

2. KIRSTINE ROEPSTORFF & MATYÁŠ CHOCHOLA SIDE STEP: NADIM ABBAS

Opening: 08.12.17 17:30–20:00

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The many shades of darkness are the topics at hand in Last Tango's latest curatorial pairing between Kirstine Roepstorff and Matyáš Chochola. An urge to find truth and solace in darkness is the shared sentiment. Denmark's representative at the Venice Biennale this year, Roepstorff and laureate of the Jindřich Chaloupecký Award, Chochola come together to exhibit new and older works consisting of paintings, sculptures, mobiles, and installations. Sympathetic to the Tibetan schools of mysticism and recent quantum theories, two aesthetic voices create a pensive vibe that is as gloriously spiritual as it is powerful.

Kirstine Roepstorff (b. 1972, Virum, Denmark, lives and works in Fredericia) is a visual artist who studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen from 1994–2001 and Rutgers University, Mason School of Fine Art (MFA), USA (2000). Roepstorff represented Denmark at the Venice Art Biennale 2017 with an exhibition entitled *influenza. theatre of glowing darkness*. Solo and group exhibitions include: *Rehearsing Volume*, Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen, (2016), *MMXV*, Svit, Prague (2015), and *Dried Dew Drops. Wunderkammer of Formlessness*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, CH (2010). In June 2018 she will have a solo exhibition at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen. Her work is included in the permanent collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Saatchi Gallery, London; National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo; National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen.

KIRSTINE ROEPSTORFF

One hand reaching into darkness. One hand retrieving its fruit.

Roepstorff's recent immersive intervention at the Danish pavilion during the 2017 Venice Biennale saw the site transformed into a theatre of renaissance. Therein she explored darkness as a positive force of strength and rebirth, through a story of recreation. The release aptly set the tone: "Darkness dissolves form and can be seen as the void out of which all things arise." And as we know it before the break of dawn is darkness, seeds germinate in pitch dark... In Roepstorff's insight into darkness there is a similitude to the ideas of 17th century astrologer, mathematician and cosmologist Robert Fludd. In his drawings he tried to conjure what existed prior to the creation of the universe, and what he defined as a "pre-universe." One of such illustrations was of a black square. Its formlessness was key in understanding the concept. It was ultimately depicting the formless realm that is all encompassing.

At the root of Roepstorff's work is an acute awareness of balance in its diversity of meanings and ramifications: from the disturbances in the balance of power in today's world, to the human condition with principles of equilibrium in the mind-body as informed by Eastern philosophical traditions. Roepstorff calls her mobiles "Timbre People" [*Klangmenschen*]: "We're some kind of vibrational beings that are walking around, sometimes in unison, sometimes not. Whether we are able to go in harmony with our surroundings is very much about how our own inner sound is tuned."

Widely recognized for her early large-scale collages her juxtapositions of fragments hijack our visual culture into new imaginations. Often marked by assemblages of Xeroxed print media or direct cuttings, the collages, many times with images or text related to socio-political events, encompass materials such as fabrics, paper, brass and wood and paper. Roepstorff increasingly places attention on the spaces in between, cracks and breaks with prospect, or openings of potential.

Following a more abstract vein are Roepstorff's mobiles, "brass" paintings and "waterings." The mobiles hint at ritual and mythical dimension, hovering macrocosms and microcosms. Algebraic in their language and with pure forms reminiscent of elements and creatures such as water, the sun, the two-legged, they are a model of wholeness. Attached as pendulums the structures are themselves reliant on the principle of balance.

The “brass” paintings point to a musical orientation in the composition, rhythmic with their linear delineations and acoustic with the vibrational characteristic of brass.

Roepstorff's “waterings” bear traces of the labour that went into them. A small amount of pigment is mixed with volumes of water and is applied onto the canvas; a layered process that is repeated and which can take months in its production. In this veil of shadows and translucent sedimentations of murkiness we come to experience a delightful instability of interpretation, but also the shiftingness of memory, almost as a direct reflection of the process.

