaces, the idea being that each projection of the moving-image work will have a special, unique synthesis with the environment in which Beloufa situates it. Befitting this interest in surfaces and the play of one material off of another, Beloufa's videos themselves usually transpire in a self-reflexive vein: *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water* (2011), the video at the center of Beloufa's new project at MoMA, asks a roster of interview subjects to talk about the city in which they'd most like to live, with the clear stipulation that they could describe either a real or a fictional place. In addition to *People's passion*, the exhibition — Beloufa's first solo show in New York — also includes *The Colonies* (2016), a structure Beloufa built by hand with inexpensive equipment and DIY ingenuity. For those unfamiliar with Beloufa's heady brand of metatextual installations, consider this quote (from a 2015 interview with Artspace) a representative sampler: "I think my innocence was broken super early when it comes to fiction. I never had a suspension of disbelief. I analyze — I don't cry, and I don't believe it. I just don't buy it."

Photo Credit: Neïl Beloufa. People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water. 2011. Video, 10 min, 59 sec. Installation view, Schinkel Pavilion, Hopes for the Best, April 4-May 31, 2015. Courtesy the artist, François Ghebaly Gallery, Mendes Wood DM, and ZERO...Milan.

Photo: Andreas Rossetti

DETAILS

Time: 10:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
March 12
\$25

LOCATION INFO

Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)
11 W. 53rd St.
New York, NY 10019
212-708-9400
<http://www.moma.org>

Art in America

NEWS MAR. 21, 2016

The Pleasures of Being Watched: Neil Beloufa's "The Colonies"

by William S. Smith



Neil Beloufa: *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water*, 2011, video, approx. 11 min, at Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin. Courtesy François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, Mendes Wood DM, São Paulo, and ZERO..., Milan. Photo Andreas Rossetti.

In addition to producing videos that blend utopian and dystopian modes of speculation, Neil Beloufa also establishes, through architectonic structures, specific conditions for viewing those videos—and for being viewed in turn. In “The Colonies,” on view at New York’s Museum of Modern Art through June 12, these conditions are defined by a group of clunky metal, epoxy resin, and Plexiglas fixtures, occasionally adorned with crushed aluminum cans and cigarette butts as well as speakers, cameras, and other electronic components. A wall text informs visitors that some of these pieces can be used as benches and seats. But it’s not always apparent what’s sculpture and what’s furniture, and the invitation to touch runs counter to ingrained habits of polite museum behavior. The awkwardness of deciding how to engage the installation—whether to sit on or look at it—is heightened by the eventual realization that everyone in the space is also being recorded on closed-circuit video.

Positioned throughout the installation are Plexiglas cylinders and spheres with small cameras on rotating arms inside them. On the interior surfaces of these structures, Beloufa has affixed an assortment of banal images: stock photos of women jogging, a snapshot of a funny-looking dog, a printout of some attractive partygoers. The moving cameras’ output runs on two monitors hung on one side of the gallery. The result is a live video collage, where images of museum

visitors—captured at extreme angles, distorted by the plastic’s sheen, obscured by the scrapbook array of feel-good pictures—appear in real time.

Being surveilled is supposed to make us feel tense, but there’s a funhouse quality to Beloufa’s work that renders the experience pleasant and goofy. (It might even make visitors temporarily forget that MoMA’s “real” security cameras aren’t missing a thing.) It’s hard to feel threatened while sitting on one of his benches, which include seats made of repurposed bicycle saddles. The visual language of “The Colonies” is familiar and inviting. There’s even a “Friends” DVD positioned in one the Plexi vitrines.

This feeling of ease is underscored by the soundtrack to the CCTV feed, playing on speakers, which features the

voices of several enthusiastic young adults speaking about their enviable lifestyles in a coastal North American metropolis. They describe having achieved the pinnacle of twenty-first-century success: a perfect, even utopian, work-life balance. Weekends are for water sports and hiking. Evenings are spent enjoying wine that makes them tipsy but never drunk. Every moment can be spent in the company of a conscientious community where class distinctions don't matter.

Though hyperbolic to the point of parody, these descriptions also implicate the MoMA visitors pictured on the monitors. Wouldn't a healthy lifestyle of tasteful leisure also include a trip to the museum to take in some inspiring art? And after an impassioned engagement with this art, might we not retire to one of MoMA's three dining establishments for some nice wine, and perhaps take a stroll along the High Line later, at sunset?

The soundtrack was originally recorded for Beloufa's 2011 single-channel video *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water*. The entire MoMA installation could be considered a setting for viewing this work, even though the video itself is hidden from view. It's installed around a corner at the "end" of the exhibition, so that encountering it is almost like a revelation of the installation's meaning. In addition to the scripted interviews that can be heard in the main gallery, *People's passion* features tranquil scenes—parks, calm neighborhoods, strolling families—similar to the images seen in karaoke videos.

Beloufa, who is French-Algerian, has exhibited *People's passion* in New York previously, as part of the Migrating Forms film festival and at MoMA PS1. But the environment that he's created here adjusts the focus to highlight the older work's exhibitionist thread. The new context, in a gallery that offers views of the museum's sculpture garden through a glass curtain wall, makes it easier to perceive a meditation on modernist architecture and the dynamics of surveillance. At one point in *People's passion*, a man describes the excitement and drama of living in a glass high-rise, catching glimpses of neighbors through their windows and realizing that he, too, can be seen at such vulnerable moments. Rather than a source of distress, however, this reality of urban living is a selling point: "It's better to live in a world where there's not a lot of privacy," he says.

In a sharp essay for a pamphlet accompanying Beloufa's project, curator Thomas Lax places "The Colonies" within a tradition of surveillance art. He mentions Dan Graham, among other artists of the 1960s, who used video and film cameras to dramatize the dynamics of watching and being watched. Yet Graham's later work might be a more relevant touchstone, particularly the glass pavilions he has been building since the 1970s. As an essayist, Graham has chronicled the devolution of glass architecture, showing how a material with utopian overtones for modernist designers became a symbol and instrument of corporate dominance. Buildings clad in two-way glass allow inhabitants to peer out without being observed themselves: "Surveillance power is given to the corporate tower," he writes in his 1996 essay "Two-Way Mirror Power." Graham's pavilions, such as the one installed on the roof of New York's Metropolitan Museum in 2014, transform this power dynamic into a source of leisure. Viewers can hang out around the human-scaled glass edifice with no clear inside and outside and, thus, no hard distinction between the observers and observed.

Similarly, Beloufa's work underscores the pleasure of surveillance. Seeing oneself and others juxtaposed with goofy animal pictures from distorted angles while navigating the maze of Plexiglas in the installation is, in truth, pretty funny. Instead of mimicking the slick look of corporate architecture, as Graham's pavilions do, Beloufa's structures appear like something a committed, eccentric tinkerer might construct in a garage on the weekend.

"Rather than representing surveillance as a total threat *out there*," Lax writes, citing a recent blog post by media critic Rob Horning, "Beloufa renders it as something specific that is mediated by people and thus, perhaps, more susceptible to critique and dismantling." It's hard not to compare Beloufa's project to Laura Poitras's "Astro Noise," the exhibition now on view at the Whitney Museum. Poitras confronts surveillance as it applies to drones and inaccessible NSA sites. There is a sublime beauty to the overwhelming power implied by such militarized systems, but there's also something stultifying about pondering them. Once these inaccessible drones have us in their sights, where do we go from there?

The terms of surveillance presented by "The Colonies," on the other hand, seem to be an allegory of sorts for social media. Beloufa's installation captures the effect of those self-constructed, surveilled worlds. Rather than casting it as a threat he acknowledges its appeal. The myth of the perfect lifestyle is often one that we construct for ourselves, even if it is at times threadbare and made of scraps.



Dans l'atelier de...

Neïl Beloufa

Par Thibaut Wychowanok, photos Mario Palmieri

Nouvelle coqueluche française de l'art contemporain, Neïl Beloufa ouvre à *Numéro* les portes de son **atelier aux allures de studio de cinéma**. Visite privée avant le tournage du prochain film de l'**artiste nommé pour le prix Marcel Duchamp 2015**.

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Numéro

À visiter l'atelier de Neïl Beloufa, à l'écouter, on a presque envie de parler de tromperie sur la marchandise. Omniprésente, la nouvelle coqueluche de l'art contemporain français semble cacher, sous ses atours d'artiste brillant, pas seulement un metteur en scène ou un vidéaste mais un vrai réalisateur de cinéma. Pire, un producteur du septième art. Dans son vaste atelier de Villejuif, une trentaine de personnes s'affairent, depuis plusieurs mois, à la réalisation du gigantesque décor de son prochain long-métrage : un hall, un étage et quelques pièces (qu'on se rassure, le bar n'a pas été oublié) d'un hôtel au style aussi *fifties* que *seventies* se confondent avec le métal et les verrières de l'atelier. Si c'est avant tout à ses vidéos et à ses installations, aux aspects volontairement *low tech* et faits main, qu'il doit sa notoriété, Neïl Beloufa assume désormais entièrement son "*fantasme de cinéma*", en passant à plus grande échelle. "*L'atelier accueille aujourd'hui trois fois plus de monde qu'il y a un ou deux ans, confirme-t-il. Nous sommes passés à une autre dimension, mais je tiens toujours à ce que tout*

moins sur une forme – je n'ai pas envie de réinventer la chaise ou la peinture – que sur la relation entre l'œuvre et la personne qui la regarde, déclare Neïl Beloufa. *Le moment qui m'intéresse le plus dans cette relation est celui où le spectateur est dans l'incertitude. Lorsqu'il se demande s'il peut croire au film, s'il doit l'accepter, s'il doit simplement suspendre son raisonnement cohérent, ou s'il doit refuser ce qu'il voit. Je veux que ce soit lui qui décide s'il y a film ou pas, s'il veut croire à ce film, alors que j'en montre toutes les ficelles. Je veux que le spectateur décide s'il y a art ou pas.*"

Pour Kempinski (2007), film aux allures de documentaire, l'artiste interrogeait des Maliens sur leur vision du futur, qu'ils devaient développer devant la caméra en en parlant au présent. S'amusant à déjouer les attentes du public occidental vis-à-vis d'un récit africain, entre exotisme et postcolonialisme, le film a rapidement transformé Neïl Beloufa en un artiste de "*la déconstruction de nos croyances et de nos systèmes de pensée*

assume le fait d'y abuser de son autorité, il prétend cependant refuser toute hiérarchie, comme dans une société autogérée, anarchiste... Justement, peut-être est-ce au sein de cet atelier qu'il exprime le mieux l'ambition critique, politique et sociale de son art. Neïl Beloufa revendique verser à chacun de ses collaborateurs le même "*salaire*", peu importe l'âge ou l'expérience. Il leur demande en échange un investissement sans limites, quitte à les pousser "*à bout*" reconnaît-il. "*Actuellement, nous produisons en continu tant les expositions se succèdent : trois le mois dernier, deux ce mois-ci, sans compter le MoMA à la rentrée...*" Une consécration internationale. Neïl Beloufa a récemment fait la couverture du magazine *Flash Art*, est déjà acheté par les plus grandes collections françaises et a profité du soutien de l'excellente Fondation Ricard et du Palais de Tokyo à Paris, tout en étant exposé à la Biennale de Venise en 2013 ou à l'ICA de Londres en 2014...

"Enfin, cette histoire d'atelier, c'est aussi une histoire que j'ai envie de vous raconter", conclut l'artiste qui ne semble jamais abandonner la posture du metteur en scène. "*Derrière mon sourire et mes propos, je suis une ordure.*" Comprendre : je suis celui qui signe les œuvres, celui qui décide et, surtout, celui qui, tout en critiquant le modèle capitaliste, s'y jette entièrement en participant au système de l'art contemporain qui en est certainement l'ultime avatar. C'est dans cette ambiguïté que vit Neïl Beloufa aujourd'hui, à l'instar de la plupart des artistes qui refusent le cynisme total comme l'angélisme. Surtout, c'est de cette ambiguïté qu'il nourrit son travail.

Neïl Beloufa est représenté par la galerie Balice Hertling à Paris, www.balicehertling.com.

Le travail de Neïl Beloufa est un art du déplacement : aller du réel vers la fiction, du cinéma vers l'art, et inversement. Brouiller les pistes, surtout, entre le vrai et le faux.

continue à être produit sur place : les murs, les charpentes..." Un attrait pour le cinéma qui n'a rien d'étonnant pour un artiste qui a toujours mêlé réel et fiction.

Pour le film *Brune Renault* (2010), qui fut l'une des matrices de son art, Neïl Beloufa proposait déjà une fiction se déroulant dans une voiture occupée par quelques personnages... Une voiture que certains plans révèlent comme étant en réalité découpée en quatre tranches et reposant sur de petites roues, telle une sculpture. Une fois l'artifice révélé, c'est le jeu des comédiens qui se trouvait dévoilé. C'est tout l'art du déplacement caractéristique de Neïl Beloufa : aller du réel vers la fiction, du cinéma vers l'art, et inversement. Brouiller les pistes, surtout, entre le vrai et le faux. Le spectateur n'aura plus qu'à s'interroger sur ce qu'il voit, sur la nature des images et des objets qui lui sont présentés. "*Je travaille*

préconçus et de production d'images et de récits". Pas toujours avec succès. À Londres, alors que l'artiste donnait une conférence à l'Institute of Contemporary Arts sur la pensée décentralisée et sur le folklore et les résidus du colonialisme dans nos modes de pensée, les responsables lui préparaient... un cous-cous. De son côté, Neïl Beloufa refuse ce terme de "déconstruction" : "*Je ne démonte pas les mécanismes, bien au contraire, je m'en empare. Lorsque je laisse traîner un micro, je rappelle que nous sommes dans un film. C'est un peu la même chose lorsque je laisse les prises apparentes dans mes installations.*"

"L'atelier lui-même est, d'une certaine façon, une œuvre en soi, ajoute-t-il, *dans la mesure où dans mes œuvres – comme dans mon atelier – je réfléchis sur les notions de protocoles de travail, d'autorité et de relations humaines.*" Si Neïl Beloufa

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Pour son prochain film, l'artiste Neïl Beloufa a transformé son immense atelier de Villejuif en décor de cinéma reproduisant un hôtel au style à la fois *fifties* et *seventies*.

“I Don’t Think We Should Be Too Serious About Art”: Neil Beloufa on Making Images for a Post-Artist World

By Dylan Kerr
Oct. 3, 2015



The artist Neil Beloufa

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In one well-known Indian parable, a group of blind men are tasked with describing an elephant. Each grabs hold of a different body part—the trunk, the tail, the tusk, and so on—and each portrays the creature in a radically different way. The French-Algerian artist [Neil Beloufa](#)’s film *The analyst, the researcher, the screenwriter, the CGI tech and the lawyer* can be read as a contemporary reinterpretation of this old tale; the professionals from the title all watch the same bit of ambiguous footage—an aerial shot of a truck weaving through Vancouver traffic—and are asked to explain what’s going on. Like the blind men before

them, the members of this group can't help but to interpret this experience in terms of what they already know, a process that leads them invariably towards increasingly divergent readings.

Beloufa has dedicated himself to exploring precisely this ambiguity of interpretation. His films proceed from simple tasks the young artist gives his subjects—talk about the future in the present tense, for instance, or describe your ideal city—that he then edits into deadpan documentaries that render these fantasies as realities. It's a gesture of documenting fiction not unlike **Joshua Oppenheimer's** genre-defying 2012 masterpiece ***The Act of Killing***, and the results are in turns amusing and eye-opening.

Beloufa does not stop with his films, however. Instead, he shows them in the context of sprawling installations made of Plexiglas, plywood, and his signature foam walls, usually with some not-so-subtle pop-culture references thrown in for good measure. The result is a kind of armature for the films, a layering that expands the scope of his moving images even as it obscures them.

The 30-year-old artist is quickly gaining recognition for this work, with recent solo shows at [ICA London](#) and the **Hammer Museum** and an upcoming project at **MoMA** scheduled for March 2016. For Beloufa, the success already seems short-lived; as he says in the following conversation with **Artspace's** [Dylan Kerr](#), failure is always an option, albeit one that he welcomes with open arms and a “romantic” disposition.



Still from *Kempinski*, 2007

How did you first get interested in making films?

