

Les recherches d'un chien (*Investigations of a dog*)

Works from the FACE collections

“Les recherches d'un chien” is the first exhibition organized and curated by the FACE group (Foundation of Arts for a Contemporary Europe). It was initially presented at Foundation Sandretto Re Rebaudengo (Autumn 2009) and at Ellipse Foundation in Portugal (Spring 2010).

FACE

FACE founding members are non-profit foundations established by private collectors who have set up public spaces for the production and promotion of contemporary art. This new alliance aims at broadening and empowering the scope of their activities through ambitious international projects.

FACE (www.art-face.eu) aims to promote international artists by supporting the production and exhibition of new works. In particular, FACE Partner Foundations aim to work towards: promoting contemporary art in Europe and the rest of the world; supporting artists; bringing an ever-growing public closer to contemporary art and culture; promoting the activities and the art collections of each partner foundation. With these aims, the Partner Foundations will particularly be able to: develop collaborations between the partner foundations and, in particular, exchange programmes between partner collections; produce contemporary art works; produce publications and catalogues; design joint promotional and advertising campaigns, public relation strategies, take part in contemporary art fairs; produce a periodical with analysis on contemporary art; produce and organize international exhibitions; conduct market research, study programmes and special arts projects; offer consultation and services to third parties based on their joint experience and development in the field.

The **FACE** project was first presented at the European Parliament in Brussels in 2008.

FACE Partner Foundations

The DESTE Foundation - Established in 1983 by international art collector Dakis Joannou, the DESTE Foundation for contemporary art is based in Athens, Greece. DESTE is a nonprofit foundation that organizes exhibitions and supports publications that explore the relationship between contemporary art and culture. It aims to broaden the audience for contemporary art, to enhance opportunities for young artists and to establish a dialogue through an exhibition

program that promotes emerging as well as established artists. Through its exhibition and publishing program, the DESTE Foundation aspires to act as a host to innovative expressions, and operate as an open space for the redefinition of the current artistic production and emergent cultural realities. Apart from the shows that focus on the Dakis Joannou Collection, the DESTE Foundation also supports and hosts a number of external projects. Such as the DESTE Prize which was introduced in 1999.

The Ellipse Foundation – The Ellipse Foundation began as an initiative by João Oliveira-Rendeiro with support from the Banca Privado Português. It was formally established in 2004 to support contemporary artists through a variety of initiatives, including acquisitions and commissions as well as a residency, scholarship and educational programmes. The collection currently includes more than 600 works in a variety of mediums – painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, film and video and installation. João Oliveira-Rendeiro began collecting in the 1980s, initially acquiring key works by important modern masters and contemporary Portuguese artists. He has since expanded his focus to develop an international collection of considerable scope.

Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo - The Italian contemporary art foundation *Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo* was founded in 1995 by the international contemporary art collector Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo. The Foundation's first exhibition space was set up at the Palazzo Re Rebaudengo in Guarene d'Alba, in 1997.

In September 2002, the Fondazione SRR opened its current headquarters, a centre for contemporary art in Turin with a gallery space of over 1,500 square meters, a book shop, auditorium, educational dept., cafeteria and restaurant. The new centre is a flexible structure that can put together exhibitions quickly and efficiently to respond to today's trends. A range of activities and events (films, talks, music, theatre and dance) are organized parallel to all the main exhibitions, whereby audiences can enjoy, interact and gain greater understanding of the centre and of contemporary art.

In 2005, the FSRR opened its third exhibition venue at Villa Remert in Cirie, a town near Turin airport where educational style exhibitions are organized. Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo has three main aims: to promote both Italian and international artists by supporting the production and exhibition of new works, bring an ever growing public closer to contemporary art and to

create dialogue, exchange and partnerships with other worldwide art institutions.

Every year FSRR produces a rich calendar of major exhibitions and events, as well as running an educational centre with courses for children and adults, a residency programme for international curators and a Prize honoring women over the world.

The Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Collection was started in the early 1990s and today consists of over 1,000 works. The collection contains photography, painting, sculpture, installation, film and video and features works by both internationally acclaimed and emerging artists.

Magasin 3 - Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall was founded 1987 and is one of the leading institutions of contemporary art in Sweden. Since its inception Magasin 3 has become recognized for major exhibitions presenting works by internationally established artists. The aim is to actively participate in contemporary culture by introducing and presenting artists and supporting artistic work. The building of Magasin 3, dated 1930, is a former warehouse in the old Freeport district of Stockholm with an exhibition space of 2,500 square meters. David Neuman has been the director since 1987.

