Neil Beloufa
Party Island
2014
Mixed media video installation
72 x 96 x 36 inches

NEÏL BELOUFA

1985   Born in Paris, France
        Lives and works in Paris, New York, and Los Angeles

EDUCATION

2010   Le Fresnoy – Studio National d'Art contemporain, France
2009   Jury honors, Ensba, Beaux-Arts de Paris (National superior school of Fine Arts), France
2009   Jury honors, Ensad, Arts Décoratifs de Paris (National superior school of Art and Design), France
2008   CalArts, California Institute of the Arts – Valencia, USA
2007   The Cooper Union – New York, USA
2007   DNAP, Ensba

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016   Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA (Upcoming)
        Projects 102: Neïl Beloufa, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
2015   *Counting on People*, La Casa Encendida, Madrid, Spain
        Galleria Zero, Milan, Italy
        Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin, Germany
        Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany
2014   *En Torrent Et Second Jour*, Fondation Ricard, Paris, France
        Superlatives and Resolutions, Mendes/Wood, Sao Paolo, Brazil
        Counting on People, The Banff Centre, Canada
        Counting on People, ICA, Intitute of Contemporary Arts, London, United Kingdom
2013   *Speaking About Best*, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
        Production Value, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, USA (curated by Ali Subotnick)
2012   *Les Inoubliables prises d'autonomie*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
        Institut Francais, Amman, Jordan (curated by Ala Younis)
        Documents Are Flat 4, Kunstraum Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria. (curated by Veit Loers)
        Functions of Light, Balice Hertling & Lewis, New York, USA
        "WSR" / Audi Talent Awards, Fiac, Paris. France
2011   Art Basel Miami with Galeria Zero, Miami, USA
        Topics Values, Kunsthaus Glarus, Zurich, Switzerland
        An Archived Causality, Saprophyt, Vienna. Austria
        As Far As We Know, The Western Front, Vancouver, Canada
        Les Manques Contenus, Galerie Balice Hertling, Paris, France
        Kempinski in Stowaways, New Museum, New York, USA
        LISTE 16 with Balice Hertling, Basel, Switzerland
        Changes of Administration, Zero Gallery, Milan, Italy
2010   *The Beautiful Spaces*, Frieze Art Fair, London, United Kingdom
        Art Forum Berlin, Germany
        Future in Present Tense, Kai Middendorff Galerie, Frankfurt, Germany
        Si dans le future les machines à remonter le temps éxistaient, on se le serait dit, Biennale de Belleville, Paris, France
        (curated by Florence Parot)
2009   *The Dissociated Designs*, Kai Middendorff Galerie, Frankfurt, Germany
        Tectonic Plates or the Jurisdiction of Shapes, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
        L'importance des sujets, Galerie LHK, Paris, France
2008   *Six feet under: Kempinski*, Whitebox, New York, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015   FIAC, Ghebaly Gallery, Paris, France
        Ten Rooms, Three Loggias and a Hall, Sprengel Museum, Hannover, Germany
        AVATAR AND ATAVISM, Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf, Germany
        Transparencies, Bielefelder Kunstverein, Bielefeld, Germany

YARAT Art Center, Baku, Azerbaijan
Cultivating Culture, ICASTICA, Arezzo, Italy
Neil Beloufa, Julien Creuzet: Scroll infini, La Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec, France
Exhibition of the 4 Marcel Duchamp Prize nominated artists, Carré d'Art Contemporain de Nimes, Nîmes, France

2014   *Here and Elsewhere*, New Museum, New York, USA
Taipei Biennale, Taiwan
Shanghai Biennale, China
Europe Europe, Astrip Fearnley Museet, Oslo (curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist)
Future Generation Prize Shortlist Exhibition, Kiev, Ukraine
Memory Palaces, Carlier Gebauer, Berlin, Germany
DERRIERE, APRES LES CHUTES, Clearing, Brussels, Belgium
The Stuff that Dreams are Made of, Too, CLEARING, New York, USA
Neil Beloufa and Sayre Gomez, Art Basel Hong Kong