I have a family history with film. My mother was an editor when I was a kid, but then she stopped. My father made one movie before I was born, but then he stopped. Maybe it was just in the culture of my home.

I wanted to make cartoons, but schools of animation didn't want me because I was a bad drawer. I ended up in an applied-arts school, training to be a graphic designer, and I was bored. That's when I went to the video section. I got caught up in the art world because I made a video in Mali called *Kempinski*. It wasn't planned to be an art piece—it was a documentary that somehow got into the art system.

Kempinski proceeds from a simple idea: asking subjects you encountered just outside Bamako, Mali's capitol city, to speak about their vision of the future in the present tense. How did you come up with the speculative frame for this piece?

It was to piss off my teachers, basically. I was in my third year of school, and they sent us to Mali to make documentaries. I rejected it because I'm Algerian—it felt to me that they had a paternalistic point of view. I thought they wanted us to document hard lives or something, which wasn't really true. Either way, that was my rebellious move. I was like, “OK, I'm going to make a documentary if you want me to do one.” It was all about fucking with them. I wanted the people I was filming to say “fuck you,” basically.

Your works often seem to be documenting fiction, where you set up artificial scenarios in order to show what really happens in them. How do you think about the interplay between the artifice of the question you're asking and the artifice of the documentary you're filming?

I've thought about the history of the moving image since I was really young. I think my innocence was broken super early when it comes to fiction. I never had a suspension of disbelief. I analyze—I don't cry, and I don't believe it. I just don't buy it.

I'm always trying to play with this relationship between yourself and the fiction you see. It's something you don't believe but you kind of still believe, or you play with, or you have a connivance with. The film is not happening on the screen—it's happening in between, in your relation to it. It fights its own authority, it fights propaganda, it fights commercialism.

You're exploring old questions about the power of the filmmaker—the fascistic control the director has over what the viewer sees and thus believes.

I don't like authority. I'm interested in creating an authoritarian system, and then breaking it. I like displaying my authority in order to challenge it.



Installation shot of *The analyst, the researcher, the screenwriter, the CGI tech, and the lawyer*, 2012

In these situations where you are asking people to play along with your conceit, whatever it might be, have you had the subjects that you are filming push back against this authority?

It's a game. Those kinds of rules or systems concern half of the works, but what I like with those works is that it's always a game. People fight against me because they know I want to make something, and I fight against them because I want to control them even while I give them freedom. That's what creates the narration or the tension. They don't want to give what I want.

How does this game translate into the gallery once you've done your job as a filmmaker?
How does the power dynamic of that game shift from artist-subject to artist-viewer?

I guess that's for you to say. My goal is for people to get caught, but not believe it. That relation is interesting to me. I want you to have questions, political questions, after you watch them. Sometimes I lie, but most of the time it's just playing games. It's never straightforward and it's never yes or no. It's up to you. I'm making a proposition, and you can say no and you can say yes and hate me.

There is that racist film, *World Domination*—

Where you asked people what they would do if they were president?

Yeah, and they get super violent. There is a fascination towards it, but I also got a reaction from people saying, "What the fuck are you doing? You can't do that." That's what I like, that thing where you are free to buy into it or not. Because I show the system, I give you the keys to not buying into it, and that produces something else entirely.

All of your films have very specific conceptual frames, which are the games we've been talking about. On the other hand, the sculptural objects that you create around these films have their own presence. They don't really help in relating the films as clearly as possible—they add layers, both physical and metaphorical, between the viewers and the films. Why create these additional layers?

When they work, these objects open up the meaning of the film, but sometimes they reduce its strength. An example of one of those that works is the installation from *Counting on People*, because the structure—which looks like a shitty condo, or an Apple display—grounds the idea in society. You don't even need to listen to the film.

More and more in my practice, the items become the document. The films become more and more about fiction, and less and less about documenting. The objects ground the films now, here in front of you. It's the same way that you look at your bed and your laptop when you watch a movie—they participate in that movie. When you watch a porn, you have the contrast of your shitty, empty bed with that utopia of easy sex. My work parasitizes life and brings your experience more towards how you relate to life in real time. My shows should be a mess, where you can decide what you want to look at. It's about making a world without hierarchy.

It seems like your work is attempting to create a horizontal platform, where all the elements—the films, the objects, your actors, and yourself—are being placed onto an equal level.

We're in a world where there's no hierarchy between imagery or fields. That's disappearing. There's now a new job, which is curating. That person is not an expert, but he's an expert on everything. He's YouTube, he's Wikipedia. He can talk about soccer, philosophy, art, and music, all without being a soccer player, a philosopher, an artist, or a musician. He's a new kind of author.

I'm not a sculptor, I'm not a filmmaker. I'm an editor. I edit content, I edit voices, and I edit ideas. That's how I work, and that's how I try to build something that goes towards this direction. Something might look autonomous, so I add something that kills it—but then

you can watch that alone or you can see both. I like stuff that can go here and there and keep that line of unbalancing meaning, keep the openness of it.



Installation shot of *horizontal usb knight, work out, macho dream of a wedding, his length*, 2014. Image courtesy of Mendes Wood DM.

There's a real economy of means in your work—many of your films are populated with amateur or untrained actors, and the materials you use to build your installations are generally stuff anyone can get in a hardware store. Is this sourcing of your materials part of your process, or is it a function of what you have available?

It's both. I'm interested in standardization. My sculptures look like they're made with standardized, industrial materials, but they're unique because I peed on one and put a cigarette out on the other. I like that they play and display that game, because my point of

interest and field of expertise is always representation and how we represent something, not the thing in itself. The simulacra, or something like that.

In terms of actors, I like when something reflects on its time without using reality. The fictional stuff that I did with amateur actors talk more about our society than if I was filming his life. It's political, also. I made one film in L.A. called *Production Value*, where I play the wannabe Hollywood director with wannabe actors that were real gangsters or real cowboys. I told them, "OK, I'm making a feature film, with a set and everything just like in Hollywood. Make the movie you want." I gave the exact same amount of time to every community I was working with. In that way it's a democratic movie, but I don't believe in democracy. I just display what it means.

You're working with some serious issues of real art-historical and political import—representation, the relation of objects to meaning, the redistribution of wealth—but your initial approach seems to be through humor. What role do jokes have in your work?

My form is based on jokes, but I can talk about something serious with jokes. I like when people go into a show, look at something, and don't know if they should laugh or not. Sometimes they laugh and then feel guilty, and I like that too.

I don't think we should be too serious about art, even if it's super important. I think the vague or fake seriousness about it is bullshit. When you're clever with something from pop culture, with something that makes you laugh or that my grandmother can watch, you're way stronger than any bullshit complicated intellectual statement. Sometimes representations of the intellectual don't give you the opportunity to be on one side or the other. If you see a good book in a bad vitrine, what does it mean? You're not talking about thinking—you're talking about the idea of thinking. It's seductive for people who want to look clever.

The jokes are my way of saying I'm stupid, that I don't think art should be clever and that I'm not smart enough to quote [philosopher Emmanuel] Levinas, but they're also super pretentious because they say that I don't think I need grounding to make something relevant. Like everything else, it's both at the same time.



Installation shot of *Production Value*, 2013

A lot of what you're saying sounds like you have a real aversion to the pretension and business-oriented approach of today's art world. How do you reconcile these feelings with the fact that it's precisely this world that has allowed you the freedom to pursue your work?

I'm part of it. When I was younger, I was that really intense person who says, "Fuck money, fuck power." A curator friend of mine—one of the few people that I owe—gave me an important show for that time in my career. There was a dinner, and she placed me at a table with people that cock-blocked me—directors of museums, people like that. I said, out loud, "I won't sit with these traitors—I'm not that kind of guy. I won't sit at any table if the people that actually worked on the show don't sit there too." My friend took me to the side and said, "If you don't want to come, don't come. It's easy. You don't have to do your show."

I have an aversion to authority and systems that look fixed, and I don't think the world is in good shape, but I'm not helping anything. I'm not changing it. Art is the laboratory for everything else in society. We're totally deregulated, so every system can work in it. It's always pushed further because there is no law.

For a relatively young artist making works that aren't exactly collector-friendly, you've enjoyed a large amount of recognition in the field. How does this kind of early success affect the way you're making or thinking about your work?

I'm not going to speak against it, because I live off of it and I'm super happy to be so lucky, but, hypothetically, I don't think you should theorize what someone does before they're 40.

I think a lot of people would probably agree with you. Why do you think that?

Because the work is still in the making. I'm not going to complain about it, because I'm playing with it and I'm happy to work, but I wouldn't feel hurt if someone says that because I agree. It does put a lot of pressure on me, and I'm caught up in questions that I shouldn't be caught up in, but it's also nice because I'm learning a lot.

I'm a shitty businessman, but I'm learning about economics. I'm talking to bankers, which provides an interesting image of our time. Sixty percent of my time is being stressed about money, but as long as it allows me to produce, I'm fine. And it does allow me to produce. Last year we did four films, including one serious feature, all self-produced. As long as no one is telling me to stop and I'm not feeling like a gambler who's gambled too much, I'm going to take and make. It's a chance that doesn't come often, and it's going to stop soon.

Do you think there will come a time when you have to stop?

Yeah. At some point, people get bored, and I can't produce that much. I think that people make guys like me produce more in five years than some people do in their lifetime, which is crazy, so at some point it's going to be dry, for sure. Maybe I'm already dry, but I'm trying not to be. It allows me to reevaluate my system all the time.

It also gets harder the more you grow. I thought being super autonomous and not needing anyone to do something was good, but the more you gain power, the more you submit to it. It's an interesting relation, because I'm less and less autonomous while also gaining autonomy. It's interesting and stressful, but that's the game of society.



Secured Wall, 2015. Image courtesy of Mendes Wood DM.

You've said before that some of your films and projects have failed. How do you work with failure?

The systems I put in place are made to fail. It's romantic—it's a complex I have.

What do you mean by romantic?

It's romantic cynicism. For instance, *Kempinski* was based on a grammatical mistake. It's a joke but it's not—it's super serious. I know people won't buy it. I know they won't think it's science fiction, and I'm playing on that. Each every project, even sculptures, shows me as a wannabe artist, a wannabe filmmaker. Success is communication, and I think communication is my enemy as an artist.

Why is that?

I don't know. That's how I define my position in the role. I work with failure because I don't know how to succeed. I have no answer.

My enemy is efficient, is industrial, is communicative, is designed. It's something that you don't think about when you use it—that's my enemy. My way of fighting is to fail, or to play with it. It's partly just having a sense of humor, but it's also a romantic belief in questioning something. An artist's role is to step back and be in between, to be in society and outside at the same time. I want to bring people to that same line, where they don't know if they're in or out. My tool for doing that is failing or betraying or showing problems.

What's an example of a work of yours that has failed?

The biggest failure of my life was a project at the Palais de Tokyo. I tried to make an economic system inside the gallery. We didn't have the budget to make anything besides videos, so we built a set in the space and shot three movies on-site. Then we organized a party with 700 people to destroy the set, so people would work for free for me to create my materials. Out of that party, where people were working for free and paying for drinks, I would have money to work and do sustainable development with the materials that they destroyed. From that, I would have enough money to pay a bribe to the director of the Palais de Tokyo—I wanted a picture of me paying the bribe.

I ended up in debt. I was losing money because people started to understand the password system for the drinks. We weren't allowed to sell the alcohol, so we had a system of paying for a password to get a drink, and people started to fuck me over. People also stole stuff

from the museum that I had to repay, so in the end I was in debt. It was an attempt to create sustainable development from a corrupt, Facebook-style participation economy where people think they're having fun while they're actually working for me, and it was a complete failure.

That's really beautiful, actually.

Yeah. I was really depressed for two months after the show, but I learned a lot. I lost everything trying to rely on someone else, so I decided to find some other way. It's going to happen again—me going broke and then finding a new solution.

Communication is the Enemy

Neïl Beloufa talks about participation and resistance in his artistic practice
by Maurizio Cattelan



Maurizio Cattelan: Are you comfortable making videos that are pretty borderline, morally?

Neïl Beloufa: I create representations of the world, which means I'm dealing with what actually exists, without masking or judging it, as a way to force the viewer to face reality. Answering yes or no to this question is perhaps less important than saying that I believe communicating my own view of the world would be inappropriate — it would be a sort of absurd propaganda led by one person who doesn't know any more than another. I don't think that that is the role of the artist. Art should really allow us to step back from the world, and it shouldn't illustrate messages or propose grand theories. Ideologies are the enemy, and singularity is the enemy too. In fact my work tries to get rid of any kind of moral judgment between good and evil, as well as any dichotomy between fiction and reality.

For example, *La domination du monde* (2012) and *Kempinski* (2009) are videos that replicate notions tied to racism and exoticism while giving the impression that they're very well-intentioned. They're neither true nor false. It's an attempt to put viewers in an uncomfortable position between a paternalistic Western perspective and an interesting or amusing image. I hope those works help the people watching them to step back, to take a position and think about this imagery, rather than blindly accepting it — or me. Ultimately, it's about refusing a certain form of authority coming from me or from the medium.

MC: Is it necessary to be tasteless? Does it have more popular appeal?

NB: I was brought up to have good taste. Nonconformity was about identifying the most vulgar features of popular mainstream culture. Today I no longer think there's such a thing as a good or bad image, and that's why I try to look at the world without putting information into any kind of hierarchical order. In this sense, this is a political gesture. I try not to leave anything out.

MC: Why make installations with videos?

NB: I like interfering with my own authority because I don't want my videos to persuade or influence the viewer in a straightforward fashion. I'm interested in double-edged devices. Indeed, the installations use the same dynamics as video, but they augment and complicate understanding by layering stuff over the apparent message. Their purpose is also to avoid playing out the kind of theatrical devices that are so effectively used in movies or churches. But I have to say I also just like building things: it's a way of learning about materials, trying stuff out, putting myself at risk.

Most of all my work is about how different elements and signs relate to each other. I focus more on the relationship between the artwork and the viewer than on the artwork itself, and I like creating a situation where a viewer has to connect ideas with forms or a narratives.

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LES REPRÉSENTATIONS PIÉGÉES DE NEÏL BELOUFA

PAR JULIE PORTIER

Le désordre n'est terrifiant qu'à l'instant où pointent les indices de son ordonnancement. Il en est de même pour l'apparente confusion suspectée d'articuler des signes, ou du dysfonctionnement réglé au millimètre. Et l'on sait combien l'esprit de l'artiste français le plus regardé de sa génération sur la scène internationale est complexe mais logique. Même si le geste d'expérimentation semble n'avoir aucune retenue, rien n'est gratuit dans les installations de Neïl Beloufa. Le signal se brouille mais jamais ne se dissipe. Au contraire, il vise juste, et ça peut faire mal comme à la Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, à Paris, où son exposition « En torrent et le second jour » laisse un goût étrangement amer dans la bouche, et la mélodie des *Portes du pénitencier* dans la tête. Le standard chanté par Johnny Hallyday revient en boucle dans la bande-son du film *Brune Renault* (2010) que l'artiste a choisi de réengager spécialement ici dans un nouveau dispositif total, où le film et l'installation qui l'encercle ne font qu'un, forme hybride dont Beloufa s'est fait maître en quelques années. Le statut des objets hésite entre la sculpture et le décor, l'outil de production et sa représentation, leur régime d'existence entre le dérivé du film et son préalable, l'avant et l'après, à moins qu'ils ne soient piégés dans une inquiétante immanence. On reconnaît dans ce paysage agencé en trois zones herméneutiques l'identité esthétique de l'artiste d'à peine trente ans, et son usage particulier des objets de rebut et des matériaux de construction fragiles, parcourus de branchements high et low tech. Mais l'ambiance est particulièrement aride, le temps propre à la fossilisation, d'où peut-être la récurrence de ces liquides figés (moulages de contenants, bouteilles ou sac plastiques), parmi d'autres matériaux qui agissent comme des signes. Ainsi des éléments détournés de l'univers administratif ou industriel, telles ces barres d'acier brut, omniprésentes, en guise de structure ou d'encadrement.