The exhibition program of Magasin 3 is regarded as a complement and a challenge to other institutions of contemporary art. Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall produces and presents approximately six to eight exhibitions every year. This often involves commissioning and production of new works. The Collection of Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall currently consists of approximately 600 works of art. The focus is on three-dimensional and site-specific works. Acquisitions are made in conjunction with the exhibitions as well as outside the exhibition program. Through close collaboration with artists and institutions the Collection is in constant progress. Works from the Collection is mainly presented at Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall but as a result of its unique history and composition, there is an active lending program. During the last 15 years Magasin 3 has lent works from the Collection to numerous museums around the world.

la maison rouge - La maison rouge, a private non-profit foundation, opened in June 2004 in Paris. Its purpose is to promote the different facets of contemporary creation through a program of temporary exhibitions, some of which are staged by independent curators. Functioning as an art centre, its

vocation is to explore the diversity of contemporary artistic experimentation and expression by way of solo and thematic shows and special exhibitions focusing on selected private collections. Through each art experience that it incites and initiates, the foundation aims to encourage multiple attitudes, practices, and approaches to contemporary creation, opening the doors to different forms of expression as outsider art, performance, primitive art, or popular art. This diversity reflects the personality and taste of the maison rouge's founder, Antoine de Galbert, an art collector and active figure on the French art scene.

Beginning with *L'intime* [*Behind Closed Doors: the private life of collections*] (2004), la maison rouge regularly stages exhibitions on the theme of private collections and the issues and questions surrounding them. Particular focus is placed on individuals with a strong, personal vision, allowing surprises and discoveries. Past displays include the outsider art collection of Arnulf Rainer, video art from Isabelle and Jean-Conrad Lemaitre's collection, and Latin American art from Isabel and Agustin collection.

Over the past few years, La maison rouge has also presented solo shows by Ann Hamilton, Christian Boltanski, Henry Darger, Gregor Schneider, Berlinde de Bruyckere, and Mika Rottenberg and thematic exhibitions such as *Sots Art, Political Art in Russia since the 70'*, *Vraoum! Comics and Contemporary Art, Vinyl: Records and Covers by Artists...*

The foundation extends over 2,000 square meters on the site of a disused factory built around a former house "la maison rouge" or "red house" from which the venue takes its name. A special program in an open-air courtyard at the heart of the foundation offers an occasion for invited artists to create commissioned work.

La maison rouge aims to extend the circle of initiates and enrich visitors' experience through guided visits, lectures, and special events such as concerts or performances. Interaction and exchanges with artists, art historians, collectors, curators, and thinkers from all fields create opportunities to explore the exhibited works from a given perspective. These situate the works in the history of art and ideas, but also in relation to the art world today.



Despite differences of age, size of the spaces and of the teams, organization, budgets and artistic directions, the Face partners share a common ambition to support and promote contemporary art, through the organization of joint projects. The exhibition *Investigations of a dog* is the first of these projects. It was conceived using the Partners collections (or their President's collection, in the case of la maison rouge, which owns no collection). It is displayed successively in every Foundation. Now in Paris after being displayed in Turin and Cascais, it will go next to Stockholm and Athens. At every new venue, the works are displayed in a new configuration, bringing different perspectives. At la maison rouge, the layout has been conceived in order to privilege open viewpoints, allowing for the works to be seen in relation with each others, and thus suggesting different readings depending on the visitors focus.

“The exhibition *Investigations of a Dog* draws its title from a 1922 short story by Franz Kafka. Still a puppy, a dog suffers an identity crisis that brings him to question its own nature and, more in general, the canine essence. Endowed with a more solitary, introverted temperament than other dogs, who happily live together without asking themselves questions, the protagonist embarks on a quest for knowledge that takes him to the margins of society, and turns him

into a madman, or a stranger, in the eyes of others. Paradoxically, this isolation is in fact the expression of an extreme form of love from the investigator dog towards its fellows, because it is out of concern for others that he is trying to understand what it means to be a dog.

This short story, and more generally the themes and expressive strategies that recur in Franz Kafka's works, have inspired the selection of the works on exhibit. They all center around the question of how linguistic innovation can entail a political dimension of art-making that precedes the content-related aspects of the artwork. The French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, in their analysis of Kafka's work, have come up with the notion of 'minor' literature, to describe this link between writing and politics, i.e. the possibility for artistic creation to carry revolutionary messages, starting precisely from the subversive use of language. Minor here means that something is not official, not in power, but nonetheless moves within the domain of power to find escape lines, to create spaces of freedom. Minor is the use of a major language by a minority – take Kafka, a Jew from Prague writing in German: language is de-territorialized, ceases to be the expression of a national identity, and becomes nomadic. Minor means establishing a link between individual events and a larger context, finding the political relevance of individual stories. Finally, minor is the collective nature of an utterance, the transition from individual to collective voice.