2013   *Dissident Futures*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, USA
Mécaniques des fluides, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (curated by Marie Maracciole)
12ème Biennale de Lyon, Entre-temps, Brusquements… et ensuite, Lyon, France (curated by Gunar B. Kvaran)
The Unicorn, The Power Station / Cleveland Art Museum, Dallas and Cleveland, USA (curated by Reto Thuring)
55th Venice Biennale, "The Encyclopedic Palace", Venice, Italy (curated by Massimiliano Gioni)
Love Is Colder than Capital, Kunsthaus Bregenz, Bregenz, Austria
Fruits De La Passion, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, France (curated by p.a.c.)
Beloufa, Bourouissa, Binet, ZERO, Milan, Italy
Screens, Murray Guy, New York, USA
Unruhe der Form. Entwürfe des politischen Subjekts, wiener Secession, Austria (curated by Georg Schollhammer)
Better Homes, SculptureCenter, New York, USA. (curated by Ruba Katrib)
Triennal der Kleinplastik in Fellbach, Stuttgart, Germany
The French Haunted House, SongEun ArtSpace, Seoul, Korea
No one lives here, Royal College of Art, London, United Kingdom

2012   Frieze NY (with François Ghebaly Gallery), New York, USA
Remainder, Hillary Crisp Gallery, London, United Kingdom (curated by Alex Ross)
La Triennale: Intense Proximity, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (curated by Okwui Enwezor)
Deep Space, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, USA
Superpower : Africa in Science Fiction, Arnolfini Contemporary Art center, Bristol, United Kingdom (curated by Nav Haq)
Permanent collection, level 4, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, France
Contemporary Art Center, Bristol, United Kingdom
Science Fiction in Africa, Arnolfini Contemporary Art Center, Bristol, United Kingdom (curated by Nav Haq)
Edificio Métalico, TEOR/eTica, San-José, Costa Rica (curated by Inti Guerrero)
Los Pasos Perdidos, Galerie Andreas Huber, Vienna, Austria

2011   *Le retour*, Musée Art Moderne d'Alger, Algiers, Algeria
Alternative Knowledge, Counter-Memories, David Roberts Foundation, London , United Kingdom
Idéal #13, Espace croisé, Roubaix, France
Rituel, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris, France
Museum Of Display, Extracity _Kunsthal Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium
2001, 2011, Soudain, Déjà, Galeries d'Exposition de l'École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France
Eattopia, Hong-Gah Museum, Taiwan
Group Show, Gallery Balice Hertling and Lewis, New York
Impression, Soleil, 6B, Paris, FR. Curator Stephanie Cottin.
The Normal Condition For Any Communication, Gallery TPW, Toronto, Canada
Yet to be titled, Gaudel de Stampa, Paris, France
Spacecraft Icarus 13, BAK -Basis Voor Actuele Kunst, Ultrecht, The Netherlands (curated by Cosmin Costinas)
Sympathetic Magic: Video Myths and Rituals, Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, USA

2010   Times BFI-54th London Film Festival, London, United Kingdom
Police the Police, Young Artists Biennial, Bucharest, Romania
Manifesta 8, Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain
Monsieur Miroir, 12th Ricard Foundation Prize, Paris, France
Real Estate, Galleria Zero, Milan, Italy

Actual Fears- Gaps and Vertigo, Centre d'Art Neuchatel, Switzerland
Mouvement des Atomes, mobilité des Formes, Galerie des Beaux Arts, Paris, France
2009   *LHK18*, Galerie LHK, Paris, France
Etrange familiarité, familière étrangeté, Galerie Mongrand, Beaux-Arts de Marseille, France
Idéal #11, Espace Croise, Roubaix, France
Videonale 12, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Bonn, Germany
In Search of the Unknown, Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Speed of light, Israeli Centre for Digital Art, Holon, Israel
2008   *The Gatekeepers*, Momenta Art, Brooklyn, USA
The Gatekeepers, Hordaland Art Center, Bergen, Norway
Jeune creation, Grand Halle de la Villette, Paris, France
Re-reading the future, Prague International Triennial of Contemporary Art, Prague, Czech Republic.
Nothing at the end of the lane, The Soap Factory, Minneapolis, USA
Holy Holes: Absolute Stalls, Dumbo Art Centre, Brooklyn, USA
Provocations: The Art of Social Action, Johnson Center- GMU, Washington D.C., USA
38th International Film Festival Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Transmediale 09, Berlin, Germany
22nd Leeds International Film Festival, Leeds, United Kingdom
Les Ecrans Documentaires, Paris, France
52th Times BFI - London Film Festival, Londres, United Kingdom
25fps, Zagreb, Croatia
24th Hamburg International Short Film Festival, Germany
10th VIDEOEX festival, Zurich, Switzerland.
15th /16th Rencontres internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid, Madrid/Berlin, Spain/Germany
54th International Kurtzfilmtage, Oberhausen, Germany
European Media Art Festival, Osnabrueck, Germany
Courtisane festival, Ghent, Belgium
5th Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, Bangkok, Thailand
Transmediale 08, Berlin, Germany
New York Film and Video festival, New York, USA