Centre névralgique de cet organisme (post-) technologique, *Brune Renault* se passe un soir dans une voiture, entre quatre adolescents engoncés dans leurs désirs contrariés et leurs attitudes surfaites. Le jeu est mauvais, et en même temps que le scénario tourne en rond, immobilisé



Neïl Beloufa, vue de l'exposition « En torrent et second jour » à la Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, à Paris. Photo : Aurélien Mole.

par l'indécision des personnages, les artifices du tournage apparaissent impudiquement ; la voiture démantelée fait du surplace. Même le dévoilement du réel dans la fiction ne produit aucun retournement de situation, comme si la duperie était une affaire convenue ; alors la machine nous aspire dans son inertie, sans rencontrer de résistance. Plus loin, le film est rediffusé sur un pan de décor qui avance et recule sur son rail, et à l'image bègue s'infiltre une vue de la tour Eiffel. Encore un signe, et une fois de plus l'occurrence d'un mythe national dans ce piège monté en boucle : la tour Eiffel, Johnny, les gauloises brunes, Renault, sans oublier Ricard. Il n'y a rien d'innocent à ce que ces emblèmes interviennent comme des stimuli dans ce qui pourrait se révéler être une zone de test sur cobayes. Les structures équipées de selles sous-entendent un usage productif ou ludique, à moins qu'elles ne soient les appeaux de la surveillance généralisée sous couvert de travail et de divertissement. Sous les webcams, elles permettent d'enregistrer les voix, peser les corps, compter leur présence. Seules les images et les chiffres défilent, mais tout est immobile, comme s'il était vain d'espérer modifier le cours des choses. ■

NEÏL BELOUFA, jusqu'au 24 mai, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, 12, rue Boissy d'Anglas, 75008 Paris, tél. 01 53 30 88 00, www.fondation-entreprise-ricard.com

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By Sini Rinne-Kanto
06/04/2014

[Paris Review](#)

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Neil Beloufa: Mixed notions of realism and mimesis

If you happen to find yourself in Paris, I strongly recommend Neil Beloufa's exhibition *En torrent et second jour* at Fondation d'entreprise Ricard. This exposition provides a perplexing entity, with a combination of sculpture, video, installations and photography. These elements end up being a linear exposure, a real indulgence for the spectator, while displaying a puzzling series of work completed by the final touch of Mihnea Mircan, the invited curator.



Courtesy of the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

The exhibition space consists of several rooms: in the first one, the artist's video *Brune Renault* from 2010 is on view. The settings are quite simplistic: four teenagers finding themselves in a red Renault in a parking garage. It seems like a typical Friday evening, with fleeting moments of disagreements, flirting and jealousy, characters being like classic movie figures. However, a rupture appears once realizing that they only *pretend* to drive in circles in the parking lot, everything around is moving except them: the passing landscapes flashing through the windows are finally, only a moving stage. The whole video seems like an eternal repetition, with Johnny Hallyday's song *Le penitencier* coming from the stereos over and over again: "Haven't we already been here?" asks one of the girls repeatedly.



Courtesy of the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

The first room with its projection serves as a starting point and as a conclusion for the rest of the exhibition: when entering the other rooms, we can always discover traces from the first one. Exploring the second room, with its installations and videos, is like witnessing a crime scene: everything seems to be in a chaotic order. There is a disturbing feeling, something is definitely wrong. Still hearing the traces from Hallyday's song, seeing a video with the very same characters as in the first one: it seems like a reproduction of the first scene, this time with real life settings. We're part of an experimentation, with video cameras, microphones and surveying eyes: as if we were kept under surveillance, but at the same time, having the power to survey others. This surrealistic experience between different worlds is emphasized with the objects: high tech combined with clumsy, childish like sculptures.



Courtesy of the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

In the third room, the characters that we've already met reappear in different forms, with a monitor presenting a live edit: surveillance camera footage synchronized with *Brune Renault*. This is where the exhibition reaches its final closure: there are so many necessary, yet unnecessary elements, which held the entity together. The final parts of the exhibition are recurrent with the thematic while questioning several dichotomies: where are the borders between reality and fiction, presence and absence? What does the cause and effect stand for? When merging these components, the artist deconstructs our beliefs and prevailing ideas, while proposing that the fiction can be real, and vice versa.



Courtesy of the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

Neil Beloufa "En torrent et second jour" at Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris

April 25~2014



Neil Beloufa's video works do not so much deconstruct filmic conventions, as they un-build them, tear apart and reassemble the cinematic apparatus into new continuities. His characters inhabit precarious stages, meant to obstruct or facilitate the movements of the camera, rather than accommodate stories of becoming. Tracking shots, dialogues, half-gestures, segmented or cloned scenographies fictionalize each other to a point of cinematic self-display. This logic of dismantling extends into the environments Beloufa constructs around his moving images – a montage of material translations and unstable equivalents, of palpable film-stills from a process in many ways similar to his handling of video technique and narrative.

It is these installation correlates – Beloufa's labyrinthine "projection rooms", or, seen differently, his sculptural makin-of's – whose syntax and role are emphasized (an accentuation that comes close to a reversal) in the artist's project for the Fondation Ricard. Never at ease with their status as props, these objects are animated and documented, moved and movied, allowed to outgrow any clear separation of figure, ground and importance in the hierarchy of experience. The interface embodies and takes over the role of protagonist: the converse of a Pygmalion moment – where the pedestal would come alive –, or an echo of modern anxieties about a conspiracy of screens and viewing machines, encroaching upon the bodies and souls of viewers.

Neil Beloufa experiments with a lively hypertrophy of display, with multiple configurations of frame and that which is framed, mirror and mirroring. "En torrent et second jour" works through a messy notion of realism and mimesis, where figures and grounds, transmissions and screens camouflage one another. The initial mimetic equation – that links films and the sculptural assemblages ostensibly made for the viewing of those films, through the structural similarities in their articulation – expands into the mimesis of our visual regime: one that binds erratic images and disoriented users, competing for meaning and dispossessing each other of time.

As opposed to trying to keep up with the impetus of making and unmaking in the installation for Fondation Ricard, to wrest sense from its mazes and domesticate it textually, the following notes focus on Brune Renault, a 2010 short that both occupies a central position in the exhibition and interweaves in a particular way the conceptual and visual maneuvers sketched above. Beloufa notes that "Brune Renault is a looped fiction that happens in a car sliced in four parts, resting on small wheels – basically a sculpture. Since we can open the car, implausible camera shots move in and out of the object. I wanted the sculpture to mutate into a functional object, once viewers were starting to follow the fiction."

If viewers are indeed mesmerized into following this fiction – a constructive fiction of breaking apart and mending, of fragments held together by the camera shots, by sculptural and digital montage –, this hypnotic effect might be akin to a vertigo of all possible combinations: a logical netherworld where all intersections of camera and its stilled or animate objects are examined. An animation – somehow autonomous, abstracted from the animated subject – that pushes and pulls at scenes and characters.

It could be argued that the variable perspectives on and distances from the segments of the car recompose the vehicle into an anamorphic object. Regular anamorphosis converges distinct vanishing points within the same picture plane, each reducing the other's object to a smudge of colour: in Hans Holbein's painting, the ambassadors and the skull are each other's peripherally perceived blur. Brune Renault meshes chronologies, accelerations and slow motions, title and credits in the wrong place on the timeline of the work, flickers of light suggesting speed, absolute stillness and the uneasy, vacuous dialogue between the four characters – all held in negative unity by zooms and transversal shots.

Anamorphosis here reconciles, in order for the film to exist, a discomposed set and the protagonists' inability to occupy it and fulfil their part in the performative contract. And perhaps anamorphosis indirectly indicates that the only solid identity, or self-contained reality we are offered is that of the camera itself, its technical integrity and unhindered recording capacity, to-ing and fro-ing across a spectrum of actions and significance, circling the defenceless, exposed insides and relays of the film's making. A tridimensional anamorphosis, maybe, activated by the rolling (as they used to say) of the camera and by that other invisible activity, the labour required by building and re-building the set, to allow the self-referential relations the camera patiently weaves.

A film of filming, with the set design as its idiosyncratic *deus ex machina*. A space that recoils and repels, and a persistent sense of distance, like a transparent sheet of emptiness separating viewers from work, barring sensuous contact with it. As a last hypothesis, this is perhaps the distance (or equal to the distance) separating an artifice that has been revealed from the truth.

Mihnea Mircan

Neil BELOUFA

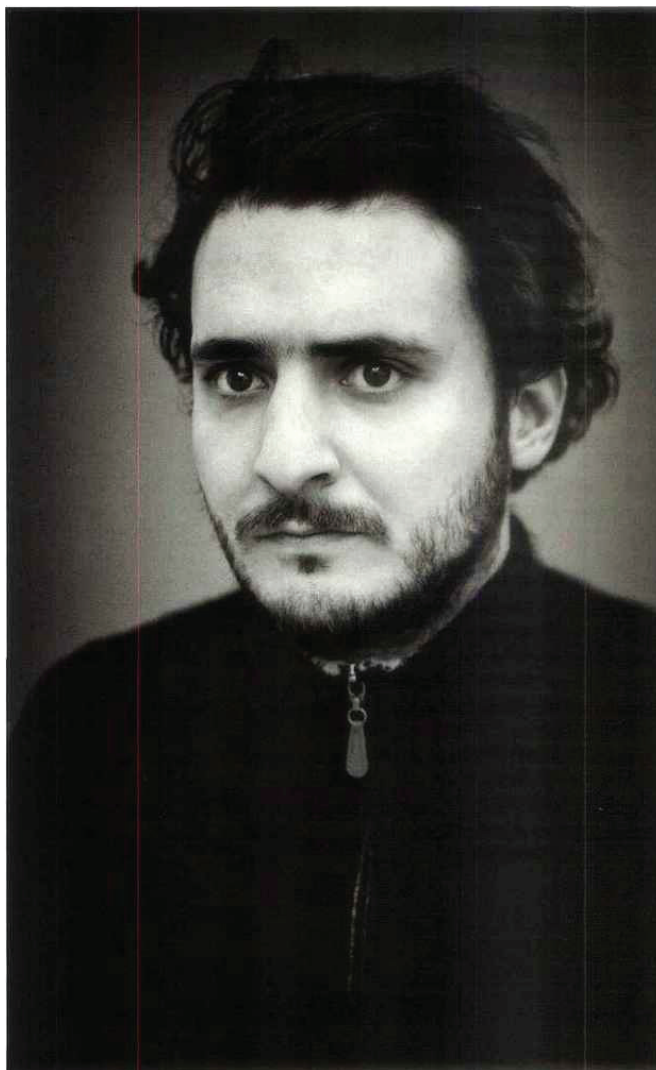
TALENT (ART)

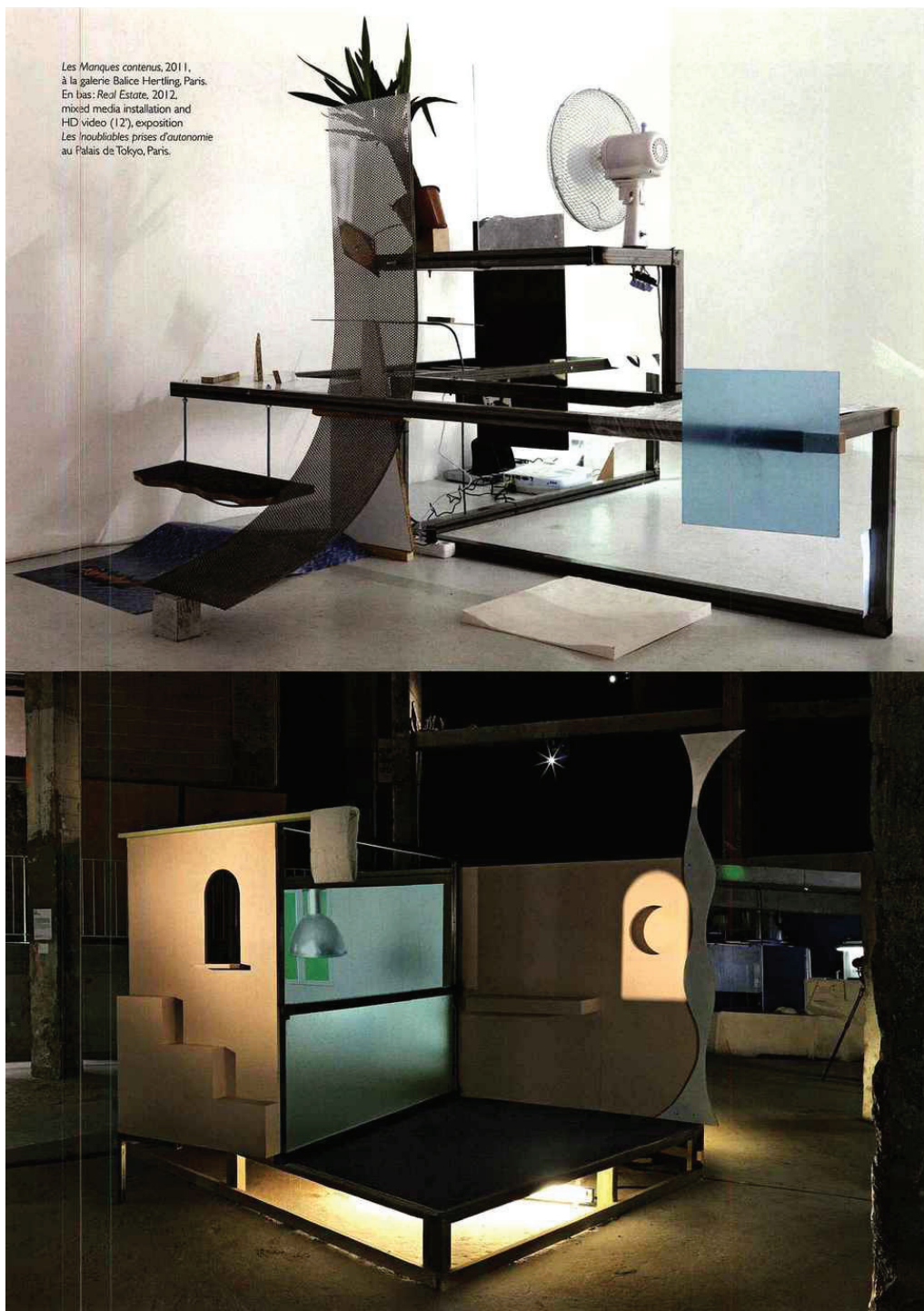
Ce jeune artiste déjà incontournable de la scène contemporaine crée des œuvres modulaires, entre sculpture et installation, vidéo et photographie, dans une démarche expérimentale et intellectuelle.

En isolant l'œuvre et en conditionnant le visiteur, la salle de projection noire fonctionne comme un dispositif d'exposition particulièrement autoritaire, quoique moins remis en question que le *white cube* de la galerie. Dans ses expositions, Neil Beloufa, artiste franco-algérien de 29 ans basé à Paris, va à l'encontre de ce principe de "prise d'otage" du spectateur. Il présente en effet ses vidéos dans des installations fragmentées qui peuvent avoir des ramifications multiples, comme lors de son exposition à la galerie parisienne Balice Hertling (2011), où planches, plantes, plaques de Plexiglas, ventilateurs et vidéos semblaient posséder le même statut précaire. *"J'essaie de tout mettre sur le même pied, d'éviter les hiérarchies, de parler de Do It Yourself, de standardisation des matériaux et d'un monde où une vidéo de chat qui joue du piano peut générer des millions de clics"*, explique l'artiste.

Cette labilité du cadre se conjugue avec un contenu qui renverse les catégories, combine les contraires et déjoue les attentes du spectateur. Déclencheur de sa carrière internationale, le film *Kempinski* (2007), un hit de la Manifesta 8 à Murcie en 2010, faisait raconter à des habitants de Bamako leurs visions du futur dans une nuit éclairée de néons et peuplée de chèvres. Les récits, l'ambiance inquiétante du décor et le choix du présent comme temps de la narration faisaient basculer ce documentaire ethnographique à la Jean Rouch dans la science-fiction, chamboulant au passage les stéréotypes sur l'Afrique, un continent rarement représenté comme un terrain de futurologie. D'autres films, comme *Real Estate* (2012), créent un écart entre ce que le spectateur voit, en l'occurrence un appartement de sitcom, et ce qu'il entend, le récit constamment renouvelé d'un agent immobilier, qui sonne comme un hommage au storytelling. Très sollicité, le jeune artiste sera prochainement exposé à la Fondation Ricard à Paris, à l'ICA de Londres, ou encore au Schinkel Pavillon de Berlin. SYLVAIN MENÉTREY. PORTRAIT CHRISTOPHE ROUÉ

www.neilbeloufa.com





NEIL BELOUFA : "EN TORRENT ET SECOND JOUR" A LA FONDATION RICARD

Posted by *infernolaredaction* on 28 mars 2014 · [Poster un commentaire](#)



Neil Beloufa, «En torrent et second jour» /Une proposition de Mihnea Mircan / Fondation Ricard, Paris / Du mardi 1 avril 2014 au samedi 24 mai 2014.

