Ali Cherri
Somniculus
02/14 – 05/28/2017

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En couverture :
Ali Cherri, Somniculus, 2017, film set photography, Courtesy of the artist
Co-production: Jeu de Paume Paris, Fondation Nationale des Arts Graphiques et Plastiques and Capc-musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux.
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Curator
OSEI BONSU

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Presenting the work of four international artists “The Economy of Living Things” draws upon fields of visual art, archaeology, music and literature to reveal an alternative map of modern migrations. The exhibition is concerned with the constant flow of bodies and the movements of plants, animals, artefact and other cultural products found in everyday life. Composed as a series of four solo exhibitions, it takes as its point of departure the recording of lived experience and the state of human progress in the twenty-first century. It is through the lens of the present that artists frame their own subjectivity while considering the deepening relationships between memory and fiction, communities and civilisations, the dead and the living.

“The Economy of Living Things” concerns the value of undocumented peoples, the flights of birds pushed by high winds, the pathways of dreams and the songs and stories of freedom. In a broadening geo-political landscape, we can observe the routes of traffic forcing the movements of people, goods and processes into phases of conflict and agitation. In this existing world of hegemonic borders and empires drawn by war, we can understand the need for places of worship and spaces of encounter in our common reality. To admit history is a fragile space is to listen to the little known personal stories that tear through imposed narratives. From here we begin an archaeology of time that renders visible things unseen; an alternative territory; a transnational imagination.

In a series of newly commissioned works, lens-based media is used to re-enliven events of histories rooted in personal, political and collective experience. Together the artists share an interest in the living histories of the communities and cultures to which they belong, capturing those intangible and immaterial expressions of life and livelihood. Beyond defining comprehensive narrative structures, spaces are often left open only to be filled by the emptiness of words, gestures and encounters. Entering these worlds we often find that we are awoken to the clamour of our own reality, the lives of unknown others, erasures and displacements, the pains of exile and the loss of traditions.

While being rooted in the medium of film, “The Economy of Living Things” will take on an interdisciplinary program inviting performative and site-specific encounters with the moving image. By accommodating the complexity of contemporary practice, the framework will be an essential entry point to a breadth of interests from ethnomusicology and archaeological systems to colonial discourses and utopian conceptions of racial progress. Opening with Ali Cherri and closing with Jumana Manna, Satellites 10 will is oriented towards the tradition and preservation of histories as containers of living memory. Such encounters will open the space for the elaboration of temporality by Steffani Jemison and Oscar Murillo whose formal practices emphasize the poetics of physical gestures informed by wider socio-economic conditions such as industrial factories, urban high-streets and public parks. Moving beyond the notion of physically mapping history, “The Economy of Living Things” moves toward a consideration of the political body’s movement through material, local, and symbolic time and the impossibility of controlling living things.

Osei Bonsu
THE CALENDER

- ALI CHERRI / 14 FEBRUARY — 28 MAY, 2017
  JEU DE PAUME, PARIS

- OSCAR MURILLO / 13 JUNE — 24 SEPTEMBER 2017
  JEU DE PAUME, PARIS

- STEFFANI JEMISON / 17 OCTOBER, 2017 — 21 JANVIER 2018
  JEU DE PAUME, PARIS

- JUMANA MANNA / 30 NOVEMBER, 2017 — 4 FEBRUARY, 2018,
  MAISON D'ART BERNARD ANTHONIOZ,
  NOGENT-SUR-MARNE

BIOGRAPHY
OF OSEI BONSU, CURATOR

Osei Bonsu is a British-Ghanaian independent curator and writer based in London.

His writing has been included in a number of museum and exhibition catalogues including the 56th Venice Biennial Exhibition and Milan EXPO « Arts and Food » at La Triennale di Milano. He is the founding director of CRANE, and has developed a number of projects focused on international art, including «Pangea II: New Art from Africa and Latin America» (Saatchi Gallery, 2015) and 1-54 Art Fair (2013 - 14). He advises private and not-for-profit arts organizations and contributes to publications such as New African, NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art, Mousse Magazine, and Art Review among others.