2007   *12th Biennial of moving images* (competition), Centre Pour l'image Contemporaine, Geneva, Switzerland
Incorrect, Prix Leica Laureates, FH-Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Germany
10 Jours / 10 Artistes / 10 vidéos, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France

AWARDS

Special Mention, Onion City, Chicago 2009
Grand Prix, IndieLisboa, Lisbon 2009
Lawrence Kasdan award, Ann Harbor Film Festival, Ann Harbor 2009
Prix Videoforme de la ville de clermont-ferrand, Clermont Ferrand 2009
Special Mention, 25 FPS, Zagreb. 2008
Grand Prix, 24th Hamburg Short Film Festival, Hamburg 2008
ARTE prize for a European Short Film, 54th Oberhausen Film Festival, Oberhausen 2008
Grand Prix, Courtisane, Gent 2008
"Dialogpreis" of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, EMAF, Osnabruck 2008
Finalist, LICC London International Creative Contest, London 2008
Leica Price nomination, Bielefeld 2007

FESTIVALS

2012   41th International Film Festival Rotterdam, The Netherlands
2011   15th Kurzfilmtage Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland
Toronto International Film Festival, Toronto, Canada
Times BFI 55th London Film Festival, London, United Kingdom
International Euro Arabe Film Festival, Santiago de Compostela, Spain
Cairo Independent Film Festival, Cairo, Egypt

57th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Oberhausen, Germany
IndieLisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Hors Piste, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
2010   54th Times BFI - London Film Festival, London, United Kingdom
Onion City Film Festival, Chicago, USA
IndieLisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Hors Piste, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, France
2009   New York Film Festival, New York, USA
Onion City Film Festival, Chicago, USA
Media Fest, Windsor, Canada
IndieLisboa, Lisbon, Portugal
Image Festival, Toronto, Canada
Ann Arbor Film Festival, Michigan, USA
Videoformes, Clermont-ferrand, France
2007   14th Rencontres internationales Paris/Berlin/Madrid, Paris, France
12th Biennial of moving images, Geneva, Switzerland

BIBLIOGRAPHY

2015   *Momus*, by Kristy Trinier
Artspace, by Dylan Kerr
2014   *Artforum Magazine, 1000 Words: Neil Beloufa*, intro by Alexander Scrimgeour
Flash Art, by Maurizio Cattelan
2013   *Art Review*, Bortched, Gesine
Figaro Magazine, Mme Mouille Farine
Mouvement
Les cahier du cinema, Stephane delormes
Les Inrockuptible, Judicael Lavrador
L'officiel Art, Rebecca Lamarche Vadel
Artpress, by Myriam Ben Salah
2012   *Frieze Magazine*, by Paul Teasdale
ArtReview "Future Greats" by Boris Ondreicka.
Artforum Magazine, by Claire Moulène.
Vogue Italia
2011   Milliard, Coline, "Nine to Watch: Neil Beloufa", *Modern Painters*, December 2010 / January 2011
Artforum.com "Best Of The Year 2011" by Rahma Khazam
Filip, by Cheyanne Turions
New York Times Magazine, "Neil Beloufa's Brave New World" By Kevin McGary
Mousse Magazine, "All is Magic" by Jarett Gregory
Les Inrockuptibles, " Nouvelle Tete" by Claire Moulène
Metropolis M, Chris Sharp
Art Agenda, " Beloufa's changes of administrations" at Galleria Zero, Milan" – Review by Filipa Ramos, 05/11
Artforum.com – "Neïl Beloufa", critic's Pick by Vincenzo de Bellis, 04/11
Bidoun, "Neïl Beloufa, Ghost Songs of ourselves" – Review by Negar Azimi, spring 2011
2010   O'Hare, Louise, "Manifesta 8 and the Problems of Sincerity", *Afterall*, November 2010
Taft, Catherine, "Neil Beloufa", Review, *Artforum*, January 2010
2009   Berardini, Andrew, "Slideshow Neïl Beloufa with Andrew Berardini" *Mousse Magazine*, December 2009
Schad, Ed, "Neïl Beloufa: Tectonic Plates, or the Jurisdiction of Shapes", Review, *Art Review*, December 2009
Berardini, Andrew, Review, *Frieze Magazine*, November 2009
Taubman, Lara, Review, *Artnet*, September 2009
Buckley, Annie, Critic's Pick, *Artforum online* , September 2009
Schad, Ed, "Beloufa in Chinatown," *Artslant online,* September 2009
Berardini, Andrew, "Interview with Andrew Berardini", *Artslant online*, August 2009
Liron, Jeremy, Review of Neil Beloufa/Oriane Dechery, *Semaines*, June 2009
Hegert, Natalie, Review of "In Search of the Unknown," *Artslant online*, February 2009