Les oeuvres vidéo de Neil Beloufa ne déconstruisent pas tant les conventions filmiques qu'elles ne les défont, démontant puis réassemblant le dispositif cinématographique pour produire de nouvelles continuités. Ses personnages habitent des décors à l'existence précaire, conçus pour faire obstruction aux mouvements de la caméra ou pour les prolonger plutôt que pour accueillir des récits de transformation.

Panoramiques, dialogues, gestes ébauchés, scénographies découpées en segments ou clonées se fictionnalisent mutuellement, jusqu'à s'exhiber cinématographiquement. C'est la réponse de l'artiste à notre attente de moments forts, dans sa recherche méthodique de ce qui fait un artifice, sur l'écran ou en dehors. Cette logique de démantèlement s'étend aux environnements que Beloufa construit autour de ses images animées, montage de traductions sculpturales et d'équivalences instables, d'images fixes prélevées sur un processus de création, qui évoque son recours aux techniques et aux récits de la vidéo.

Dans le projet de l'artiste pour la Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, les éléments mis en relation par l'installation (les « salles de projection » si frustrantes de Beloufa, avec leur structure en labyrinthe, ou encore ses making-of sculpturaux, dérangeants par leur réalité palpable) voient leur syntaxe et leur fonction retournées. Jamais en phase avec leur statut d'accessoires, ces objets seront activés et documentés, déplacés et « animés » ; il leur sera permis de se développer au delà des distinctions admises de figure, de fond et d'importance. Leur usurpation d'une position centrale sur scène intensifie et souligne leur place ambiguë entre fonctionnalité et obstruction. L'interface incarne le rôle du protagoniste, qu'elle s'est d'abord appropriée. Nous avons là l'inverse d'une situation à la Pygmalion, d'une statue prenant vie, dans un écho aux anxiétés modernes autour d'un complot des écrans qui envahiraient peu à peu les corps et les âmes des spectateurs. Neil Beloufa se livre aussi à des expériences d'animation avec cette vibration hypertrophiée d'images, projetées ou montrées, où le cadre ne se distingue plus de ce qui est cadré.

En torrent et second jour travaille une idée — assez indémêlable — de réalisme et de mimesis où figures et fonds, messages et interfaces servent de camouflage les uns aux autres. L'équation mimétique, qui tenait ensemble les films et les assemblages sculpturaux conçus très clairement pour les regarder, se transforme en une autre mimesis, plus large et plus abstraite. Cette dernière met en relation images instables et utilisateurs incertains, à la lutte pour le sens, et se vidant réciproquement du temps.

(Mihnea Mircan, février 2014)

Les huit qui font l'actualité

Ces huit artistes francophones, vivant en France ou originaires de l'Hexagone construisent le paysage de l'art contemporain en 2014. Portraits de ces créateurs dont le propos et les œuvres résonnent avec notre époque et ses enjeux.

DOSSIER RÉALISÉ PAR GUY-CLAUDE AGBOTON, ANNE-FRANCE BERTHELOIN ET MIKAEL ZIKOS



Neïl Beloufa

L'ENVERS DU DÉCOR

Prix Meurice pour l'art contemporain 2013-2014

Les mises en scène vidéo de ce petit Platon décortiquent le réel. Autant de cavernes pour de nouveaux mythes.



A l'image du monde – déboussolé ! –, l'art est friand du mélange entre fiction et réalité. Au Canada et en Afrique, Neïl Beloufa a produit des vidéos dans des territoires radicalement opposés. Il les présente dans des structures complexes soutenant un flot d'images pointant les absurdités de la société. A Vancouver, *Les Manques contenus* (2011) interrogeait les habitants d'un complexe immobilier neuf sur leur qualité de vie et semait le trouble... Etaient-ils des acteurs employés par le promoteur ? *The Analyst, The Researcher* (2010) regroupait déjà leurs affabulations d'agressions et délits sur la foi des vidéo-surveillances d'hélicoptères. « *Je ne suis pas ironique mais gêné par rapport à l'autorité des images ou des paroles* », explique le Parisien, lauréat des Audi Talents Awards 2011 avant d'être, l'hiver dernier, récompensé par le Prix Meurice : 20 000 € pour la production de *Les Arabes et les Services*, une série de deux vidéos. L'une dans un pays arabe, où des touristes sont espionnés ; l'autre où des civils se font passer pour des hommes politiques. Réunies, elles seront projetées dans un décor inspiré du film *The Tourist* de Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (2010). Une mise en abîme renforcée par l'usage de webcams permettant au visiteur de voir cette « double » exposition différemment. « *Comme je suis contre l'idée du cinéma en galerie et de sa pression sur le spectateur, je cherche des systèmes qui permettent au visiteur de prendre du recul et de ne pas croire tout ce qu'il voit* ». Au cœur de l'installation *Tectonic Plates or the Jurisdiction of Shapes* (2009), la réalité physique des pièces exposées était a priori confuse. Devant un ventilateur en marche, une plante verte restait statique... Un ensemble désordonné auquel fait écho le propos animiste des hommes filmés dans *Kempinski*, tourné au Mali : ils comparent leur amour pour les femmes à celui qu'ils auraient pour des objets. « *Le spectateur a le droit – et je lui*

conseille même – d'être incrédule... », souligne Beloufa. De la Biennale de Venise à celle de Lyon, 2013 a vu son art protéiforme et sophistiqué voyager sans perdre de sa saveur. 2014 accueillera ses nouvelles productions à l'Institute of Contemporary Arts (Londres, du 17/09 au 16/11) et à la Fondation d'entreprise Ricard (Paris, du 1/04 au 10/05) avant de repartir en tournage... ? « *J'aime à croire qu'il n'y aurait pas de différence à produire dans ma chambre ou sur la Lune... même si je préférerais la Lune !* » M.Z.
www.neilbeloufa.com / www.balicehertling.com

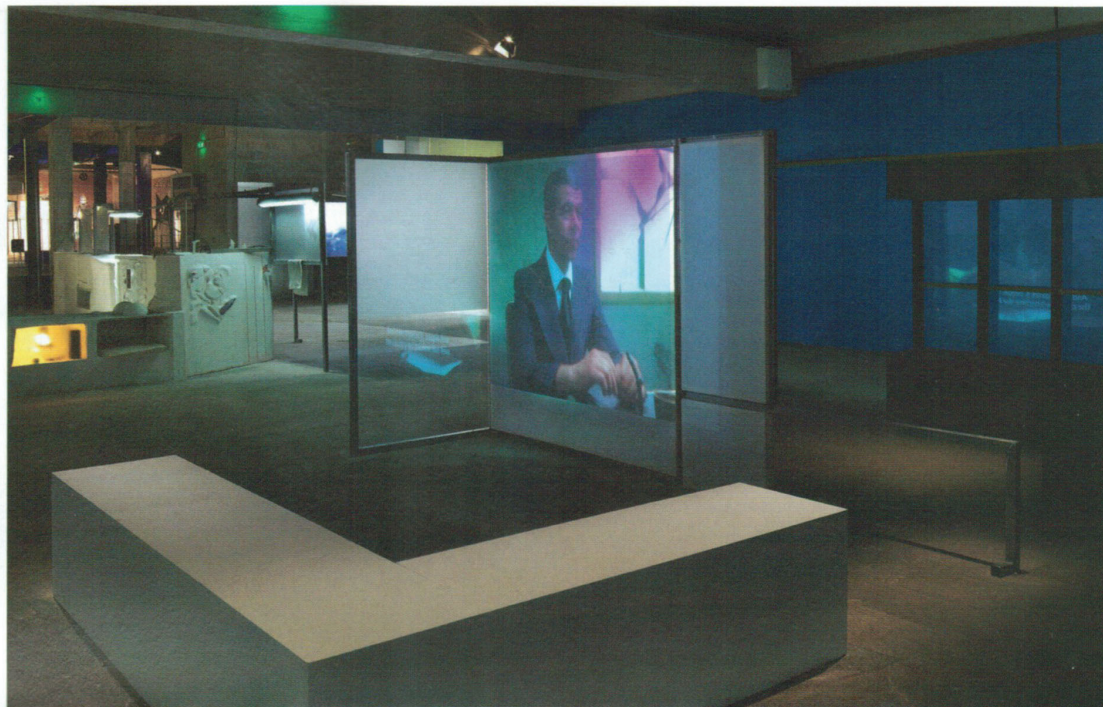


En haut :
Vue de l'exposition « En streaming
et second jour » à la Fondation
Ricard (2014).

Ci-contre :
Neïl Beloufa.

La Domination du monde
2012, installation vidéo,
vue de l'exposition
«Les inoubliables
prises d'autonomie»
au Palais de Tokyo.

Hammer Projects
Neil Beloufa
2013, installation vidéo,
vue de l'exposition
au Hammer Museum
de Los Angeles.



4/ NEIL BELOUFA

VIDÉASTE AUX FRONTIÈRES DU RÉEL

1985 Naissance en Algérie.
2008 California Institute of the Arts, Los Angeles.
2009 Diplôme des Arts décoratifs et des Beaux-Arts de Paris.
2010 Le Fresnoy, studio national des arts contemporains.
2013 Expose au Hammer Museum à Los Angeles et à la biennale de Lyon.

www.neilbeloufa.com
> Galerie Balice Hertling, Paris

Impossible de voir un film de Neil Beloufa sans regarder à côté de l'écran sur lequel il est projeté, voire derrière. À vrai dire, le film ou plutôt les films, puisque plusieurs s'affichent simultanément, ne surgissent même qu'au détour d'un dédale hétéroclite de planches, de panneaux de plexiglas, de murets de plâtre, de bâches tendues ou de grillages déroulés. Un capharnaüm bricolé qui multiplie les points de vue : on ne voit plus seulement les films de face. Or, c'est cette manière de regarder les choses, les gens, le monde, qui épaté dans le travail de cet artiste d'origine algérienne, installé en France après avoir séjourné aux États-Unis, le temps d'étudier à la prestigieuse université Cal Arts de Los Angeles. Neil Beloufa fuit les points de vue unilatéraux, à commencer par celui, longtemps dominant, de l'Occident. Dans *Kempinski*, une de ses premières vidéos, il proposait à des villageois maliens d'exposer leurs visions du futur. Dans la nuit africaine, la silhouette de ces hommes et leurs yeux brillent d'un éclat vert aussi irréel que les perspectives qu'ils imaginent, sur fond de bicoques exotiques. Le film affole ainsi le genre du documentaire ethnographique, et le regard stéréotypé sur l'Afrique, en y injectant une dose hallucinogène de science-fiction. À cette œuvre portée par le souffle de personnages volubiles répondaient en quelque sorte les films montrés au Palais de Tokyo à l'automne dernier et qui mettaient en scène des êtres raides et caricaturaux, comme désincarnés, entretenant avec leur espace de vie des rapports conflictuels ou, au mieux, tristement banals. Un peu

comme nous, spectateurs, puisque toute l'installation était faite de décombres des décors dans lesquels ces petites sitcoms avaient été tournées. Neil Beloufa suggère donc ceci : il n'y a plus de lieux qui tiennent, plus de lieux où se tenir, que des ruines à hanter, une nouvelle place, une autre vie à construire sur les débris de l'ancien régime. Rien que cela.

J.L.



Vintage Series
2013, métal, MDF,
fil électrique et prise,
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FOCUS

Neil Beloufa

Documentary films and sci-fi encounters; assumption, truth and magic *by Paul Teasdale*

Neil Beloufa lives and works in Paris, France. He has had recent solo exhibitions at Balice Hertling, Paris; Kunsthaus Glarus, Zurich, Switzerland; The Western Front, Vancouver, Canada; Saprophyt, Vienna, Austria; and ZERO ..., Milan, Italy (all 2011). This year he will have solo shows at the Institut Français, Amman, Jordan; Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria; and François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA.

Let us imagine that Plato's *Republic* (c.380 BCE) is the first example of Utopian science-fiction, albeit one best known for its curiously dystopian set-up. This episode comes in Book VII: a dark cave, a large fire, a group of manacled prisoners watch a tableau of shadows flickering across the cave walls, created by a procession of people 'carrying vessels and statues and figures of animals'. Forced to view this perpetual display, they become accustomed to the shapes of the objects through their silhouettes. When the prisoners are set free from their screen-based existence and can see the real objects in natural light, they no longer recognize them.

Skip some 2,400 years to present-day London. A ramshackle plywood construct houses a screen on which we see a film of figures looking out on a vista of tropical vegetation through the windows of a Modernist house. A large banana leaf bobs limply in the breeze. Curiously, air bubbles and creases start to appear in the landscape as our eyes become accustomed to the gloom. This film, Neil Beloufa's *Untitled* (2010), shown at The David Roberts Art Foundation last year, is based on an anecdote the artist heard about a house near Algiers, which was abandoned by its wealthy owners during the political unrest in the 1990s and occupied by a terrorist group. They lived there for three years and left it spotless. The idyllic landscape we see is in fact a series of full-scale inkjet prints, which the artist photographed and used to wallpaper a life-size model of the house for his film set. Actors playing the landlord of the house, the gardener and the neighbours imagine what the terrorists had done there, how they lived, how they ate. More importantly, they question why the group chose to live in a house with floor-to-ceiling glass windows on all sides.

This re-imagined scene is typical of Beloufa's exploration of the hazy shades of narrative, make-believe and truth that underpin the representations of real-world events. Suppositions, assumptions and conjecture lie at the heart of his films' often unscripted dialogues and interviews, while carefully borrowed tropes from sci-fi, TV, advertising and theatre make his sleight-of-hand slippages from purported documentary to fantasy all the more convincing. Beloufa insists on the presentation of his videos as objects, more so than as legible narratives. Assemblages of plywood, paper and metal; angularly positioned PVC and glass screens; littered sculptural assemblages and photographic prints foreground, surround and fracture the viewing experience of his films.

For his exhibition 'Les Manques Contenus' (The Missing Content), which opened at Balice Hertling, Paris, in September, Beloufa presented two films within a modular arrangement of screen dividers and shelving units. *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water* (2011) is, ostensibly, a series of interviews Beloufa carried out with apparent residents of a newly built residential development in an unnamed North American city. The artist's footage shows large high-rise apartments overlooking pristine lawns and meandering pathways, evoking a middle-class paradise of sunshine, cyclists and joggers. Each interviewee seems unflinchingly positive about the place, further raising suspicion about the truthfulness of their accounts and whether they are, in fact, paid actors in a promotional video. It turns out they are people the artist approached in Vancouver while on a residency there. Beloufa asked them to talk about an ideal place where they would like to live – either fictive or real – the only directive being to maintain a cheerful disposition.

Using a similar ploy of uncoupling what is shown onscreen and what his subjects describe, the film *The Analyst, the researcher, the screenwriter, the CGI tech and the lawyer* (2011) shows what we immediately assume to be footage of a crime in progress shot from a police helicopter. Four experts from each of the professions cited in the film's title give their commentary on what they believe is taking place. Coherence and probability seem the only checks and balances on the authority of their accounts. But their baseless assumptions and stylized imaginings overtake what we see in the actual footage: the first narrator muses that the driver of the red truck the camera follows has had a fight with his girlfriend and has followed her 'across the river, over the bridge'. The lawyer is cagey, reasoned and analytical; the others far less so. One claims that this sort of area is a perfect place for terrorist organizations to be creating weapons of mass destruction. The film's focus is on the assumptions, prejudices and fantasies that arise when the viewers are given no background information.