The artists brought together here share a practice of art that can be read in the light of this category of minor. They have initiated an 'eccentric' art discourse, which cannot be associated with any of the acquired esthetic categories, and subverts the conventional use of the expressive means it adopts. This formal research, however, is not an end in itself, but looks at the outside world, connects with the political situation of its time – i.e. is socially active. In this perspective, appropriating objects and signs from extra-artistic fields, and attributing new meanings and functions to them, is a key strategy, employed by many of the artists on exhibit to reflect upon central themes in our contemporary society, such as post-colonial identity, gender, race and religious conflicts, violence and collective paranoia, economic disparities and the excesses of consumer society, the sense of community and the condition of marginality, the relationship between memory and present time.

The gesture of appropriating and de-locating interrupts the codified relationship of signification, enabling an analysis of stereotypes and acquired traditions. The hybridization of esthetic visions peculiar to contexts that are far apart from each other – mass and 'highbrow', official and alternative culture, creates an effect of

estrangement that subverts the usual ways of looking at reality. The registers of the incongruous, paradoxical, grotesque, ironic, and uncanny, are all devices used by the artists to investigate the world around them, and hand it back to us for a critical evaluation. The use of obsolete media, of outdated techniques and expressive forms, serves the function of recovering memories lost in social history. The exploration of the boundaries between fiction and reality, the artificial staging of reality and, conversely, the pseudo-scientific documentation of fictitious situations, is a way of questioning the acquired notions of truth and falseness. The process-oriented, performative nature of the works, where artists limit their intervention to the activation of a mechanism, whose effects escape their control, refuses individual forms of utterance. These and other strategies enacted by the artists on exhibit produce expressive forms that are directly focused on content and allow for a possible revolutionary use of the language of art. Like the dog-protagonist in Kafka's short story, these artists ask themselves questions about the meaning of art making, spurred by a passionate emotional involvement in the society of humans."

Irene Calderoni, conservateur à la Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo

Metamorphosis, the idea of constant transformation and hybridization among forms and identities, is both a theme and an expressive strategy in the work of **Roberto Cuoghi**, who puts his own body into play, as well as classic media such as painting and drawing. *MEGAS DAKIS* portrays the face of art collector Dakis Joannou, elaborating it into the terrifying forms of a harpy, the cruel bird-woman of Greek mythology. Cuoghi blends black humor (a constant hallmark of his work) with references to past and current cultures and political visions.

The career of artist **Philippe Bazin** began when, working as a physician, he started to photograph his patients and created a series of disturbing portraits, where elderly and sick people, who are usually relegated to the margins of society, look back to observers, challenging them. *Dufftown n°9* is part of a video series the artist created during his artist-in-residence stay at the Scottish distillery William Grant & Sons, in 2002. The company, nestled in the heart of a

valley, has business relations all over the world. Developing his research about the relationship between individual lives and the institutional system, Philippe Bazin video filmed eight employees of the firm, an hour static shot in close-up. Each of them performed a true feat, staring at the camera, without moving or speaking for the whole time. The result is a poignant work, that explores a new approach of portrait

The Swiss duo **Fischli & Weiss** have always chosen everyday life as their main subject, revealing unusual aspects of it, or distorting its meaning in such a way as to create intriguing, humorous situations. A playful, sometimes childish tone characterizes all the forms they work with, from sculpture to photography to video. In *Animal*, the artists operate in the space between the work's formal aspects and its title. The figure represented here does not exactly correspond to an animal, yet it does not completely differ from a vague idea of "animality", either. The work undermines the institutionalized relationship between signifier and signified, between the object and its definition, between the individual and its attribution to a community. In *Animal*, Fischli & Weiss use humor to touch on issues that are central to the anthropological/cultural debate, such as the notions of identity and otherness.

Mark Dion turned a personal hobby of his, natural sciences, into a privileged vantage point from which to examine the cultural representations of nature. The artist is especially fascinated by the historical figure of the amateur scientist, the *dilettante* of 18th and 19th century. In his sculpture *Les Nécropores*, the unusual combination of a giant dead mole with carrion beetles (necrophagous insects) on its back, was inspired by the experiments of Jean-Henri Fabre, a self-taught scientist of the XIXth century, "half La Fontaine, half Cuvier" who spent his life studying entomology. Mark Dion transforms a scientific engraving (documenting one of Fabre's experiments) into a monumental installation that questions the distinction between scientific (rational) methods and subjective (irrational) influences. The mole, at the same time grotesque and scary, becomes a monster, closer to the atmosphere of children tales than to scientific inquiry.