CATALOGUES

Videonale 12,
Jeune creation 08, editions Particule ISBN
Re-reading the future, Prague International Triennial of Contemporary Art.
London International Creative Contest Finalists. Asterisk Press, ISBN-13- 978-0-9814741- 0-6
"Incorrect" – Prix Leica Laureates, Kerber Verlag Publishing, ISBN 9783866781252

VIDEO LIBRARY / ARCHIVES

E-flux video Rental Berlin / New York / Beirut
Momenta Art, Brooklyn, New York
Netherland Media Art Institute, Amsterdam
Oberhausen Kurzfilmtage Archives, Germany

AWARDS

Audi Talent Awards, Paris, France
Triangle Arts Association, Residency, New York
Grand Prize City of Oberhausen, Oberhausen, DE
Prize of the Jury of the Ministry for Family, Children, Youth, Culture, and Sport of North Rhine-Westphalia of
Oberhausen, Oberhausen, DE
Special Mention, Onion City Short Film Festival, Chicago
Prix Studio Collector/ Le Fresnoy/ Isabelle and Jean-conrad Lemaitre, given by Agnes b. Paris.
Prix Ricard nomination, Paris, FR

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Centre George Pompidou, MNAM, Paris
Sammlung Goetz, Munich
David Roberts Arts Fondation, London