In Beloufa's earlier works, such as his films *Kempinski* (2007) and *April the Second* (2009), he employed simple but disruptive commands to eke out the proximity of the more obviously fantastical aspects of belief – those of magic and science-fiction, respectively. Shot near Bamako in Mali, *Kempinski* is a series of interviews with people illuminated by a lamp they hold or place near them while the cold blue neon of a searchlight at the top of a large metal tower ominously watches over them. *Kempinski* hinges on the neat conceit of asking the interviewees to talk about the future in the present tense. A man describes making love to his wife by thinking of her; another describes sentient cars that act of their own volition. For *April the Second*, the artist

Opposite page:
'Les Manques Contenus'
(The Missing Content)
2011
Installation view
Balice Hertling, Paris

Below from top:
*People's passion, lifestyle,
beautiful wine, gigantic
glass towers, all surrounded
by water*, 2011
Kempinski, 2007
Untitled, 2010
April the Second, 2009
DVD stills

planted a large white monolith in the middle of a Parisian street and documented the resulting bewilderment of passing motorists using three hidden cameras in parked motorbikes. Both the monolith and the metal tower act as ciphers for a strange, alien presence – material signifiers of the uncanny quality that pervades Beloufa's films. These mysterious objects, much like the jars and vessels seen by our cave dwellers for the first time, are a reminder that the flickering forms of representation are perhaps the safer, more comforting illusions after all.



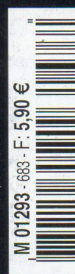
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DOSSIER



Bandana de Neil Beloufa (2012).

canevas. Il y a un besoin de créer, j'aime les emmener dans la création eux-mêmes, dans la fabrication d'objets ou de décors. Ma démarche se situe entre le documentaire et la création d'une fiction, mais je ne me considère pas dans la performance. Ou alors la performance de groupe.

• En même temps, il y a un vrai trajet dans vos vidéos. Et le visiteur qui arrive à n'importe quel moment peut rater ce trajet.

Que les gens passent à côté, c'est le risque d'exposer une vidéo dans un centre d'art. Un critique a dit assez justement que mes vidéos sont des fables. J'espère donner un peu envie aux gens de rester. Et de comprendre l'histoire, parce qu'il y a toujours une histoire. Mais même moi, je m'assieds très rarement devant les vidéos, c'est aussi ça le jeu : attraper un extrait au passage et partir. Je ne pense pas non plus au cinéma, parce que je ne connais pas ce circuit-là. C'est peut-être aussi mon parcours qui fait que je me retrouve dans les musées. Mais, je ne sais pas si mes films pourraient être montrés en salles, il y a des effets spéciaux hyperdiscount et des faux raccords à tous les plans. Et j'aime montrer des ensembles. J'associe des objets au film, donc c'est en galerie ou au musée qu'ils ont leur place, je ne veux pas les montrer seuls. Souvent, ce sont des éléments de décors qui apportent d'autres informations sur la communauté. Il y a toujours une envie de faire avec les moyens du bord. En l'occurrence, pour *Ô quatrième*, j'ai demandé à chaque sœur de me donner des objets personnels qui ont servi à la bande-son du film. Ils sont exposés et leurs apparitions sonores dans le film sont énumérées. Ce qui est important, c'est que la totalité (le film et les objets) retranscrive la vérité que j'ai ressentie dans cette communauté.

• Quels sont les artistes et cinéastes dont vous vous sentez proche aujourd'hui ?

J'aime beaucoup le travail de Julien Prévieux, je m'intéresse beaucoup aux artistes qui réfléchissent sur l'archive, comme

Jérémy Délaire. Sinon j'apprécie beaucoup Francis Alÿs. En cinéma, j'aime les vieux trucs surréalistes, même si c'est bateau. J'aime Buñuel, Pedro Costa, Wang Bing, Herzog, les Monty Python. Mais ma star, c'est Luc Moullet. J'aime beaucoup Pazienza, aussi. Je suis allée toquer à leur porte pour qu'ils écrivent dans le catalogue du musée d'Art moderne.

• Et vous allez repartir en immersion quelque part ?

Demain, je pars en résidence à Saint-Nazaire, parce qu'on me l'a proposé. Mais je ne sais pas ce que je vais y faire. Enfin si, je vais aller voir les bateaux qui se construisent, je n'en sais pas plus. Et puis, vu que l'expulsion est imminente pour les gens que j'ai rencontrés à Ivry, j'aimerais bien demander une bourse pour aller suivre leur quotidien en Roumanie.

Entretien réalisé par Stéphane Delorme et Camille Polet à Paris, le 11 octobre.

Neïl Beloufa

Le voisin d'en face de Bertille Bak, qui expose au musée d'Art moderne cet automne, est lui aussi un tout jeune artiste de 27 ans, inaugurant son premier show solo au Palais de Tokyo. Composé de trois vidéos stylisées dans des décors en studio très artificiels, *Les Inoubliables Prises d'autonomie* confronte trois situations décadentes : une discussion politique dont la seule issue est la guerre, un porno plage détaché très années 80 et la visite immobilière d'un appartement bourgeois. Avec un vrai brio, Beloufa poursuit sa démarche postmoderne : vider les films de tout enjeu narratif et mettre à plat les dispositifs. Après un double cursus Beaux-arts / Arts-déco, une année au Fresnoy, le lauréat des Audi Talents Awards entame en novembre le montage de son premier long métrage, *Bandana*, tourné cet été dans un studio de la banlieue de Los Angeles. C'est avec une distance amusée qu'il se lance dans le cinéma.

DOSSIER

● **Quelle est pour vous la spécificité du travail de construction des films en galerie ?**

Dans les galeries, je fais des dispositifs, je sépare les deux processus. J'accepte le fait que personne ne va regarder ma vidéo dans un musée ou une galerie. Donc je n'ai pas besoin de solidifier le tout, il faut juste que toutes les minutes trente on puisse y entrer et comprendre en gros de quoi il retourne. Je fais des structures avec des tensions narratives très plates. Pour les galeries, il faut trouver des idées qui peuvent s'étirer sans risquer que l'on s'ennuie au bout d'une demi-heure. Un de mes films a été montré principalement en festivals, une fiction avec quatre comédiens dans une voiture, *Brune Renault*. Les autres ont d'abord été exposés et sont ensuite allés en festivals, à Rotterdam ou Toronto.

● **Pour votre vidéo, *The Analyst, the Researcher, the Screenwriter, the Cgi Tech and the Lawyer* (2011), filmée au Canada, avez-vous repris des images de filature policière ?**

On a loué un hélicoptère et mis en scène un truc banal : des gens qui courent. Ensuite, j'ai demandé à des personnes qui tiennent des discours d'expertise différents de regarder les images et de les commenter en affirmant leur théorie. Seule l'avocate a refusé d'entrer dans une fiction.

● **Que ce soit dans cette vidéo ou dans *Sayre and Marcus* (2010), où les acteurs disparaissent par un jeu de chaises musicales, il y a toujours l'idée du *whodunit*.**

Je retire l'enjeu et l'enjeu devient de savoir où est l'enjeu. Il faut voir ça avec un pas de recul. C'est comme les cartoons des années 50. Dès que quelque chose va être animé, c'est dessiné en noir, c'est surligné. Au début, la porte qui va exploser est plus foncée que le reste du décor. Cela crée une trame parallèle qui n'est plus dans l'écran. J'essaie d'inventer des systèmes de ce genre.

● **Le *whodunit* est-il au cœur de votre long métrage, *Bandana* ?**

Le film est basé sur un McGuffin tout bête : on a filmé des communautés où l'on porte le bandana. Cela me permettait de jouer sur des sauts temporels, de passer d'un cow-boy à un groupe d'anarchistes en *cut*, grâce au bandana. Le passage de l'un à l'autre suffit à construire quelque chose. Sur les images, les couleurs sont saturées, c'est un peu *Plus belle la vie*. Les personnages sont de vrais gens, mais comme ils sont à Los Angeles, ils se disent acteurs et essayent tous de jouer. L'un d'entre eux faisait partie d'un gang et avait aussi fait de la figuration sur *Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua, 2001) ! On a tout structuré et écrit à partir de ce qu'ils nous disaient. Tenir un dispositif sur 20 minutes, c'est facile, mais là il fallait trouver un système qui puisse tenir sur une longue durée et, du coup, pour assurer nos arrières, on a écrit un scénario potentiel de ce qui pourrait se passer tout en gardant de la marge pour improviser.

● **Pourquoi ce long métrage de fiction va-t-il être montré uniquement en salles ?**

On a tous une frustration de cinéma. Avec ma productrice Marie Dubas, on travaille depuis longtemps sur un vrai film. Les projets naissent après avoir eu l'argent. Le système s'est inversé depuis peu : j'ai une base d'argent et je construis ensuite un projet. Là, c'est grâce aux Audi Talents Awards que j'ai eu de l'argent. Du coup, on a levé des fonds chez des privés, surtout milanais. Au total, j'ai eu 135 000 euros. *Bandana* a la durée légale d'une fiction hollywoodienne. Il parle de représentation, car Los Angeles, c'est de la fiction. Certains artistes projettent leurs films dans une salle de cinéma, même en galerie. Ils ajoutent une autorité qui n'existe pas en galerie. Une salle de cinéma, c'est une église, il y a l'écran qui est surpuissant et rien d'autre n'existe. D'habitude, je ne fais pas ça, mais si *Bandana* est projeté en galerie, je ferai une *black-box*, je remettrai le système autoritaire du cinéma dans la galerie. En regard de mes installations précédentes, ce sera un vrai geste.

Entretien réalisé par Stéphane Delorme et Camille Polet à Paris, le 12 octobre.



Bandana de Neil Beloufa (2012).

MOUSSE 31 ~ *Neil Beloufa*

PARIS



All Is Magic

BY JARRETT GREGORY

Sayre and Marcus, installation view, Galleria Zero..., Milan, 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Zero..., Milan

Opposite, top – *Untitled*, 2011, installation view, Liste 16, Basel. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli

Opposite, bottom – “Changes of Administrations,” installation view, Galleria Zero..., Milan, 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Zero..., Milan

PARIS ~ *Neil Beloufa*

The work of the young French artist Neil Beloufa is situated at the crossroads of different media – video, installation, sculpture and photography – combined in a conceptually meaningful continuum. Formalism or the use of new technologies are not ends in themselves, but compositional modes that can provide the tools for a disorienting revelation, for original rethinking of social questions, post-colonial arguments, interpersonal tensions. Jarrett Gregory takes a look at some of the most significant videos by this artist.

Today's youngest generation inherits a fundamental acceptance of the conditions of the digital world: that which looks flat has depth. Anything may be a button and therefore an entryway, even the smallest of objects can contain worlds upon worlds inside of them. Children who will be raised using platforms such as Skype, Twitter, Wikipedia, YouTube, and Facebook know how to unlock an iPhone before they can string together a sentence. Technology for the youngest generation will be second nature, and impossible to extract from their developmental evolution. Midnight's children born on the eve of the iPad.

I propose that there is a sweet spot, a window in contemporary art practice when technology and history strike a balance: when there is just enough saturation of information to prompt the right questions, and not so much to induce a vertigo that plummets you off your feet.

For me, Neil Beloufa's work demonstrates the delicate alignment of questions and information. Born in 1985, he has as much as he wants at his fingertips, but with enough distance and acumen to perceive the affects of the digital boom. He is among the last who will know a before and an after. And, like other 20-somethings, digital media has already altered his brain development, making him (and some of us) something of a cross-breed. For that reason, Beloufa – and I'd argue Ryan Trecartin to achieve this as well – can bridge both worlds, recognizing the meaningful issues at stake with the boom of digital media and synthesizing this into his work.

As opposed to artists like Cory Arcangel, who built his practice around addressing technology on a primarily formal level, in Beloufa's work, digital culture plays a descriptive rather than utilitarian role: it is his thematic and structural framework. Influenced by open source platforms such as YouTube and Wikipedia, Beloufa's videos introduce narratives that become lost or obscured. Issues of similitude and saturation are pervasive and he makes no distinction between real and fake, seeing them as equals. His works tell stories that may be fictional, may be true, may not even be stories save that they employ the language of storytelling. He layers meaning without solutions, stopping a piece when it feels on the precipice of being finished. As in the digital realm, linear progression is replaced with a permanent home in liminality.

Kempinski (2007), Beloufa's first film to garner attention, raises some of the questions he continues to clarify and problematize. I first came across it amidst hundreds of submissions while I was jurying a film program in 2007. *Kempinski*, which Beloufa finished when he was twenty-two, was the product of a grant he received to make a documentary in Mali. As a French-Algerian artist, he became interested in playing with Western expectations of Africa, opting to make a science fiction film rather than a voyeuristic portrait. He asked the local residents to describe their vision of the future while speaking in the present tense. Beloufa was able to take this very basic premise, the tense-shift, and turn it into a mysterious and distinct world. A Malian man holds a fluorescent tube that emits a halo of light, illuminating his face and t-shirt. Another man stands amidst the lush foliage. In unscripted monologues, these men describe how they can use their mind to communicate with the stars and the oxen. Cars can speak, all materials are equal and play human roles. Humans make love through telepathy. Buildings don't have doors, but can be entered from anywhere. As one man says, "All is magic, all is simple".

Between interviews Beloufa cuts to long shots of a metal tower in a field. The hum of an unsettling minor tone punctuated by the sound of crickets reverberates over the scene. The bright lights at the top of the tower shine down across the grass, a contemplative shot that imbues the structure with an anthropomorphic presence, as if it is one of the protagonists in this story, offering us its own anecdote if we listen closely. Through the series of static and painterly configurations that make up *Kempinski*, Beloufa demonstrates his unique eye for composition and contrast, which he interweaves with the proven techniques of science fiction filmmaking.

Beloufa's next project, *Brune Renault*, plays again with film genres. Two teenag-

ers sit in a car, the girl in the backseat leans out the window to exhale a drag from her cigarette, while the boy driving is captivated by her reflection in his rear-view mirror. The dialogue is circuitous: They discuss their friends and where they are going. The girl says, "Haven't we been here before," to which the boy responds, "I took a left because I thought you told me to go right." She quickly changes the subject. Manipulation, power dynamics, and jealousies are complex but apparent. It's a classic style, drama in the most general sense, but also mystery, verging on Film Noir with the dark lighting, cigarette smoke, and moody music. The air is thick with tension, some of it sexual, which only heightens as two more characters make their way into – and out of – the car. It's reminiscent of the atmospheric scenes and sinuous, fragmented plots of Michelangelo Antonioni or David Lynch. It even has moments of the aimlessness and absurdity of *Waiting For Godot*. While it is easy to become ensnared in the enigmatic drama



unfolding, at certain moments it is distractingly obvious that the car is not moving, but closed in a garage. The flashing of lights and the sound of an engine simulate movement, but only to a point, as an exterior shot of the car captures a rear end covered in duct tape and stationary wheels. Toward the end of the film—hard to say if it is, since the credits and title appearing multiple times throughout—a clearer view of the back seat reveals the car has been sawed down the middle. With Beloufa's work every revelation is carefully calculated. He makes no distinction between what is fake and what is real and, as his viewers, neither should we.

In 2010, Beloufa made *Untitled*, which is set in Algeria and inspired by the story of a family, who was forced to leave their home because of a dangerous political climate, and had returned to find that their house had been inhabited by terrorists. The only broken or missing possession was a marble table that had been cracked in two. *Untitled* follows the former residents as well as other characters as they imagine how the terrorists lived, and describe the state of the house as they found it. Oftentimes they wonder aloud why these people, who were trying to keep their whereabouts unknown, would have chosen a hiding place with so many windows. The story itself is perfectly simple.