Finnish artist **Esko Männikkö** works with photography as a social document. One of his main interests is portraying humans in the environment they belong to. His investigations focus on economically and geographically marginal situations,

as in this series, devoted to bachelors living in isolation in the north of Finland. The photos are the result of a long process, during which the artist deepens his knowledge of the subjects and of the context they live in, until he enters a personal relationship with them. It is this relationship that ultimately forms the basis for his compositional choices. The rooms, furniture, clothes and furnishings, all contribute to build an image of the person represented. Yet each photo is also a rigorous abstract composition, in terms of color, structure and rhythm, and manages to reach a sophisticated synthesis between social content and esthetic form.

Boris Mikhailov creates major photographic series, exploring the individual's position within the public sphere of ideology, be it communist or capitalistic. The famous *Case History series* (1999) documents the social disintegration that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, and especially its repercussions on the living conditions of people. With the cycle *Look at me, I look at Water* (1999) Mikhailov carries on, in terms of both themes and forms, with his research on a degraded humanity, physically and morally scarred by the loss of its identity. Taken during a long trip from East to West, these pictures are accompanied by short commentaries handwritten by the artist, which emphasize the feeling of finding oneself in front of a private photographic album. But the humanity he portrays with fierce realism is one that is not familiar to us; it is on the contrary one that is almost invisible from the point of view of our comfortable lives. Mikhailov's work forces us to acknowledge these men and women and face their harsh existence.

Martin Parr's photographs cast a merciless, ironic glance on everyday life fragments, portraying an existence at the mercy of the excesses caused by abundance and the consumer habits of today's society. The pictures were taken and collected with the devotion of an ethnographer, and are exhibited like documents of a long field research. In *Portfolio common Sense*, a project he begun in the mid-90s, Parr gathers and exhibits a series of photo details that range from sex toys to doughnuts, up to the kitsch bikinis worn by bizarre bathers. Parr builds his own personal picture of the societies he explores during his travels, searching for shared habits and different values. On the other hand, individuality seems to lose value and leave room for merchandise as a sign of collective identity.

Paul McCarthy's works have often been referred to as 'disturbing', for the artist's ability to analyze the American imagination and iconography, and distort both until he reaches the 'disturbing', i.e. the unsettling union of what is known with what is altogether foreign. For instance, McCarthy created a psychopath version of Santa Claus, turning the Christmas party into a repulsive whirligig of fluids, found objects, blood and dirt. The artist then presented this very same icon in an inflatable, plump, unthreatening version. The pig is a recurring subject in McCarthy's work. In *Pig* the animal, which generally carries negative connotations, is wiped clean and turned into a harmless, Disney-like character. It is lying on the ground, in a strange condition of both peacefulness and suffering, health and illness - which puts the spectator before a bizarre, ambiguous status half-way between human and animal.

Ever since the 90s, **Santiago Sierra** has worked on creating critical actions that analyze the conventions and constraints of the social, economic and political system. He has done highly controversial performances and installations, using direct, sometimes violent tactics to deal with the individual's position as related to power systems. *PERSON OBSTRUCTING A LINE OF CONTAINERS* is the video document of a performance that took place in the harbor area of Stockholm. The action is very simple but has a strong emotional impact, and makes use of a recurring strategy in Sierra's work, i.e. the creation of an obstacle, a barrier that interrupts or subverts the normal functioning of a device. In this case the artist focuses on transportation and the exchange of goods, which, in a capitalistic system, paradoxically enjoy greater freedom of movement than people.

In his works **Mircea Cantor** investigates the impact of individual acts of rebellion by people who are forced to operate every day within complex political and bureaucratic structures. Both in his videos and in his sculptures, Cantor opts for essential formal choices, which nevertheless reveal a strong communicative impact. *The Landscape is Changing* is the video documentation of a performance, where a group of people stages a silent protest march through the streets of the Albanian capital Tirana. Albania, until recently a communist state, rarely sees demonstrations, which are still strongly associated with propaganda parades for former dictator Enver Hoxha. Replacing the demonstrators' slogans with mirroring surfaces, Cantor interrupts and short-circuits the demonstration's traditional information flow, sending back to bystanders fragments of the reality that surrounds them.