Matyas Chochola (b. 1986, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic, lives and works in Prague) studied at the Academy of fine arts in Prague from 2008-2014 and later at the Universität der Künste in Berlin. In 2016 he won the Jindřich Chalupecký Award, and in 2012, he received the Václav Chad Award at the 6th Zlín Youth Salon. In 2015 he was selected to participate in Manifesta 11 in Zurich with a new commission. Within the last couple of years he has exhibited at National Gallery in Prague (2016), Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2017) and Grimmuseum, Berlin (2015). He is featured in the collection of FAIT Gallery, Prague and the J&T Bank Collection, Prague.

MATYÁŠ CHOCHOLA

Big Bang Style

An artist trained in sculpture, Chochola feels close to former post-modern designers such as the Atika group in Prague whose Post-industrial aesthetics crossed Czech folk and saw the light of day in the 80s.

Chochola seeks to trigger a connection to something larger and to transport us into a cosmic dimension. Chochola sees that through art there is a possibility to create “new bonds between the contemporary world and ancient rituals.” Ancient rituals reveal some very powerful truths about how we connect to one another and to our own history. So how do we tip into transcendence just enough to become moved and feel the terrifying power of life, whilst also remaining grounded in reality and not getting sucked into a New-Age Black Hole?

His large-scale installations come with an air of bricolage and fragmentation, using the industrially produced refuse of daily life and combining it with hand-made sculptures that are pre-historic, cubist and post-modern in style. The sculptures range from materials such as ceramics, glass, rubber and plastic. While a lot of Chochola's art recently has sought to present a world in apocalyptic ruins, his primary subject is ultimately a portrait of the consciousness of being human. How do we live? And how should we live in the material world moving towards the future?

We usually come to experience environments whereupon the artist displays remnants of a performed activity, what can be considered an initiatory ritual or performance held at the moment of the opening. The spontaneous spillage of paint, vocal utterings and the breaking of surfaces make up some of these moments passed. This gesture can be considered a rite of passage in the life of the objects, releasing the objects into their static and temporary presentation.

Sometimes borrowing symbols from Buddhism and Native Americana, Chochola aligns them with symbols of the mechanization of western life, derelict things and mass-produced objects that once were considered social mainstays, which are now either obsolete or well on their way. These objects are given new significance and inserted into a new value system; CD racks as totems, dated workout bikes as temples of body culture, bulky keyboards as animistic digital wizards, a burnt car as a Memento Mori self-portrait and/or Trojan horse, and used plastic patio furniture retracing the genealogy of the baroque throne. Putting on the Postmodern (thinking) cap, his work stages a “rebirth” of objects. There is a disruption of the sacred-profane dichotomy and an honouring of the everyday wherein he invites the viewer to envision common objects as potentially relevant in ritualistic activity.

Chochola's dark micro-macro cosmos is presented in two installations, one below ground and the other above ground. They mirror each other and both represent a world of intergalactic darkness as a metaphor for the darkness of our contemporary mythology. The ground has been turned into an industrial glimmering landscape with rolled asphalt creating an impression of a thin film of surface tension dividing the outer space from the energies of quantum physics.

His work looks at our need to better understand the complexity and the broad implication of the interrelatedness all physical phenomena, a notion related to quantum physics. Through a psychedelic channelling of post-modern culture the whys and the hows of the arrival of a post-material modern-day digital era are raised. Chochola states: "Being aware of the context of what's going on around us, both ecological and political has much deeper layers. There are impacts between the universe and what happens on earth, like a butterfly-effect or "quantum realities" or "parallel worlds.""

In the installation upstairs we encounter what the artist describes as "the world of energies" filled with monochrome glass sculptures as well as multi-colour glass sculptures sprouting out like Ikebana bouquets. His monochrome sculptures form a series titled *Attavistic Cookbook of the Infinity* (2015-2017). These are first moulded in clay, allowing him to make their surface very expressive and indicative of the rough hand gestures. They are then transformed into glass, making some areas of the sculpture hyper-smooth and flat. His *X-Rays* series (2015-2017) depict crystal-like formations with cold surfaces are metaphors of an intact and potential explosive energy.