With *Brune Renault*, the dissected car functions simultaneously as sculpture and stage set, but I believe that issue is much more complex in connection with *Untitled*. Beloufa's visual representation of the house feels like a small wonder. It is part vision, part hallucination. He has recreated the house in paper and cardboard. Inkjet prints of a balcony and sweeping panoramas are tiled together across the sliding doors. The uneven surfaces of the kitchen cabinets ripple under the stark lighting. A close up of hands on a railing reveal corrugated cardboard and staples. It is a life-size dollhouse, a simulated digital world pulled back into reality at full-scale. Although we are inundated with images every day, this feels different. It could only be a representation of the house, never the

MOUSSE 31 ~ *Neil Beloufa*



PARIS ~ *Neil Beloufa*



MOUSSE 31 ~ Neil Beloufa

house itself. Beloufa has managed to create a new mode for us to interact with images to look them in the eye – they stand up to us, calling into question the very solidity of our physical world, and just like the actors in the film, we believe in them. This September, Beloufa showed a new film in Vancouver, *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water*. Inspired by Vancouver's claim to being "The Best Place on Earth," he asked individuals to talk about a fictional or real place. A positivist discourse emerges that at times seems innocently enthusiastic and at other times the passion and conviction verges on absurdity, forcing you to question the system at work in these interviews. The hyper-

bolic accounts piece together a modern Western utopia, characterized by sporting activities, glass towers, and delicious wine that you can drink all day but doesn't make you drunk. Between interviews we see shots of Vancouver looking picturesque and without any cars, an uncanny adult's theme park.

The installation he has created for this piece is a structure made of wood and other building materials that pulls the video out into three dimensions by separating it into layers. Multiple surfaces catch the projection and what could have been a single image becomes fragmented into a kaleidoscopic explosion of colors and light, faces and buildings. Beloufa's investigations into mimesis and myth-

making are at the heart of his practice, and his works are breeding grounds for meaning. His understanding of the problematic of digital culture, including issues of access, connectivity, and saturation, inform his thinking but do not compromise the final product, which still offers us our visual reward. He manages to strike a delicate balance by engaging with the harder questions posed by the Internet and its infinite outlets, as well as distilling a uniquely perceptive understanding of this period in time. A bit like a Duchampian Internet kid, Beloufa has recognized a moment when things could be turned upside down and hierarchies are obsolete. With a new century and new constraints, there is the possibility of an unexpected gesture.



Above – *Untitled*, installation view, "As Far As We Know," Western Front, Vancouver. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Kevin Schmidt

Opposite, top – *Documents are flat II* (detail), installation view, "Untitled (Evidence)," David Roberts Foundation,

London. Courtesy: the artist and David Roberts Foundation, London

Opposite, middle – *Untitled*, 2011. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli

Opposite, bottom and previous pages – *Untitled*, 2011, installation view, "Les Manques Contenus," Balice Hertling, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli

DI JARRETT GREGORY

Il lavoro del giovane artista francese Neil Beloufa si colloca nel crocevia di diversi media – video, installazione, scultura e fotografia – integrati in un continuum concettualmente significativo. Il formalismo, o l'uso delle nuove tecnologie, non è infatti fine a sé stesso, ma modalità compositiva utile a fornire gli strumenti per un disvelamento spiazzante e per inedite rimediazioni di questioni sociali, argomenti post-coloniali e tensioni inter-personali. Jarrett Gregory prende in esame alcuni fra i lavori video più significativi dell'artista.

Oggi, la generazione più giovane accetta completamente le condizioni imposte dal mondo digitale ricevute in eredità: ciò che appare piatto ha profondità; qualunque cosa può essere un pulsante e quindi una via d'ingresso; persino gli oggetti più piccoli possono contenere mondi su mondi al loro interno. I bambini che saranno cresciuti usando piattaforme come Skype, Twitter, Wikipedia, YouTube e Facebook, sapranno come sbloccare un iPhone prima ancora di saper mettere insieme una frase. Per la generazione più giovane, la tecnologia sarà una seconda natura inseparabile dal suo sviluppo evolutivo. Figli della mezzanotte, nati alla vigilia dell'iPad.

A mio parere, c'è un momento felice, uno stadio nella pratica dell'arte contemporanea in cui la tecnologia e la storia raggiungono un equilibrio: quando vi è una sufficiente saturazione d'informazioni tale da suscitare le domande giuste, ma non così tanta da provocare una vertigine che ti fa tremare le gambe.

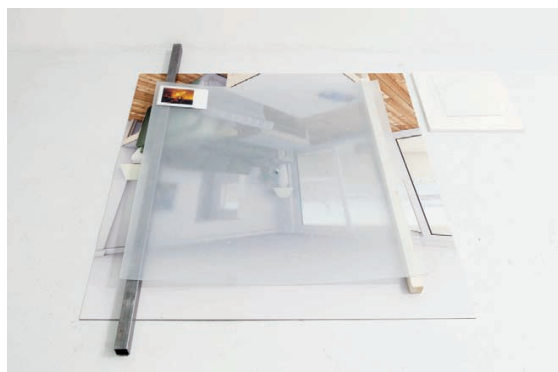
Per me, il lavoro di Neil Beloufa rivela il delicato allinearsi di domande e informazioni. Nato nel 1985, ha praticamente tutto quel che vuole a portata di mano,

PARIS ~ Neil Beloufa

ma il suo acume e una sufficiente distanza critica gli consentono di percepire gli effetti del boom del digitale. È tra gli ultimi che conosceranno il prima e il dopo dell'avvento del digitale. E, come per altri ventenni, i media digitali hanno già alterato il suo sviluppo cerebrale, facendo di lui (e di alcuni di noi) una sorta di ibrido. Per questa ragione, Beloufa – così come Ryan Trecartin – è in grado di collegare entrambi i mondi, identificando e sintetizzando nel suo lavoro le questioni significative in gioco a partire dal boom dei media digitali.

Diversamente da artisti come Cory Arcangel, che ha costruito la sua opera indagando la tecnologia principalmente a livello formale, nel lavoro di Beloufa la cultura digitale gioca un ruolo descrittivo anziché utilitaristico: è la sua cornice tematica e strutturale. Influenzati dalle piattaforme *open source* come YouTube e Wikipedia, i video di Beloufa introducono racconti che poi si perdono o si fanno oscuri. Le questioni della similitudine e della saturazione sono sempre presenti, e non vi è distinzione tra realtà e finzione, considerate come equivalenti. I suoi lavori raccontano storie che possono essere di fantasia, o forse vere, o che non possono essere neppure considerate storie, se non fosse per il fatto che impiegano un linguaggio narrativo. L'artista stratifica vari significati senza risolverli in un'unica soluzione, interrompendo un lavoro quando sembra quasi completato. Come nel regno del digitale, la progressione lineare è rimpiazzata da una liminalità permanente.

Kempinski (2007), il primo film di Beloufa a suscitare attenzione, solleva alcune delle domande che l'artista continua a chiarire e problematizzare. Incrocia il lavoro, per caso la prima volta, tra centinaia di proposte quando ero nella giuria di un concorso cinematografico nel 2007. *Kempinski*, che Beloufa completò quando aveva ventidue anni, fu concepito dall'artista dopo che ottenne una borsa di studio per realizzare un documentario in Mali. In quanto artista franco-algerino, decise di giocare sul tema delle aspettative dell'Occidente nei confronti dell'Africa, scegliendo di realizzare un film fantascientifico anziché un ritratto voyeuristico del paese africano. Chiese alla gente del posto di de-



scrivere la loro visione del futuro parlando però al presente. Beloufa è riuscito a partire da questa premessa molto elementare, la variazione del tempo verbale, per poi trasformarla nella storia di un mondo misterioso e ben definito. Un uomo maliano tiene in mano un tubo fluorescente che emette un alone di luce, e che gli illumina il volto e la maglietta. Un altro uomo si trova in mezzo a del fogliame rigoglioso. In monologhi improvvisati, questi uomini descrivono come riescano a usare la mente per comunicare con le stelle e con il bestiame. Le macchine possono parlare; tutti i materiali si eguagliano e ricoprono ruoli umani. Gli uomini fanno l'amore per via telepatica; gli edifici non hanno porte, ma vi si può accedere da qualsiasi parte. Come dice un uomo: "Tutto è magia, tutto è semplice".

Le interviste sono intervallate da campi lunghi che mostrano una torre metallica all'interno di un campo. Il ronzio dall'inquietante tonalità minore, ritmato dal frinire dei grilli, risuona nella scena. Le luci luminose in cima alla torre risplendono sull'erba in basso, in un'inquadratura dal carattere contemplativo che conferisce alla struttura una presenza antropomorfa: tale presenza, capace di raccontare a un osservatore attento la propria storia, diviene una delle protagoniste del racconto. Attraverso l'insieme di configurazioni statiche e pittoriche che costituiscono *Kempinski*, Beloufa dà prova del suo occhio eccezionale per la composizione e i contrasti, unito all'uso di tecniche collaudate del cinema fantascientifico.

Il progetto successivo di Beloufa, *Brune Renault*, gioca di nuovo con i generi cinematografici. Due adolescenti siedono in una macchina, la ragazza sul sedile posteriore si sporge fuori dal finestrino per buttar fuori una boccata di sigaretta, mentre l'attenzione del ragazzo alla guida è catturata dal riflesso di lei nello

specchietto retrovisore. I dialoghi sono contorti; discutono sui loro amici e sulla loro destinazione. La ragazza dice: "Non siamo mica già stati qui?", e il ragazzo risponde: "Ho girato a sinistra perché pensavo che mi avessi detto di andare a destra". Lei cambia rapidamente argomento. Manipolazione, dinamiche di potere e gelosie sono complesse ma evidenti. Lo stile è classico, è un dramma nel senso più generale del termine, ma è anche un giallo, che rasenta il cinema



noir per l'illuminazione buia, il fumo di sigaretta e la musica d'atmosfera. L'aria è gravida di tensione, in parte sessuale, che non fa che accentuarsi quando due altri personaggi salgono – e scendono – dalla macchina. Evoca le scene d'atmosfera e le trame sinuose, frammentate, di Michelangelo Antonioni o di David Lynch. Nei momenti di assurdità e in quelli privi di senso, il film ricorda persino *Aspettando Godot*. Se da una parte è facile farsi catturare dallo svolgimento enigmatico del dramma, dall'altra, in certi momenti, si è distratti per il fatto che risulta ovvio che l'auto non è in movimento, ma chiusa in un garage. Il bagliore delle luci e il rumore di un motore simulano il movimento, ma solo fino a un certo punto, dato che un'inquadratura esterna dell'auto riprende il retro ricoperto di nastro adesivo e le ruote immobili. Verso la fine del film – difficile



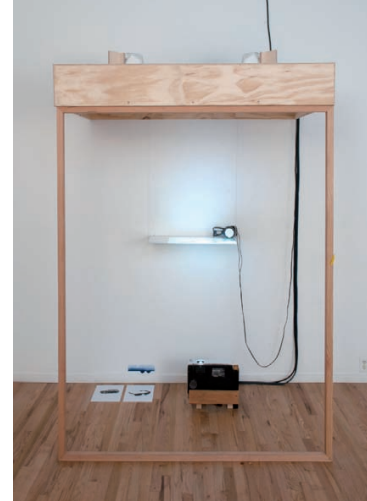
dire se lo è, dal momento che i crediti e il titolo compaiono più volte durante la narrazione – una ripresa più chiara del sedile posteriore rivela che la macchina è stata segata a metà. Nei lavori di Beloufa, ogni disvelamento è attentamente calcolato. Egli non fa distinzioni tra ciò che è vero e ciò che è falso e, in qualità di suoi spettatori, non dovremmo farle nemmeno noi.

Nel 2010, Beloufa ha realizzato *Untitled*, ambientato in Algeria e ispirato alla storia di una famiglia che era stata costretta a lasciare la propria casa per colpa del clima politico pericoloso e che, al suo ritorno, aveva scoperto che la casa era stata abitata da alcuni terroristi. L'unico oggetto rotto o mancante è un tavolo di marmo spaccato in due. *Untitled* segue le tracce degli ex residenti, oltre che di altri personaggi, i quali cercano di immaginare come dovevano aver vissuto

MOUSSE 31 ~ Neil Beloufa



Above, left – Untitled, 2011, installation view, Liste 16, Basel. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli



Above, right – Above – Untitled, installation view, "As Far As We Know," Western Front, Vancouver. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Kevin Schmidt

Below – Documents are flat II, installation view, "Untitled (Evidence)," David Roberts Foundation, London. Courtesy: the artist and David Roberts Foundation, London



Opposite, top – Untitled, 2011, installation view, "Les Manques Contenus," Balice Hertling, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli

Opposite, bottom – Untitled (Alger, modernist house), 2010. Courtesy: the artist and Galleria Zero..., Milan

PARIS ~ Neil Beloufa



i terroristi, e descrivono in che condizioni hanno trovato la casa. Spesso si chiedono, ad alta voce, perché queste persone, che cercavano di mantenere la loro posizione ignota, avrebbero scelto un rifugio con così tante finestre. La storia in sé è estremamente semplice.



In *Brune Renault*, la macchina sezionata fa simultaneamente da scultura e da palcoscenico, ma credo che in *Untitled* la questione sia ben più complessa. Qui Beloufa rappresenta la casa come una piccola meraviglia. È in parte realtà, in parte allucinazione. L'artista ha ricreato la casa con carta e cartone. Stampe a getto d'inchiostro di un balcone e vasti panorami tappezzano i pannelli scorrevoli. Le superfici irregolari delle vetrinette della cucina s'increspano sotto la cruda illuminazione. Il primo piano sulle mani appoggiate a una ringhiera rivela la presenza di cartone corrugato e graffette. Si tratta di una casa di bambola a grandezza naturale, un mondo digitale simulato riportato nella realtà a piene dimensioni. Anche se siamo sommersi ogni giorno da immagini, queste sono diverse. Può solo essere una rappresentazione della casa, mai la casa vera e propria. Beloufa è riuscito a creare un nuovo modo per farci interagire con le immagini, per fronteggiarle: esse ci rimandano il nostro sguardo, mettono in discussione la solidità stessa del nostro mondo fisico, e proprio come agli attori nel film, noi crediamo loro.

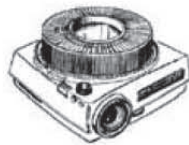
Questo settembre, Beloufa ha presentato un nuovo film a Vancouver, *People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water*. Ispirato all'affermazione secondo cui Vancouver è "Il miglior posto sulla Terra", l'artista ha chiesto ad alcuni individui di parlare di un posto reale o immaginario. Ne emerge una conversazione appassionata che, in certi momenti, pare innocentemente entusiastica, se non quando l'esaltazione e la convinzione rasentano l'assurdità, costringendo lo spettatore a porsi delle domande sulle dinamiche in gioco in queste interviste. I resoconti iperbolici vanno a comporre una moderna utopia occidentale caratterizzata da attività sportive, grattacieli di vetro e vino delizioso che si può bere tutto il giorno senza il pericolo di ubriacarsi. Tra un'intervista e l'altra, vediamo inquadrature di una Vancouver pittoresca e senza neanche una macchina, un'inquietante parco a tema per adulti.

L'installazione che l'artista ha creato per quest'opera è una struttura fatta di legno e altri materiali edilizi da cui viene proiettato il video in tre dimensioni disposto su vari livelli. La proiezione cade su diverse superfici, e quella che sarebbe potuta essere una singola immagine, si frantuma in una caleidoscopica esplosione di luce e colori, volti ed edifici.

Le indagini di Beloufa sulla mimesi e sulla mitizzazione costituiscono il fulcro del suo lavoro, e le sue opere sono terreno fertile di significati. La comprensione delle problematiche della cultura digitale, incluse le questioni dell'accesso, della connettività e della saturazione, stimola la riflessione dell'artista senza compromettere il prodotto finale, che ci offre comunque una ricompensa visiva. Beloufa riesce a raggiungere un delicato equilibrio tra le domande più ardue poste da Internet e dai suoi infiniti sviluppi, e le risposte – quelle da lui trovate – eccezionalmente acute sulla nostra epoca. Un po' come un giovane internauta duchampiano, Beloufa ha definito le coordinate di un tempo in cui si può capovolgere la realtà e le gerarchie sono obsolete. In un nuovo secolo con nuove costrizioni, c'è la possibilità di un gesto inaspettato.

MOUSSE 20 ~ Mariana Castillo Deball

SLIDESHOW Neil Beloufa with Andrew Berardini



{ English }

Andrew Berardini tried something new. The artist interview is generally a form controlled by the interviewer. The artist can ignore questions, discourse, lie, but in the end the form is not controlled by the artist....