The work of **Mark Manders**, which the artist himself describes as 'self-portrait as a building', contrasts the rationality of architecture with the frailty of human existence. His sculptures and installations are suspended in a dreamlike, mysterious atmosphere. The scale reduction, often expressed as a percentage figure in the work's title, only adds to this estrangement effect. *Nocturnal City Scene* is the model for a city made from found objects, such as forks, tin cups, and other household objects. The work, a still life in black, is filled with a stifling air, a sinister omen of catastrophe that recalls the image of a necropolis. This work is a formal and conceptual response to Manders's own study of the similarities and differences between the - rationally impeccable - architectonic aspects of structure and the size of organic and totemic objects.

DeAnna Maganias employs forms and materials that hark back to modernism, reducing minimal volumes and surfaces until they fit into the personal sphere. *The View From Bed* focuses on the 'point of view' as both a perceptual and communicative tool. Architecture, in this case the interior of Maganias's bedroom, whose scale reproduction is placed inside the cube that constitutes the sculpture and rotated by 180° on the horizontal axis, becomes the pretext for a dizzying reversal of the public's point of view, which comes to coincide with the artist's own, intimate perspective. The bed, whose volume is extracted from the cube that delimits the room walls, allowing to see inside it, becomes the missing link between two discordant views, the hole of a camera obscura that reflects a disturbing view of reality.

From the 60s onwards, **Bruce Nauman** has been one of the protagonists who renewed the language of art from a conceptual and performative perspective, with works created in the most diverse media, from video to installation, from drawing to sculpture. During the 80s, the linguistic experiments in his works start to show a more overtly political content, such as in some works inspired by South American dictatorial regimes and by the practice of political torture. Thus works are born that talk about violence, cruelty, and a human condition dominated by fear. In *Untitled (Suspended chair, Vertical III)*, the chair evokes the ones used in interrogations and capital executions, but also functions as a substitute for the human figure: made unserviceable as an instrument of torture, the chair is placed in an uncomfortable, frustrating position, and becomes itself a victim of torture.

Gardar Eide Einarsson appropriates the signs that circulate through contemporary society in order to analyze their ideological content and functioning mechanisms. The artist mixes up the original cultural contexts, stealing images from mainstream culture - like big corporation logos, as well as from subcultures, such as graffiti or punk music. In his paintings, drawings and installations, Einarsson triggers a short-circuit between verbal language and the visual dimension, trying to show how the appearance of a text can complicate its codified message. *Burnt White Flag* digs a space between the institutional form of the flag and the emancipation conveyed by the text. A third element, the half-burnt fabric, alludes to a subversive action, an aggressive protest, which however remains ambiguous as far as its intentions and results.

Vasco Araújo explores issues such as cultural and sexual identity, analysing in particular the stereotypes created by society. For his narrative references or topics, he often draws inspiration from opera. In it, Araújo finds a world of masks, costumes and divas, an artificial, made-up universe, always excessive when it comes to the reconstruction of clichés. The video *About Being Different* is the result of the artist's residence in Newcastle Gateshead, and of his collaboration with the parishioners of the local community. It examines the ideas of community and marginality, and is inspired by Benjamin Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*, which deals with a fisherman persecuted by his village. After showing Britten's opera to five local parishioners, Araújo interviewed them and recorded their comments on what it means to be different inside a small community, like that of Gateshead.

Since the 80s, **Gregor Schneider** has created installations that analyze the complex connections between physical space and individuality. His research has taken the form of a morbid relationship with the house where he has been living and working since the age of sixteen, and which the artist calls *Totes Haus u r (Dead house u r)*. Over time, the building has become a constantly changing labyrinth where rooms multiply - or the artist may move doors and windows as in a horror film, so that the visitor loses his sense of orientation. *Das Große Wichsen* is one of the rooms in the *Haus*. The title, which translates as "the big jerk-off", reveals the true nature of the room which, like the rest of the house, is not a comfortable, agreeable place, but the materialization of the artist's fears. Schneider manifests all his obsessions by endlessly rearranging a shelter for his own soul.

The photographs of **Annika von Hausswolff** explore the border territory between reality and fiction, documenting things with an objective style and a photo reporting esthetics - yet her images are actually the product of an accurate staging procedure. The female universe is often central to her research, and is examined through the power structures that define it and constrain it into specific roles. In her works, the female body is often treated as an object, an inanimate, dissected thing, abandoned in sinister landscapes that evoke crime scenes. Melancholy, isolation and abandonment pervade her house interiors, where the above process of metamorphosis is inverted - if, on the one hand, human bodies turn into objects, household objects acquire a surreptitious, unsettling vitality.