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *The Colonies*, 2016
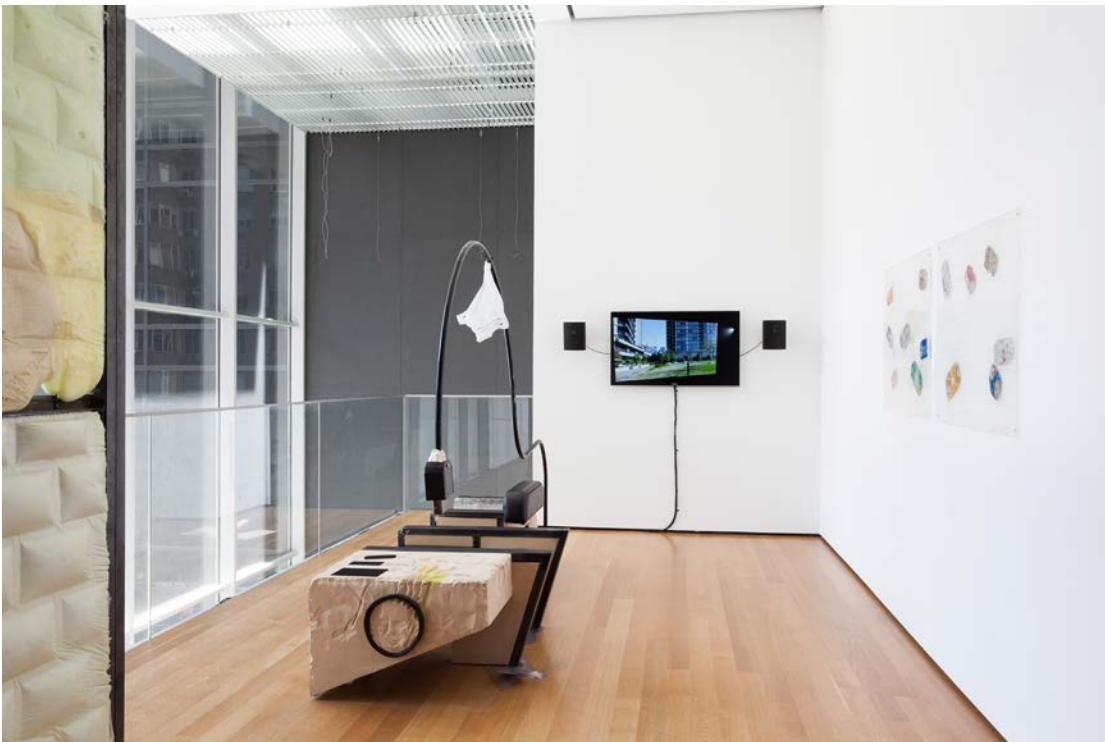The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *The Colonies*, 2016
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *The Colonies*, 2016
The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Counting on People*, 2015
La Casa Escendida, Madrid, Spain
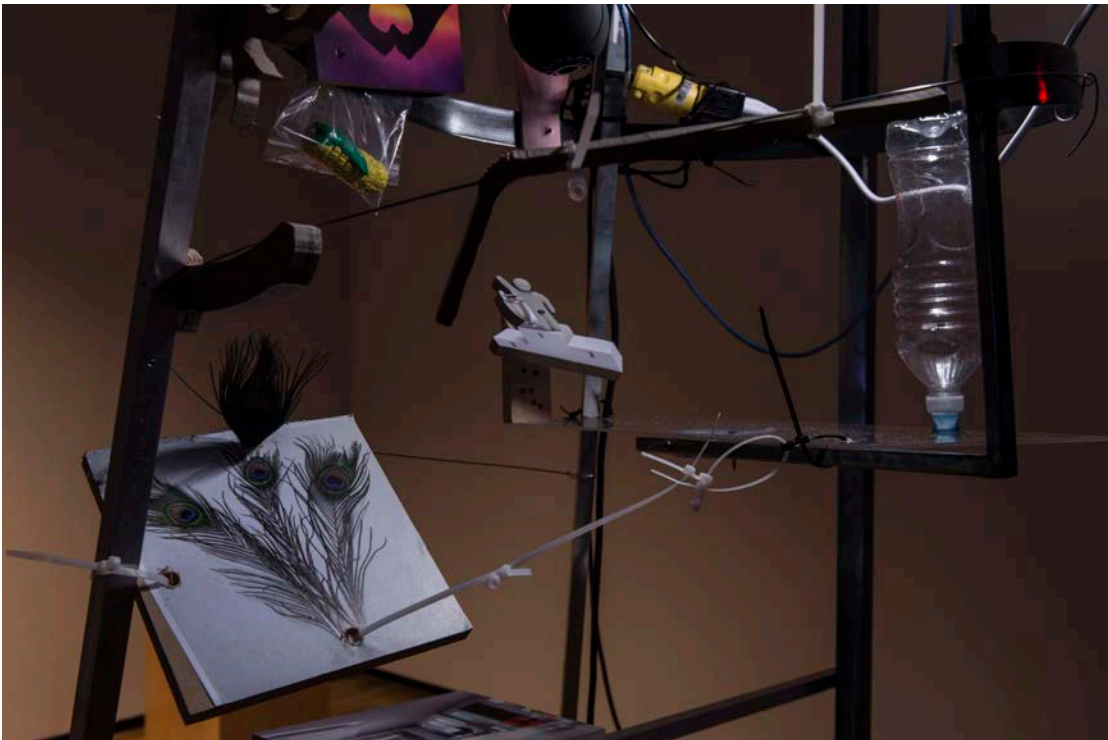
Installation view, Neil Beloufa, 2015
Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Neoliberal*, 2015
Balice Hertling, Paris

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 2015
Yarat Contemporary Art Space, Baku
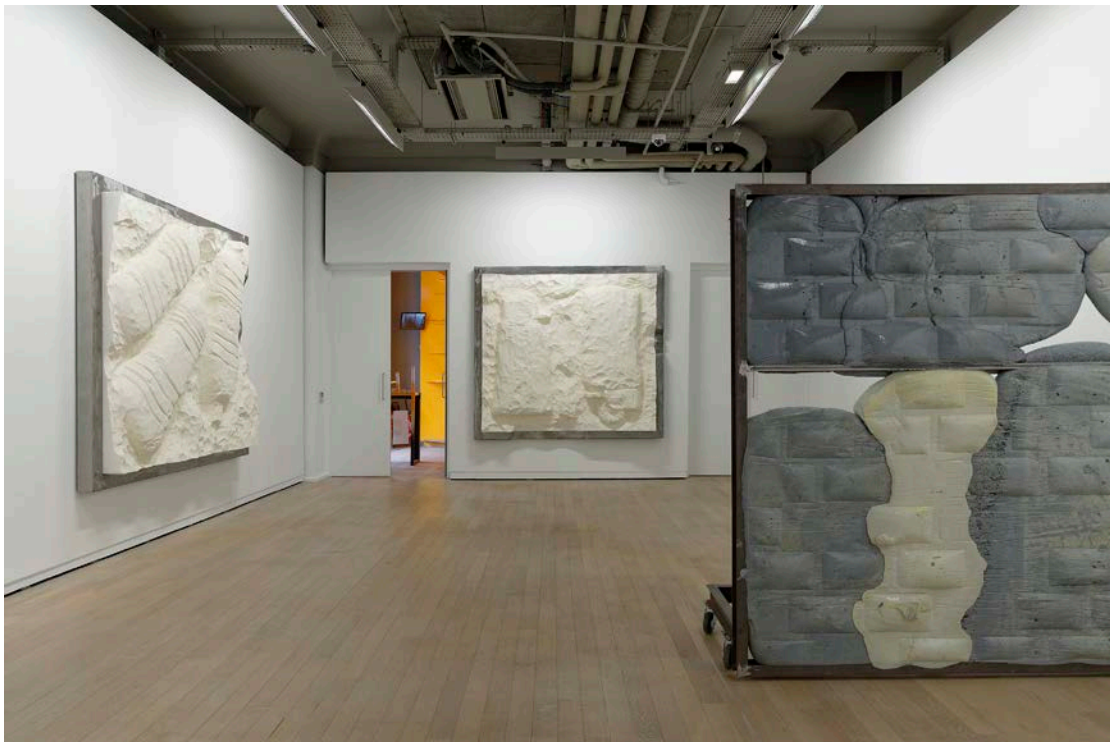
Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Counting on People,* 2014
The Banff Centre, Canada