© 2016, Osei Bonsu.
Ali Cherri’s practice is motivated by the ongoing investigation into the place of archaeology in the construction of historical narratives. Focusing on the spaces of conflict and catastrophe in the highly visible Middle East region, Cherri’s work often observes the fragile presence of historical violence in its everyday environment.

Filmed inside a series of empty museum galleries across Paris, his new work *Somniculus* (the Latin word for “light sleep”) articulates the tension between the lives of dead objects and the living world that surrounds them. Artefacts from museums of ethnography, archaeology and natural sciences are all presented in their existing cultural context as the surviving objects of human interest. Preserved inside this structure of historiographic display, each object is representative of a place or a time and each artefact lives on as a container of its own history. What if we suspended these objects outside this constructed framework of controlled meaning? Would their ideological value become any less tangible?

As a result of periods of Enlightenment, imperialism and colonial expansion over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, museums in Paris became some of the world’s most encyclopaedic institutions. The trajectory of the modern museum, from the cabinet of curiosities to a nationalist project to the colonial institution, and on to the neoliberal structure of the present day, reflects the shifting ideologies of our civilization. In *Somniculus*, the viewer is presented with a series of windows through which the objects in the museum escape these ideological regimes altogether. We see how these objects might relate to us in a pre-modern sense, as objects endowed with their own autonomy and agency.

Although the modern era has given rise to a divide between the living and the non-living, human and nonhuman, culture and nature, the project of existing museum practice seeks to bring objects of the past to life by reactivating historical narratives. Forming a discontinuity, the mummified bodies from ancient Egypt, taxidermy wildlife and fragments of non-European cultures found in *Somniculus* seem less than alive, yet they speak to us and haunt us still, as if to transcend their contained existence. The objects no longer represent a coherent representational universe, defined by ordering and classification, but rather the beginning of another fiction.

Though it would seem that the modern museum is a space of the object rather than the subject, the human body has played an integral role in the construction of our world as we know it. While the evolution of man is often defined by anthropological and anatomical developments in science, our physical relationship to objects in museums is often one of passive detachment. We are reminded that the idea of looking is not a political act of questioning the reality before us, but a way of probing the origin of the gaze itself. A camera lingers over torch-lit objects whose eyes shine back at us, while other objects lack the ability to see altogether – their view is that of an abyss or a black hole. Is it the lack of sight that prevents them from seeing, or the absence of eyes?

The apparent necessity of seeing, the act of closing and opening the eyes, recalls the inevitability of sleep and its inescapable shadow: death. Shining a light on these spaces of perpetual significance within Western culture, *Somniculus* brings a heightened awareness to the act of looking and seeing in the museum. As an anonymous man sleeps in an otherwise empty gallery we realise that he too is representative of a culture, a time, a place. These fragments of loss, destruction and violence stand in as representations of civilizations’ past. In accordance with the cultures they serve to represent, these objects are neither caught inside the deep dark past nor immediately visible in the light of our present day, but forever waiting to be awakened.

Osei Bonsu
Exhibition curator
Ali Cherri was born in 1976 in Beirut.

He received a BA in graphic design from the American University in Beirut in 2000, and an MA in performing arts from DasArts, Amsterdam, in 2005.

He has recently participated in the following group exhibitions: « But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise » (Guggenheim, New York, 2016); « Rainbow Caravane » (Aichi Triennial, Japan, 2016); « A Taxonomy of Fallacies: The Life of Dead Objects » (monographic exhibition, Museum Sursock Beyrouth, 2016); « Lest the Two Seas Meet » (Gwangju Museum of Art, Korea, 2016); « Matérialité de l’Invisible » (Centquatre, Paris, 2016); « The Time is Out of Joint » (Sharjah Art Space, United Arab Emirates, 2016). Ali Cherri lives and works in Paris and Beirut.

He is represented by the Imane Farès Gallery.

**CATALOGUE Ali Cherri. Somniculus**

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Wednesday to Sunday: 11 am – 7 pm
Closed Monday, 25th of December and 1st of January

ADMISSION
Free entrance

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