Virginie Barré appropriates the esthetics of everyday life and mass culture, of famous people and well-known stories, deforming it and making it ambiguous, creating drawings, sculptures and installations that explore the themes of death and collective paranoia. The artist models unsettling images suspended between what is known and what is impossible to identify. Barré's worlds are often peopled by mannequins and dolls - epitome of that mysterious territory where reality and fiction blend. *Les Hommes Venus d'Ailleurs* eludes our look as well as any relationship with the spectator. The proportions and the clothing enhance this estrangement effect, reinforcing the purpose of not letting yourself be caged into any pre-determined categories, even if it means to become totally isolated.

Urs Fischer's works transform the ordinary into something extraordinary. Trivial, everyday objects are deprived of their functional purpose and endowed with unique esthetic and formal qualities. Fischer uses drawing, sculpture and installation to gradually alter nature - a process in which the role of the artist is that of triggering the mechanism and letting himself be surprised by the result, as if the work had a life of its own. A disquieting vitality seems to animate his linear sculptures, of which *Mackintosh Staccato* is an example. They reveal Fischer's obsession for the line, an essential, abstract form, and a founding element of different artistic expressions. Fischer models this simple form three-dimensionally, endowing it with energy and an organic, visceral quality.

The sculptures and installations of **Thomas Hirschhorn** take as their subject the political and social reality of our time. The artist creates three-dimensional thought maps that contain information, accumulated layer upon layer until it turns into a sculptural presence and invades space. The central element in *Spin Off* is a giant Swiss army knife, from which aluminum foil tentacles branch out and settle on drawings, photographs, collages and other objects. Hirschhorn ironically encapsulates the Swiss identity into this knife, while the use of recycled materials found in his living environment contradicts the stereotype of Switzerland as the homeland of luxury and well-being. Hirschhorn ridicules this myth with the help of a micro-galaxy of materials, objects, texts, current and historical themes - a complex web of references, through which visitors are encouraged to find their way by making choices.

Gender, race and violence are the issues tackled in **Kara Walker's** works. By cutting out silhouettes and applying them onto the walls of the exhibiting space, the artist creates bizarre, shocking panoramic scenes whose characters are stereotyped in terms of both their attitude and physical features. Walker's figurines stand out as shadows of pre-cinematic shows that tell us about a past world: the dawn of America, when the history of the African-american community started developing. The images are apparently essential, barely outlined, yet on closer inspection they are full of details and narrative hints, often terrifying, such as stories of power abuse and violence. In a provocative recasting of the "minstrel shows", a form of street entertainment popular in the XIX century that offered a conventional, offensive image of black people, the artist opens her space to a reflection on contemporary African-american identity.

In her works **Lorna Simpson** explores racial and gender issues through a language that blends her past as a documentary photographer and a conceptual use of the photographic medium. In *Water Bearer*, the immediate reading of the image is complicated by a written comment that encourages us to view history as a cultural text, which can unearth repressed or forgotten memories, but does not grant to all subjects equal opportunities to speak. In *Myths*, the combination of diverse elements and the scientific esthetics allude to the oppressive act of cataloging people according to the pre-determined classes or groups they belong to. *Untitled (Cabin in the sky)* examines the construction of the 'black' stereotype in history, literature and in other creative forms of expression.

With a poetic, intense language, **William Kentridge** explores the themes of violence, oppression, death and rebirth in the history of South Africa. The technique he chooses for his works is the classical step-by-step animation method - only in this case the drawing is partly erased and redrawn with each frame, instead of being replaced by a new one, the final result being animations that 'thrive upon' the remains of what comes before them. In *History of the Main Complaint*, Kentridge stages a backward journey, portraying a middle-aged entrepreneur named Soho (a recurring character in his works) as he lies on his deathbed. Slowly, the symbols of Soho's bureaucratic power start resurfacing in his mind - the very same symbols that have caused his agony. The video is a meditation on the contradictions of post-apartheid contemporary South Africa, still plagued by deep divisions that prevent a full recovery.

Starting from the '70s, **David Hammons** has developed a minimal esthetics, consisting in works and interventions that exploit limited resources to tackle complex issues, like that of race and the construction of difference in contemporary society. Hammons uses strategies such as dissonant associations and paradoxes to question commonplaces and their effects on individuals. In *African-American flag*, the US flag takes on the hues of Africa. This gesture, in its simplicity, creates a new object thick with implications, a symbol that does not exist, and yet can be deciphered by looking at the history of the peoples and nations it involves. The comic effect resulting from the juxtaposition of contradictory elements is also central in *Untitled*, a Japanese kimono installed in a display cabinet as if it were a museum piece. The solemn garment, however, conceals filthy, bloodstained pieces of underwear - an act of profanation that turns the exotic object into a debased shred of reality.