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Counting on People,* 2014
Institute of Contemporary Art, London

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *En Torrent Et Second Jour,* 2014
Fondation Ricard, Paris

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *En Torrent Et Second Jour,* 2015
Fondation Ricard, Paris

Installation view, Taipei Biennale, 2014

Installation view, Biennale de Lyon, 2013

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Production Value,* 2013
The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles

Installation view, Neil Beloufa*, Les Inoubliables Prises d'Autonomie,* 2012
Palais de Tokyo, Paris

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Les Inoubliables Prises d'Autonomie,* 2012
Palais de Tokyo, Paris

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Les Manques Contenus,* 2011
Balice Hertling, Paris

Installation view, Neil Beloufa, *Tectonic Plates or the Jurisdiction of Shapes,* 2009
Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

Neil Beloufa
Chutes d'Atelier
2015
Steel, resin, colorant
180 x 134 x 30 cm

Neil Beloufa
Untitled
2014
expanding foam, pigment, wood, steel, hardware
70 x 70 inches

Neil Beloufa
Vintage Series: Watering Cans
2014
steel, mdf, electric hardware, electric switches and sockets
62 x 47 x 3 inches

Neil Beloufa
Party Island
2014
mixed media video installation
72 x 96 x 36 inches

Neil Beloufa
Counting Door
2014
Steel, wire, electric counting device, foam, wire
110.24 x 39.37 x 15.75 inches

Neil Beloufa
Data for Desire
2014
Digital video, color, sound
Dimensions variable

Neil Beloufa
Late Lady Dating, Curve, on Voicemail
2013
Mixed media installation
48 x 36 x 84 inches

Neil Beloufa
Shelf and Sci-fi
2013
Mdf, plexiglas, steel, plastic, video, mirrors
82 x 21 x 71 inches

Art in America

NEWS MAR. 21, 2016

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

by William S. Smith

Neïl 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, Neïl 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.

N

Neïl

B

Beloufa

MAKING FILMS, SCULPTURES AND INSTALLATIONS THAT REFLECT HIS REJECTION OF HIERARCHY AND UNAPOLOGETIC MIX OF INFLUENCES, FRENCH-ALGERIAN ARTIST NEÏL BELOUFA HAS AN INTENSE 2016 AHEAD, WITH HIS US INSTITUTIONAL DEBUT 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.

EDITED BY
MYRIAM BEN SALAH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
LÉONARD MÉCHINEAU

"IF YOU WANT TO MAKE A DOCUMENTARY, YOU
SHOULD AUTOMATICALLY GO TO THE FICTION,
AND IF YOU WANT TO NOURISH YOUR FICTION, YOU
HAVE TO COME BACK TO REALITY."
—JEAN-LUC GODARD

Having 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 Brooklyn, 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
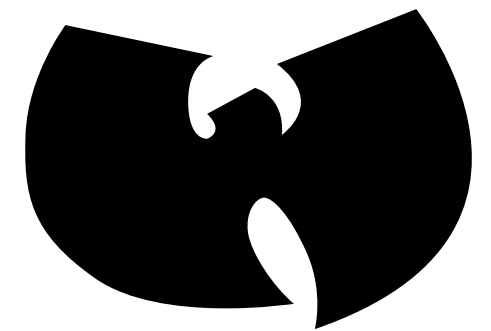
"I see Wu Tang Clan as an ideal business model because they
didn't depend on the market or on institutions, but rather
on one another. It would be great to imagine a similar system
for the production of artworks, with established artists
helping younger ones."