ANDREW BERARDINI — When artists are sometimes invited to do talks at museums or art schools, they're expected to give a slide show of their projects and to talk about them. In that circumstance, the artist is fully the authority and in control of the dialogue, even if the students revolt, hate the work, accuse the artist of this aesthetic crime or that philosophical misdemeanor, the artist is still sitting behind the table or lectern with a clicker in their hand or a laptop like a shield to protect them. In setting up this piece with Neil Beloufa, I wanted to try and set something up between an interview and a presentation. The artist picks the images, some of his work, some images from other places, and thus the artist creates the architecture and limits of the dialogue. Then it's my turn to challenge, discuss, accuse, joke, about the chosen images. It's a duel, a dialogue, a repartee, something better than an interview: a slideshow.

One recent project by Beloufa, *Kempinski*, 2007, is a series of interviews with Malian men in a dark jungle night, their faces lit with handheld otherworldly seeming lights. The men speak of the future in the present tense. A simple premise to be sure, but one that opens up all kinds of ambiguities and sites of potential meaning. The men's responses have the flavor of the sci-fi future but one refracted through their individual cultural experiences and visions. The installation where *Kempinski* was shown in Los Angeles subtly undercut the grand gesture of the video, making it less a slick production and more like an experiment in aesthetics. For this slideshow, Beloufa chose some images of his own work, and some from a multitude of other places.

1

NEIL BELOUFA — First of all a quote relating to the interview :

The chicken is the artifice that an Egg uses to produce a new Egg.

(Umberto Eco)

{ fig 1 }

What this image actually is what I want this image to be are probably different? I want this image to be an alien attack at a football match? It's probably just a publicity/firework show or something? Without context though it looks pretty apocalyptic.

I actually don't know what this really is. All I know is that it is a picture of The Stadium of the 5th of July in Algiers. I kind of know that it is a soccer match. But I chose it for its phantasmagoric potential to replace an event that occurred there and that lacks documentations. Algeria, 1992: a political religious organization called FIS (Front Islamic du Salut) is about to win the presidential elections with a simple slogan: "A vote for the FIS, is a vote for God". The military and the government cancelled the elections. Two years prior to this, in 1990, during a FIS political meeting the word "Allah" appeared in the sky in front of an astonished crowd of 12,000

• fig.1 - FIS's founders disagreed (and disagree) on a variety of points, but agreed on the core objective of establishing an Islamic State ruled by sharia law. FIS hurriedly assembled a platform in 1989, the *Projet de Programme du Front Islamique du Salut*, which was widely criticized as vague. Following the first National Assembly ballot, it issued a second pamphlet. Economically, it strongly criticized Algeria's planned economy, urging the need to "protect the private sector" and encourage competition - earning it support from traders and small businessmen - and urged the establishment of Islamic banking (i.e. interest-free banking.) • fig.2 - The first title imagined by Kubrick and Clarke was *Journey Beyond the Stars*, but Kubrick modified it later. Having the intention to give the film more pomp and grandeur, he used Homer's *The Odyssey* as inspiration to name the film.



Fig.1



Stanley Kubrick



Fig.2

MOUSSE 20 ~ Nome Artista

{ Italiana }

Proviamo a fare qualcosa di nuovo. Quando si intervista un artista, di solito, è l'intervistatore ad avere il controllo. L'artista può ignorare le domande, dissertare, può anche mentire, ma alla fine non è lui il padrone della situazione...

ANDREW BERARDINI — Quando, talvolta, gli artisti vengono invitati a parlare nei musei o negli istituti d'arte, ci si aspetta che, attraverso l'uso di diapositive, mostrino una panoramica dei loro progetti e illustrandoli. In tale circostanza è l'artista il padrone assoluto della situazione ed è lui a controllare il dialogo: anche se gli studenti si ribellano, detestano le sue opere, lo accusano di crimini contro l'estetica o di trasgressioni filosofiche, l'artista continua a restare seduto dietro il tavolo o dietro il leggio, con un interruttore in mano o con un computer portatile a fargli da scudo protettivo. Preparando questo pezzo con Neil Beloufa, mi sono proposto di sperimentare una via di mezzo tra un'intervista e una presentazione. È l'artista a scegliere le immagini, alcune delle sue opere, altre provenienti da altri luoghi, e così è lui a stabilire l'architettura e i confini della conversazione. Poi, in base alle immagini scelte, tocca a me provocare, discutere, accusare e scherzare. È come un duello, un dialogo, un botta e risposta, qualcosa di meglio rispetto a un'intervista: uno slideshow, una presentazione di diapositive.

Un progetto recente di Beloufa, Kempinski, del 2007, è formato da una serie di interviste a uomini del Mali, condotte nella giungla, in una notte buia; i volti sono illuminati da luci, tenute in mano, che conferiscono loro un aspetto soprannaturale. Gli uomini parlano del futuro, usando il tempo presente. Una premessa semplice, indubbiamente, che apre però la strada a ogni genere di ambiguità e a ogni potenziale livello interpretativo. Le risposte degli uomini hanno il sapore di un futuro fantascientifico, benché rifratto attraverso le rispettive visioni ed esperienze culturali. L'installazione, nell'ambito della quale Kempinski era inserito, a Los Angeles, riduceva in maniera sottile la grandiosità del gesto del video, facendo dell'opera più un esperimento estetico che una produzione impeccabile. Per questa presentazione, Beloufa ha scelto alcune immagini delle proprie opere e altre provenienti da un gran numero di luoghi diversi.

¶

NEIL BELOUFA — Innanzitutto una citazione relativa all'intervista:



Il pollo è un artificio che un nuovo adotta per produrre un altro nuovo.

(Umberto Eco)

{ fig 1 }

Ciò che l'immagine è realmente, è forse diverso da ciò che io voglio che sia? Voglio che quest'immagine rappresenti un attacco alieno durante una partita di calcio? Forse si tratta solo di uno spettacolo pubblicitario con i fuochi d'artificio o qualcosa del genere? Senza contesto, però, l'atmosfera è decisamente apocalittica.

In realtà non so di cosa si tratti esattamente. Tutto ciò che so è che è un'immagine dello stadio di Algeri del 5 luglio. So che si tratta di una partita di calcio, ma la ragione per cui l'ho scelta è per il suo potenziale fantasmagorico di rappresentare un evento accaduto in quel luogo, e di cui manca qualsiasi documentazione. Algeria, 1992: un'organizzazione politico-religiosa chiamata FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) stava per vincere le elezioni presidenziali, con un semplice slogan: "Un voto per FIS è un voto per Dio". L'esercito e il governo cancellarono le elezioni. Due anni prima, nel 1990, la parola "Allah" era apparsa in cielo, davanti a una folla attonita di 12.000 persone, durante un congresso del FIS. Per alcuni questo era stato il segno evidente che Dio fosse dalla parte del FIS. Gli osservatori dissero che si trattava di un trucco ottenuto con luci laser, un semplice artificio usato dai nightclub e nei film di fantascienza. Per scoprire l'inganno, il governo organizzò, poco dopo, uno spettacolo coi laser nel porto di Algeri, che però fu considerato esattamente per quel che era: uno spettacolo con i laser. Sono assolutamente affascinato da questi tipi di connessioni con gli artifici. Come e per cosa sono presi; come qualcosa che è palesemente un'opera dell'uomo acquisisca una sorta di autorevolezza mistica; credo di stabilire una specie di analogia tra i vari tipi di fede negli idoli o nelle icone della vita reale o, in questo caso, tra l'effetto speciale e il fatto che lo consideriamo un'opera d'arte e non più un semplice oggetto funzionale (lo stesso vale per la documentazione della finzione e l'annullamento dell'effetto di incredulità).

{ fig 2 }

Space Odyssey (Odissea nello spazio). Questa la riconosco, è la scena in cui l'osso si trasforma in astronave. Nelle lezioni di scrittura ti dicono di non iniziare mai dal principio. Mai iniziare un racconto, e in particolare un romanzo, dagli albori dell'esperienza umana, il che significa che, a Kubrick, è servito molto coraggio per compiere un gesto così grandioso e capace di racchiudere tutto. So che hai prodotto alcune opere su 2001 Odissea nello spazio...

Questa è certamente una delle più grandi ellissi della storia del cinema, compiuta con un movimento incredibilmente preciso. È come un riassunto della storia dell'umanità in due parti: la scoperta da parte dell'uomo degli strumenti e degli artifici; gli artifici, poi, prendono il sopravvento sugli umani, prima che scoprano l'origine della vita e della fede. Ritengo che qui Kubrick abbia postulato un assioma importantissimo. Tanto più che l'oggetto d'adorazione o delle origini è un monolite nero: una scultura minimalista essenziale.

{ fig 3 }

Mi piace quest'immagine. A parte le questioni relative alla crudeltà sugli animali (si tratta di un cartone animato, dopotutto), vorrei che l'arte le somigliasse e che fosse così: ciò che sembra un'opera d'arte statica può rapidamente trasformarsi in qualcosa di molto vivo e potenzialmente incalzato, con capacità di azione (e ci auspichiamo, come in questo caso, con un po' di senso dell'umorismo).

È buffo, mi hai appena fatto capire perché ho scelto quest'immagine. Quando ho scelto questa figura del cartone animato non mi sono reso conto che si trattava di un oggetto statico che prendeva vita, cosa che ha assolutamente senso ai fini della mia presentazione e, in un certo senso, del mio lavoro. Mi piace l'idea di disporre di un oggetto, o di una scultura, il cui stato sia instabile, mutevole. In effetti pensavo di aver scelto quest'immagine casualmente, anche se è stata selezionata tra 20 cartoni animati. L'unica cosa che sembrava avermi colpito subito - motivo dell'inserimento nella selezione di un cartone di Tex Avery - era che il modo in cui i cartoni erano realizzati nel XX secolo poteva creare connivenza tra spettatori e azione animata. Quel che m'interessa è che, all'epoca, i cartoni animati erano disegnati su livelli diversi, separati dallo sfondo. Così facendo, gli elementi che devono essere animati nell'immagine risultano più marcati (tratto più spesso e nero). Per i bambini è facile individuare quelle linee, così s'inizia a capire quello che sta per accadere prima che accada effettivamente.

• fig.1 - FIS's founders disagreed (and disagree) on a variety of points, but agreed on the core objective of establishing an Islamic State ruled by sharia law. FIS hurriedly assembled a platform in 1989, the *Projet de Programme du Front Islamique du Salut*, which was widely criticized as vague. Following the first National Assembly ballot, it issued a second pamphlet. Economically, it strongly criticized Algeria's planned economy, urging the need to "protect the private sector" and encourage competition - earning it support from traders and small businessmen - and urged the establishment of Islamic banking (i.e. interest-free banking). • fig.2 - The first title imagined by Kubrick and Clarke was *Journey Beyond the Stars*, but Kubrick modified it later. Having the intention to give the film more pomp and grandeur, he used Homer's *The Odyssey* as inspiration to name the film.

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English

people. For some people it was taken as a sign that God was on the side of FIS. Observers said that this occurrence was a simple trick made by lasers, a basic artifice in nightclubs and sci-fi movies. In order to uncover this deception, the government organized a laser show soon after in Algiers' port, which was then simply taken for what it was: a laser show. I'm really fascinated by these kinds of connections to artifices. How, and what it's taken for; how something obviously made by man acquires a kind of mystical authority; I think I do a kind of analogy between those kind of real life belief in idols or icons or here special effect and the fact that we consider a piece of art a piece of art and not anymore a simple functional object (same for documents to fiction through suspension of disbelief).

{ fig 2 }

Space Odyssey. I can recognize this one, where the bone became the spaceship. In writing classes they tell you to never start at the beginning. Never start a story or novel especially at the dawn of human experience, which is to say it took a lot of balls for Kubrick to make such a grand and all encompassing gesture. I know you did some work on *Space Odyssey*...

This is certainly one of the biggest ellipses in cinema history through an incredibly fitting movement. It's like a sum-up of human history in two steps: man's discovery of tools and artifices then artifices take over humans before humans discover the origin of life and belief. I think it's a really important axiom that Kubrick puts here. More over the object of belief or origins is a black monolith – a basic minimalist sculpture.

{ fig 3 }

I love this picture. Animal cruelty issues aside (it is a cartoon after all), I wish that art was more like this more of the time, what you think is a static art object can very quickly turn into something very much alive and potentially pissed off, something with agency (and like this picture, hopefully a little humor).

It's funny, you've just made me understand why I chose this picture. When I captured this image in the cartoon, I didn't realize that it was a static object that took life, which totally make sense in the slideshow and in a way in my work. I kind of like the idea of having an object or sculpture whose status is unstable, shifting. In fact, I thought I chose this image randomly even if it was out of 20 cartoons. The only thing that seemed to interest me at first sight and that was my motivation to have a Tex Avery cartoon in the selection was the fact that the way cartoons were made back in the twentieth century had the potential to create connivance with the spectators and the gesture of the animation. What interests me here is that, in those time cartoons were drawn on different layers separated from the background. Doing so the elements that are going to be animated in the image are overlined (more bold, more black). When you are a child it's easy to detect those lines and you start to see what's going to happen before it happens. In that case, in the first image you see the green door and the moose head are outlined so something is going to happen soon here (which happen to be "life" in that case). So as a viewer, you are a medium like somebody that can read the future before it happens. You can be a medium through a connivance with the gestures of the drawers as well as the whole cartoon itself. You don't care anymore about the normal scenario; you simply look at that element which is going to move. There is no surprise anymore and instead of following what is said to hide the surprise, you wait for this parallel line. In a way, what's important at that point is the viewers' relationship to the cartoon and not the cartoon itself. It's like a virtual climax in real life. We can maybe link that to Artaud's notion of Subjectile (through Derrida, between the frame and the viewer). It's also interesting because you know how it's made; it's cartoon like you say. And the artifice, doesn't even work, you can see that mistake (bold drawing) but you still look at it. Suspension of disbelief in real life. I can connect that to the Algiers event.



Tex Avery



• fig.3 - Frederick Bean "Fred/Tex" Avery (February 26, 1908 – August 26, 1980) was an American animator, cartoonist, voice actor and director, famous for producing animated cartoons during The Golden Age of Hollywood animation. He did his most significant work for the Warner Bros. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, creating the characters of Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Droopy, Screwly Squirrel, and developing Porky Pig and Chilly Willy (this last one for the Walter Lantz Studio) into regular cartoon characters. His influence was found in almost all of the animated cartoon series by various studios in the 1940s and 1950s. • fig.4 - kempinski with the game rule (the futur in present tense) that serve in the same way (under cover)



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

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Italiano

tivamente. Nel caso di quell'immagine si vede che la porta verde e la testa dell'alce sono più marcate, perciò s'intuisce che presto succederà qualcosa (in quel caso specifico, l'oggetto prende vita). Così lo spettatore diventa un medium, come chi sa prevedere il futuro prima che si realizzi. È possibile essere medium attraverso una connivenza con i movimenti dei disegnatori, come con tutto il cartone animato nel suo insieme. Non si è più interessati al normale scenario; si guarda semplicemente l'elemento che sta per muoversi. Non c'è più alcuna sorpresa e invece di seguire ciò che dovrebbe nascondere la sorpresa, si attendono gli sviluppi di questa linea parallela. In un certo senso, ciò che è importante, a questo punto, è la relazione tra lo spettatore e il cartone animato, non il cartone in sé. È come un climax virtuale nella vita reale. Possiamo forse collegarlo alla nozione di "subjectile" di Artaud (attraverso Derrida, tra la cornice e l'osservatore). È interessante anche perché si sa com'è fatto; è un cartone animato, per l'appunto. E l'artificio nemmeno funziona: si è in grado di capire l'errore (il disegno marcato), ma si resta a guardare. La sospensione dell'incredulità nella vita reale. Posso mettere la cosa in relazione con l'evento di Algeri.

{ fig 4 }

Okay, conosco bene quest'immagine. Anche questa appartiene al tuo video Kempinski. Sebbene alcune immagini possano avere un contenuto più poetico di altre, so di poter collegare questa a Space Odyssey. Tra le cose che hai detto sul tuo lavoro, quella che preferisco è la definizione coscientemente auto-contraddittoria di "documentario etnologico di fantascienza". Per quanto falsa possa essere la visione occidentale dell'Africa come primitiva, i Malinesi che hai intervistato hanno una concezione del futuro profondamente radicata nella loro cultura, ma non meno visionaria del nostro Star Wars e delle pistole laser. Ho sempre pensato a Kempinski, per quanto riflessivo, strano o costruito, come a un'opera profondamente collegata a una certa realtà.