Sigalit Landau often uses her own body as a means of expression, as in the tradition of body art. In this case, however, the violent action performed on the body carries political and social connotations. In the video, a childhood toy, the hula hoop, becomes the instrument of a deadly ritual, a self-imposed torture. The action takes place on a beach in Tel Aviv, amid the indifference of occasional passers-by. The barbed wire evokes the perpetual state of conflict that plagues this area. It is a violent way of establishing and guarding borders, because while it protects from enemies it also restricts one's freedom of movement. The naked body of the artist, subjected to a slow, and apparently endless, process of abrasion caused by its own movement, raises upsetting questions about the

responsibility of both victims and their torturers.

Cady Noland appropriates found objects and images of famous people to analyze the stereotype of the American dream and its crisis, which began in 1960 with the Vietnam war and the student movement, and then progressed with the murders and political scandals Noland draws inspiration from in her works, which deal with the failure of a utopian idea. What is peculiar to *Drag* is the use of metal bars, a recurring element in the artist's work. With the gates and grids used in other works, they become an icon of the violence embraced by the United States in its pursuit of independence and freedom. In time, this violent mentality has crept into the very fabric of American society, spreading to the point of influencing individual relationships. However, Noland leaves his work in a status of apparent incompleteness - left open, the work suggests the possibility of change.

In the work of **Lara Schnitger**, fabric turns into human figure or architecture, language becomes image, and poetry is charged with political meanings. The artist employs 'humble' materials and handcrafting techniques, such as sewing, to create installations and sculptures that cast an ironic look on today's society. *Gridlock* is an imposing installation that brings together elements belonging to different epochs, places and cultures the artist herself has come in touch with during her many travels. The structure is inspired by Japanese building sites - it's a sort of safety fencing, whose meshes are made with Tibetan prayer flags and windshield stickers of the kind you often come across in the US, especially during electoral campaigns. Prayers, political slogans, irreverent messages, are blended in a patchwork that evokes both cultural diversity and the universal way we express desires.

The work of **Kimsooja** looks at individuals as they face an evolving world. It rescues traditional forms and imbues them with new meanings. In 1997, Kimsooja took a trip through some Korean cities on a truck that looked like that of the installation entitled *Bottari Truck*. The truck is loaded with bottari, i.e. bundles of cloth, traditionally hand-sewn by women and used to carry personal possessions, especially on long trips or a mass exodus. Kimsooja rebuilds the symbolical web these objects are wrapped in, from the condition of Korean women, who experience the practice of sewing as both a form of isolation and freedom, to nomadism, which frees one's cultural identity from a physical place.

The bottari truck tells these stories not as a static sculptural work, but as a process-oriented object that uses the performing act of the artist to cross space and time, sewing together, just like a needle, the edges of past and present memories, individual and collective experiences.

Drawing inspiration from the widespread Thai habit of painting billboards and commercial posters, **Navin Rawanchaikul** succeeds in erasing the line between art and traditional handmade production. His works are the expression of an aesthetic of appropriation that involves cinema and advertising imagery, recast in new narrative contexts, functions and interpretations. *Fly With Me To Another World (dedicated)* is a large acrylic on canvas painting that narrates the almost mythological deeds of Inson Wongsman, who, in 1962, embarked on a scooter trip from Thailand to Italy. Traveling thus becomes a time for crossing borders and countries, for exchanging and meeting, so places of departure and destination are only the pretext for a narration where all hierarchies, both aesthetic and political, are abolished.

Marepe's work belongs in the border area between utilitarianism and poetry, where everyday objects from her own living environment are re-contextualized and charged with new meanings. This practice recalls not only classic artistic strategies such as the ready-made, but also local customs. Because the region of Bahia, in north-eastern Brazil, is peopled for the most part by the descendants of runaway slaves, and is economically depressed, its inhabitants are forced to use objects and materials inventively every day. *Rio Fundo (Fiume profondo)* is named after the Brazilian region where the Cachaça is produced. Some liquor bottles are standing on small tables along with empty glasses - a common sight in the bars and streets of this area. The artist hopes to preserve this scene intact over time, by ironically fitting the tables with air tubes, often used as life-jackets by the inhabitants of Bahia.