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.

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 dys-

topian: 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.

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

"I work
with
failure"

Occidental, 2016

Two men—fake Italians, real schemers—stir up trouble in the aptly named Hotel Occidental, grandiloquent ersatz and scaled down epitome of our post-colonial disquieted era. In a deft game of actions at cross-purposes, the protagonists—nimbly interpreted by Idir Chender, Ana Ivachef, Paul Hamy, Louise Orry-Diqueirro and Hamza Mezziani, a handful of French cinema's vanguard—engage in a wicked play with our contemporary obsession for image and representation as means of surveillance and domination. On a backdrop of social protests and identity investigations, Beloufa explores the hows and wherefores of a paranoid, security-driven society through an unintentionally realistic yet masterfully timely fiction.

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 of 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 distantiated 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 artist in the 70's"

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. 👁

WITH *AN* ACUTE REVERENCE *FOR* THE TRADITION *OF* ART HISTORY *AND* SHIFTING FROM ABSTRACTION

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 does it please you?

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. That can become 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 techni-

cal 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 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 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 of the fact 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.

"I like inverting *the* system."

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)

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 de-scribes a feeling of constriction as if an interfering force (even lazi-ness) 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 feel-ings of constraint and urgency, which allows me to do things directly in-stead of thinking what I should do, which can often lead to depression. It allows me not to let doubt inter-rupt 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 theo-ry 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 so-ciety. 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, *Hotel 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, none 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, autono-

mously. 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. ◉

Artspace

"I Don't Think We Should Be Too Serious About Art": Neïl Beloufa on Making Images for a Post-Artist World

By Dylan Kerr
Oct. 3, 2015

The artist Neïl Beloufa

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 **Neïl 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 *Kempinksi*. 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, *Kempinksi* 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.

NEÏL BELOUFA RELIES ON OTHER PEOPLE

BY KRISTY TRINIER (HTTP://MOMUS.CA/AUTHOR/KRISTY-TRINIER/) • •
JANUARY 19, 2015

Neïl Beloufa's "Counting on People" (2014). Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre. Photo Rita Taylor.

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F rench-Algerian artist Neïl Beloufa recently debuted *Counting on People* (http://www.banffcentre.ca/wpg/exhibitions/current/)(November 8, 2014 – March 1, 2015) at The Banff Centre's Walter Phillips

[Gallery](http://www.banffcentre.ca/wpg/), a solo exhibition of the same name that was collaboratively co-commissioned for London's Institute for Contemporary Arts three months prior. In describing the difference between the two, Beloufa articulated the Banff version as being one of his "cleanest" exhibitions yet – although I had the opposite first impression. Learning more about the causal links binding each work, in both its chronology and complexity, helped clarify the underlying question Beloufa posits: how autonomous can an artist can be in this hyper-mediated present?

Beloufa's most-recent work in this exhibition was produced an hour before the opening reception, with the artist officiating a race amongst the gallery staff, where he instigated a timed competition during the last push to finish the show, and rewarded the winner by posting their hastily-scrawled results. The exercise is indicative of contemporary art's latest phase of inter-relational frames, the gallery positioned as a stand-in space for a studio that envelopes the tenets of exhibition-making, the rituals of installation, the art community at hand, and the audience themselves, and utilized for the production and content of the work itself.

Beloufa superimposing his studio practices on the gallery context is a reflection of the complicated role an artist inhabits, right now, where a reliance on the conditions and institutional support offered him can be the very source for the creation of new work, while reinforcing his distance from any true association. The metaphor of this faux-residential setting within the gallery would be, of course, the superficial and disparate connection you can find with your 715 "friends" on Facebook. At this point in contemporary culture, I don't know if an artist could function independently even if they tried to. The desperation of the exhibition's title (*Counting on People*) prepared me to get lost in the visual rhetoric of the exhibition: but ultimately, it's hard to count on people, as an artist – in so many, and newly complicated, ways.