In the downstairs installation we encounter a "sacred core," a dark wasteland reminiscent of a club in ruins with disco lights shining onto a geometric mandala and esoteric Tibetan tools. Are we confronted with an eerie archaeological site of the future or the close up of the first molecules of life?

Quotes:

Interview with Kirstine Roepstorff by Sara Thetmark, Copenhagen Magazine, 2016

Conversation with Matyáš Chochola with Linda Jensen, November 2017

Nadim Abbas (b. 1980 in Hong Kong, lives and works in Hong Kong) received his BFA from London's Chelsea College of Art & Design (2002) and MPhil from the University of Hong Kong Department of Comparative Literature. He was awarded with the Asian Cultural Council Altius Fellowship and the HK Arts Development Award (Young Artist / Visual Arts) in 2014. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Camoufleur*, VITRINE, Basel (2017); *Chimera*, Antenna Space, Shanghai (2016); *The Last Vehicle*, UCCA, Beijing (2016); *#4*, Holy Motors, Hong Kong (2016) and *Zone I, The Armory Show*, New York (2014). Abbas is currently taking part in the 7th Moscow International Biennale of Contemporary Art which will be on view until January 18, 2018.

SIDE STEP: NADIM ABBAS

BLUE NOON

*In the hour of short shadows you search, in vain.
When the carapace of visibility opens;
CRACK. Only to reveal a fresh layer of skin,
Hardening, like compound eyes staring at the sun.*

– Nadim Abbas

For Side Step, Last Tango presents *Blue Noon* by Hong Kong-born artist Nadim Abbas.

Imagine waking in a post-human urban space where blue is all-encompassing. Imagine being in a space where elements come in and out of focus, in an ever present yet discontinuous experience of multiplication, reproduction and virality. Blue lights, blue blood, blue screens. Methodological yet ambiguous, these ideas make up Abbas's formal play on visibility.

Known for his heavily researched installations, Abbas examines the structural and political properties of seeing and its precarious relationship with reality. The ambiguity of what he calls "poor images" often culminates in immersive environments, which unveil the structure of visual regimes and their coercive and normalizing effects. In the early work *Cataract* (2010), he created a two-part installation looking at Victoria Falls. "Waterfalls, I would argue, being the sublime natural phenomena that they are, have become something of an automatic portal to some vague and generic idea of nature... It is often said that the most disappointing thing about stage magic is the moment when you discover how the trick is done, simply because it is so banal. With this work, I would like to suggest otherwise, that today, it is really the illusion that is banal, since there is actually nothing more baffling than reality itself; a Sphinx without a secret."

His three-part *Chamber* work (2014-15) presented at the New Museum Triennial portrayed another interest; namely the viral image, that wavers between real and imaginary. Based on themes of ballistic warfare and outbreak quarantine protocols, he constructed bunker-like chambers filled with domestic objects which visitors could touch only with built-in rubber gloves.

For *Side Step*, Abbas has turned his attention to the history of Zurich's Kreis 5 district and specifically to the sad reality of "Needle Park" with its free drug policies in the late 80s. Rather than reducing part of that history to sensationalism, he seeks to address the shadowy fissures opened up by marginal spaces that are often considered a "quarantine" of addicts. Fascinated by the widespread presence of blue lights in public places to prevent shooting-up, Abbas has embarked on an enquiry into blueness and its relationship to concealment. This has ultimately led him down the unlikely path of correlating aspects of regulated spaces in urban environments with molecular biology, and the harvesting of blue-blooded horseshoe crabs for the pharmaceutical industry.

Quote: Nadim Abbas, "Superficial engagements: how art attempts to channel the critical agency of poor images in an age of social media" (Para Site International Conference 2013, Hong Kong).

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