In *Untitled (Natale 95) Stella con BR*, **Maurizio Cattelan** brings attention, ironically, to the contrast between the Italy of today, marked by indifference and homologation of thought, and the utopian spirit of Italy in the sixties and seventies, stained by the rise of libertarian dreams of red and black terrorism. The star of the Brigade Rosse becomes a comet ready to fade, but the real genius of the work is not in this representation of the decline, but rather to

transform the star symbol in the simple "A" "BAR", attracting any sign the bars of the country.

Since the 80s, **Jeff Koons** has been famous for works that display an ambiguous status, being analogous to the mass produced goods of American consumer society. The artist appropriates the symbols of mass culture, be they pop music stars or basketballs, estranging them from their context and celebrating their bad taste. *Wrecking Ball* is one in a series of sculptures where ordinary objects, easy to find in any supermarket, such as colorful inflatable swimming-pool toys, are transformed in their material substance. Through an almost alchemic process, stainless steel copies of the toys are created, and painted over so as to be undistinguishable from their originals. The artist views these works as 'Trojan horses', in that their appearance deceives the spectators' eye, and therefore betrays their expectations, triggering a paradoxical effect.

Since the 80s, **Sherrie Levine** has been regarded as one of the most representative women artists of the so-called "appropriationism" movement, an artistic practice that involves the critical re-use of images drawn from art history and the mass media. The act of appropriation aims at showing the extent to which the meaning of images is dependent on their use and exhibiting context. *Body Mask* belongs to a recent series of polished bronze works derived from the ritual Makondo masks of South-eastern Tanzania. In their original cultural context, these masks depict the body of a pregnant woman, and are worn by men during initiation rites. Levine reproduces the bronze masks and presents them as luxury goods, with the aim of questioning the relationship between the ritual and exhibiting roles of masks, and the different cultural meaning their reproduction acquires in each context.

In the drawings of **Aurel Schmidt**, urban waste of every kind mixes with cockroaches and other insects, forming Arcimboldo-like compositions, described by the artist as gothic-realistic, on account of the analytical style he uses to deal with abject, upsetting themes. *So Damn Pure* belongs to a cycle of works where Schmidt appropriates masterpieces of modern art history, in this case works by Morris Louis, and completely defaces them by using repulsive materials. Acrylic painting is 'enriched' with urine, spit, blood, but also medicines, mouthwash, beer and coffee. Natural and artificial waste products mingle in an apparently refined composition, an abstract image that soon reveals its link with a base reality.

In the works of **Stephane Thidet**, ordinary objects and materials are employed to create distorted visions of reality, imaginary worlds that look like dreams or nightmares. The artist deprives the objects of their original functions and transforms them, or moves them to new, ambiguous situations. *Sans titre (le terril)* consists of a black monumental heap that recalls one of the many coal deposits that covered Northern France landscapes until the collapse of mine industry in the 1970's. But on a closer look, it appears to be made of tons of black confetti, a material with very different connotations: that of festive celebrations. In Thidet's installation, the accumulation becomes ephemeral and transitory because of the very lightness of the material employed. The apparently stable, threatening form is actually liable to change with the slightest air blow.



eric pougeau, *fils de pute (son of a bitch)*, 2010

Eric Pougeau's work, shown in the patio, takes a shockingly irreverent approach to death. The tombstone is out of place in an arts centre, transporting us instead to the cemetery and personal memories of sadness and mourning. Which is why the insult chiselled in the marble carries such force. Not just for the crudeness of the language, but because it is incongruous with a funeral environment and the respect death commands.

This sculpture, from Antoine de Galbert's collection, is the last in a series, begun in 2001, of wreaths, floral tributes and memorial plaques on which the artist has inscribed a variety of insults that explore diverse aspects of everyday violence (social, domestic, homophobic, misogynous, etc.). It is a one-off which the collector has promised to return in the event of the artist's death, so as to respect his last wish that it be used as his tombstone. Pougeau pushes the

artist's identification with his work to the extreme; the two are indissociable, in life as in death.

Death is meant to be a time for forgiveness and reconciliation with those we may have insulted during their lifetime. In Pougeau's work, death does nothing to dull anger or resentment; insults can still reach us six feet under. There are no maudlin sentiments, no best behaviour, no good taste.

This invective set in stone raises all kinds of hypotheses and sparks all manner of fictions. It suggests at the very least a slanging match that death has not ended. The artist continues to voice his rage from the grave. His life, work and fury are concentrated in this tombstone, *ad vitam aeternam*.

This simple black rectangle, engraved with ten gold letters, has a curious capacity to disturb. Without any hard-hitting images, gore or pornography, through simple displacement, the unexpected overlapping of an insult and a sacred object, Pougeau's work provokes and compels us to reflect, however unwillingly, on our relationship with death.