Ciò che m'interessava in quell'opera era l'eliminazione totale di qualunque soggetto e il fatto di lasciare il finale ancor più che aperto, poiché non vi è un reale significato. Quello che dicono i protagonisti non ha nulla a che fare con la politica, eppure si potrebbe pensare che sia così. Il gesto è un errore grammaticale che offusca le nozioni di documentazione e di finzione della temporalità. Le persone dovevano parlare del futuro usando il tempo presente. Era una regola del gioco scherzosa, che poneva lo spettatore occidentale, e le sue aspettative, in una situazione strana. Qui bisogna riconsiderare le immagini perché non è possibile seguire il filo del discorso: un ragazzo dice che sua moglie è una mucca. Sappiamo che ciò non è possibile, ma il tutto è totalmente improvvisato e reale. Si gioca anche con l'esotismo, sfruttando la mia posizione intermedia: sono un osservatore occidentale (ho studiato e vissuto in paesi occidentali), ma sono anche un algerino, un figlio della colonia. In un certo senso, non si tratta di un'opera paternalista, tuttavia il punto di osservazione è esterno. Qui ritroviamo di nuovo un gioco di connivenza con artifici palesi, poiché nulla è nascosto, sebbene avvenga qualcosa che non è possibile definire. Questa pellicola fantascientifica ha rappresentato un passo importante per il mio lavoro. Il primo giorno delle riprese si è rotto l'impianto d'illuminazione, così abbiamo acquistato dei neon insieme a prolunghe di quaranta metri. Le persone che compaiono in Kempinski tengono le luci in mano con il solo obiettivo pratico di illuminare il proprio viso ma, in quel contesto, quegli oggetti semplicemente funzionali hanno iniziato ad assomigliare a fantascientifiche spade al laser, pur conservando la loro utilità pratica. Penso che sia questa l'origine della mia ossessione per lo status degli oggetti, delle sculture.

{ fig 5 }

Come per l'immagine dello stadio, credo di sapere cosa accade qui, ma vorrei che, in effetti, si trattasse di qualcos'altro. So che è un aereo JetBlue che ha dei problemi nell'atterraggio, ma preferirei che fosse una navicella spaziale che decolla. Non voglio evitare le realtà spiacevoli, tuttavia eviterei le conclusioni più banali. Le immagini possono essere potenti e ambigue, se non ne stabiliamo precipitosamente il significato. Se conserviamo un approccio sufficientemente fantasioso, in quest'immagine possono accadere molte più cose di quelle che vorrebbe la conclusione normale.

L'aneddoto legato a quest'immagine è perfino più banale. Il 2 settembre 2005, un A320 della JetBlue lascia l'aeroporto di Burbank per raggiungere New York. Appena effettuato il decollo, il pilota si accorge che il carrello è rotto e che non sarà possibile atterrare. Alla ricerca di una soluzione, il pilota decide quindi di non andare a New York,

• fig. 3 - Frederick Bean "Fred/Tex" Avery (February 26, 1908 – August 26, 1980) was an American animator, cartoonist, voice actor and director, famous for producing animated cartoons during The Golden Age of Hollywood animation. He did his most significant work for the Warner Bros. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios, creating the characters of Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Droopy, Screwy Squirrel, and developing Porky Pig and Chilly Willy (this last one for the Walter Lantz Studio) into regular cartoon characters. His influence was found in almost all of the animated cartoon series by various studios in the 1940s and 1950s. • fig. 4 - kempinski with the game rule (the futur in present tense) that serve in the same way (under cover)

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{ fig 4 }

Okay, this image I know well. It's a still from your video *Kempinski*. Though some of the images may be a more poetical reach than others, this one I know I can connect back to Space Odyssey. My favorite thing you ever said about your work was the consciously self-contradictory "sci-fi ethnological documentary." However false the West's primitive view of Africa, the Malians that you interview have a vision of the future that's very specific to the culture but no less visionary than our Star Wars and laser guns. However sci-fi, I always thought of *Kempinski*, however thoughtful, strange, or constructed, as fully grounded in a kind of reality.

What interested me in that work was to strike out of any subject and make it more than open-ended as there is no real meaning. What they say has nothing to do with politics, but it still could be seen as it. The gesture is a grammar mistake that blurs notions of temporality fiction and documentation. People had to speak about the future in the present tense. It was a playful game rule that put the Western viewer and his expectations in a strange situation. Here we have to reconsider the images because we can't follow it: a guy says that his wife is a cow. You know it can't be possible, but it is totally unscripted and real. It also plays on exoticism through my position as in-between: I'm a Western viewer (studied and lived in Western countries) and also an Algerian, son of the colony. In a way, this work is not paternalist but still looks from an external point of view. Here again there is a game with a connivance with open artifices, as nothing is hidden but something that we can't define is still produced. This sci-fi film was also a great step for my work. When we were shooting it, the lightning broke the first day so we bought neon lights with forty meter extension cords. People in *Kempinski* hold them in their hands for the practical purpose of lighting their faces, but those known functional objects start to look like laser sci-fi swords in that context, while still being functional. I think that's where my obsession with objects/ sculptures status came from.

{ fig 5 }

Like the stadium picture, I sort of know what's going on here, but I wish it were actually something else. I know it's a JetBlue plane having some troubles landing, but I wish that it were a rocketship taking off. It's no that I wish to avoid ugly realities, but more banal conclusions. Images can be potent and ambiguous if we don't close off meaning so quickly. If we look imaginatively enough, many things could be happening in this picture rather than the quotidian conclusion.

The anecdote of this image is even more banal. On September 2, 2005, this A320 from JetBlue left Burbank airport to New York. As soon as they left the earth, the pilot figured out that the undercarriage was broken and that they wouldn't be able to land. The pilot decided not to go to New York to find a solution to land now so he circled LA for 3 hours. The plane had CNN Live on there seat monitors and special reporters where covering the event from the floor basically explaining to the passengers via TV that they were going to die. Nobody panicked inside, people were fascinated by there images and where happy to see in live all those specialist explaining how they could survive. The pilot finally figured out a way to land. He emptied his fuel supply in the ocean and shut down the TV monitors to try his last chance landing. When he shut down the TV's people started to be scared whereas paradoxically the pilot had the solution to salvation. They finally survived. But when they interviewed the passengers, they said that it wasn't scary at all while they saw the images of the plane in the outside but that they panicked when it was turned off. It's interesting because I think I would have felt the same way: safe with my image and with information and scared alone in the dark of the TV screen; actually they said they thought the pilot wanted to hide them their deaths. In a way, they preferred to die "live on TV" more than survive without their representation. This big hyper-real simulacra is really interesting in relation to how a document and a mask of representation has the power of survival.

{ fig 6 }

This I recognize as well. This is the installation of your most recent solo at François Ghebaly. I remember watching you guys run around going crazy during the installation. There are a whole helluva lot of ideas going on here. At first, I thought there were too many ideas in one space, but I've seen it now maybe ten times, and each time it offers something new for me. Tell me about what's going on in this installation?

As video is most of the time pretty authoritarian and that in my case we often see that it is "The Piece" people show stills of them and rarely the installations so, here, I chose the picture that hides the video and shows the installation. In this show, I wanted to reconfigure some works in the context of this exhibition that was the San Andreas fault. Everything is undercut to move the issues of the works to their gestures and not anymore to what is shown in it (*Kempinski* is the hidden video). From everywhere in the exhibit, the audio of different videos blends and creates a sea of sounds, ruled by the minimal rhythm of a metronome "Tectonique," itself an assembly of wood and grass rising and falling before a speaker that compresses air, causing paper to shudder and snap in its current. This sculpture maybe never existed, but starts to be a sculpture again through a document. The effects of it sounds through the subwoofer make this model have an effect in real life. The pedestals are in cheap wood but spackle gradients hide the sides of each panel to simulate them as a one shape. The greenscreen formworks hide what shouldn't be seen in the space making it more visible as sculptures but in cinema that encrustation green would make it digitally removable and thus make it disappear.

So how did you like the slide show?

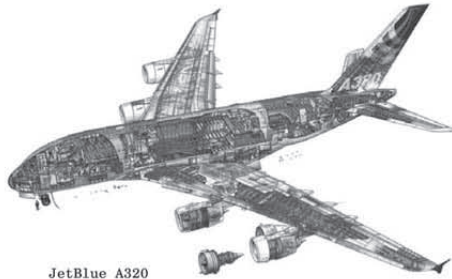
I enjoyed it. But there problem is, now I'm responsible!

* fig. 5 - JetBlue Airways is an American low-cost airline owned by JetBlue Airways Corporation (NASDAQ: JBLU). The company is headquartered in the Forest Hills neighborhood of the New York City borough of Queens. Its main base is John F. Kennedy International Airport, also in Queens.

* fig. 6 - Niel Beloufa

MOUSSE 20 ~ Nome Artista

Italiano



JetBlue A320

ma sorvola Los Angeles per 3 ore. I monitor delle poltrone trasmettono CNN Live e gli inviati speciali stanno coprendo l'evento da terra, spiegando di fatto ai passeggeri, attraverso la televisione, che stanno per morire. A bordo, nessuno si fa prendere dal panico: la gente è affascinata dalle immagini ed è contenta di vedere dal vivo tutti quegli esperti che spiegano come sarebbe possibile sopravvivere. Alla fine il pilota trova il modo di atterrare. Svuota i serbatoi del carburante sull'oceano e spegne gli schermi televisivi per sfruttare l'ultima possibilità di atterraggio. Quando spegne gli schermi, i passeggeri iniziano ad avere paura, proprio nel momento in cui, paradossalmente, il pilota ha trovato il modo per salvarli. Alla fine sopravvivono. Ma, quando vengono intervistati, i passeggeri dichiarano di non aver avuto paura finché hanno visto le immagini esterne dell'aereo: il panico è giunto con lo spegnimento della televisione. È interessante perché penso che anch'io mi sarei sentito allo stesso modo: al sicuro con la mia immagine e con le informazioni, spaventato da solo e con la TV spenta; in effetti hanno detto di aver pensato che il pilota volesse nascondere loro il momento della morte. In un certo senso preferivano morire "in TV dal vivo" anziché sopravvivere senza rappresentazione. Questo grande simulacro iperale è davvero interessante per osservare come la forza della sopravvivenza sia affidata a un documento e a una maschera della rappresentazione.

{ fig 6 }

Riconosco anche quest'opera. È l'installazione della tua personale più recente, da François Ghebaly. Ricordo di aver visto voi giovani correre come matti durante l'installazione. Qui ci sono un sacco d'idee che prendono forma. All'inizio ho pensato che ce ne fossero troppe nello stesso spazio, ma ormai ho visto l'opera almeno dieci volte, e ogni volta mi rendo conto che sa offrirmi qualcosa di nuovo. Dimmi, cosa succede in quest'installazione?

Poiché il video, la maggior parte delle volte, è molto autoritario e, nel mio caso, viene considerato come "l'Opera", le persone mostrano spesso i fotogrammi dei miei video e raramente le installazioni per intero. Questa volta, quindi, ho scelto l'immagine che nasconde il video e che mostra l'installazione. In questa mostra volevo riconfigurare alcune opere nel contesto di questa esposizione che era la faglia di Sant'Andrea. Ogni cosa è tagliata in modo da spostare l'interesse per le opere sui gesti e non più su quanto vi viene mostrato (Kempinski è il video nascosto). Da ogni angolo dell'esposizione giunge l'audio di diversi video che, mescolandosi, creano un mare di suoni regolati dal ritmo minimo di un metronomo "Techtonique", esso stesso un assemblaggio di legno ed erba che, salendo e scendendo davanti a un altoparlante che comprime l'aria, crea una corrente che fa vibrare e schiacciare la carta. Forse questa scultura non è mai esistita, ma inizia a essere di nuovo una scultura grazie a un documento. Gli effetti prodotti dai suoni attraverso il subwoofer permettono a questo modello di avere un effetto sulla vita reale. I piedistalli sono in legno economico, ma l'intonaco sulle superfici verticali nasconde i lati di ciascun pannello, per fare in modo che la base sembri formata da un unico pezzo. Le casseforme a schermo verde nascondono le cose presenti nello spazio che non dovrebbero essere viste, rendendole di fatto più evidenti in qualità di sculture, anche se, nel cinema, quel rivestimento verde permetterebbe di eliminarle in modo digitale, facendole scomparire.

Allora, ti è piaciuto lo slideshow?

Sì, mi sono divertito. Ma il problema è che ora ne sono responsabile!



Fig. 6



• fig. 5 - JetBlue Airways is an American low-cost airline owned by JetBlue Airways Corporation (NASDAQ: JBLU). The company is headquartered in the Forest Hills neighborhood of the New York City borough of Queens. Its main base is John F. Kennedy International Airport, also in Queens.
• fig. 6 - Niel Beloufa

ARTFORUM

Neil Beloufa

Neil Beloufa seems fascinated by the sympathetic vibrations between opposing forces, and his recent solo exhibition at François Ghebaly Gallery (formerly Chung King Project) demonstrated his precise ability to let dichotomies collide. Only twenty-five years old, the French artist has already produced a small but compelling body of work that includes sculpture, video, installation, and conceptual photography, all of which were on view in 'Tectonic Plates or the Jurisdiction of Shapes.' As the title suggests, this show - with some pieces adapted or repurposed from earlier sculptures and installations for a 'site-specific' exhibition in seismically active Los Angeles - lingered on the shaky common ground between reality and fiction, cause and effect, presence and absence, and surface versus framework.

Entered the darkened gallery, one first encountered *Tectonic L.A.*, 2009, two stout plywood-and-Plexiglas structures resting on short wooden platforms; these plinths, placed some two feet apart, were connected by a bundle of AV cables and electrical cords running along the floor. One construction housed a video projector; the other, a hanging sheet of paper (the projection surface) and two robust speakers. The video depicted Beloufa's sculpture *Tectonique*, 2007-2008, a hinged and motorized wooden platform covered in sod that perpetually undulated from flat to peaked. Each time the sculpture in the looped video moved toward the ground, a deep tone would resonate through the speakers, causing the paper screen to tremble.

The possible meaning (or non-meaning) of the quasi-kinetic *Tectonic L.A.* remains open; that is, the work is less about a formal or conceptual interpretation than about the viewer's experience with or perception of, say, a moving image on a vibrating screen. Perceptual experience was also the subject of 2007, *April the 2nd*. For this video, which played on a small flat-screen monitor near the gallery office, Beloufa placed a large white monolith in the middle of a Parisian street and then recorded the reactions of drivers and passersby as they encountered the mysterious roadblock. At times, the object is digitally removed from the shot or inserted into frames where it was originally absent, so that the public seems either to react to an invisible field or to be oblivious to the conspicuously out-of-place form. The video imbues the green-screen paint applied unobtrusively throughout the gallery installation with eerie significance, suggesting that if the room were to be videotaped, a different reality might one day be introduced to the scene.

Just as Beloufa represents and undermines *presence* in his artwork, he uncannily conflates *presence* with *the present*, or rather, linear constructions of time; and while this may sound like an abstract possibility, his poetic, twelve-minute video *Kempinski*, 2007 - a strong focal point of the exhibition - achieved such a fusion. The video, which was shot in Mali and has already won a number of awards on the independent film circuit, features Malian men earnestly describing a fantastical world in which domesticated animals comprise civilized society, machines and tools behave like humans, sex occurs telepathically, and unique geographies are able to travel from continent to continent. Without knowing the premise of the work - that each man in speaking of an imagined

future in the present tense - these stories seem surreal, unsettling, and indistinctly political. The fantasies and hopes of each individual are put forth as real, but the phrase 'the future is present tense' written in reverse on an adjacent wall, confuses the terms. This and every other carefully planned aspect of the exhibition revealed Beloufa's thorough consideration of both the artwork and the viewer, a skilled balancing act of object and subject - and an impressive feat for an emerging artist.

-- Catherine Taft



Neil Beloufa.
Tectonic L.A., 2009.
mixed media.
Installation view.