During his last public speech as the Walter Phillips Gallery curator, Jesse McKee examined Beloufa's intense interest in the dominion of social-media platforms that connect globalized "creative types" (through Vine, Skype, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc.), stressing the evident democratization of their media. Beloufa's stylistic references play on our familiarity with these accessible formats but points at these artworks' potential political agency. Each film challenges a territorialized and

bordered approach to media valuation, mocking scenes of official news reportage and boardroom dramas while emphasizing that in a post-Wiki-Leaks era, any illusion of freedom within our technology has been lost. The Darwinian nature of social media is dependent on groomed 'likes' by the majority, which neutralizes and generalizes all content by the sheer impact of its own largess, becoming a numbing hulk of extinct digital 'information'. Given this, Beloufa's works unravel with their personal references, quotidian traces; mirrored, interlaced narratives, and backstories upon backstories.

McKee relates this idea to the apparent "sovereignty" of the internet, a benign being that only achieves power when a mass invests in its potent capability. Beloufa represents this concept as a Jurassic façade dividing the gallery space, a front propped up and dependent of its body 'politic', the audience. As soon as you invest in the artifice projected on this sliding, hulking screen, you walk around the form and see the elaboration of its construction, and the illusion in front of you collapses. Beloufa's sculptural illustration of the concept, for instance, visibly evolved from his *The first dinosaur, lampshade, fertility and complete denial* (2014) presented at the ICA, where the reverse side of the 'dinosaur' is designed with an intent to be, debatably, more visually complex as a support structure than its relief frontage. With a skeleton of metal armature and wires, the projection seeps through the fiberglass back of the creature, flattening into a 'true' reflection across a mirror on the back gallery wall, reduced to a picture in motion.

Beloufa's second video installation, with a hovering image filtered through layers of Plexiglas, is distractingly beautiful. Eventually I focus on the elaborate drama unfolding before me, drawn through the camp narrative of *Home Is Whenever I'm with You* (2014) by the sudden recognition that a friend of mine is costumed as its bow-tied newscaster. I learn that Beloufa hires local talent for his videos, further inculcating the social network of his art audience, capitalizing on a rich sub-narrative of provincial artworlds, and creating an immediate web of familiarity between his viewing audience and the film itself.

Home Is Whenever I'm with You presents an elaborate melodrama demonstrating what dominates the news in 'real' life, with the clumsy actors responding to the effects of a global pandemic that threatens their immediate environs, and the film providing a political metaphor for its author's own position onto the gallery, his being a globally-recognized

artist who makes work in a very small town.

A directional column of sound lures me to the mobiles flanking the entrance of the gallery space, their futuristic and chandelier-like Plexiglas umbrellas leading me to a series of suspended puzzle-piece images that are literally 'cut and pasted' on fiberboard: a dildo, a Facebook "thumbs-up" icon, a "text-fail" icon. As the pervasive symbols slowly turn on their transparent mobile strings, I try to piece together their meaning.

My face turned to the mobile, I was unaware of the CCTV camera positioned at its center generating a content feed for *VENGEANCE* (2014). This film is a real-time construction of a narrative Beloufa transcribed from a group of urban youths near his studio in the south of Paris. Their meeting was administered by a social justice scheme that attempts to give at-risk children fulfilling and meaningful encounters with a mentor. Belfoufa asked his students to tell a story and narrate its key elements for a visualization of these suspended puzzles. Exterior to the gallery space, a computer program assembled the correct corresponding symbol of the story together in real time with the captured surveillance footage of the unassuming audience, creating a clumsy screenplay of this adolescent drama.

Beloufa describes this work as a failure, however without giving any further details I'm left to suspect the top-down origin of his relationship to his young subjects gives him this feeling more than his actual attempts to connect and relate to his teen neighbors. Most audience members seem delighted to engage, and unbothered by the trickery of the surveillance tactic. It's as if the work was a "selfie" of the viewers' exhibition experience and this is where the true sentiment of disappointment resides, in a collective social failure that makes us all complicit in its ubiquity.

The most poignant work was the final piece, *Data for Desire* (2014). Where international artists pass through Banff's transient and resort-like community with the same frequency as those in town for a snowboarding stint, Beloufa adroitly cross-pollinates two social scenes in one film, the first presenting a group of local hospitality workers entrenched in classic Banff escapades, and the second presenting an elite group of young French mathematicians. Beloufa films the flirtations and social nuances of the Banff visitors in a documentary style as they

chug beers around a barbeque. He then films French students analyze and statistically estimate the probabilities of hookups between them, as if they were wildlife. As the master puppeteer, the artist manages to equalize the class differences and settings of the two groups, inviting its viewers to perceive attraction and rejection equally in both tests, while effecting an uncanny portrait of current-day "Banff Life," an impressive portrait for an outsider.

The tenuous thread connecting Beloufa's directorial projects is most apparent in the spot-welded rebar scene of *Data for Desire*. Situated outside a constructed living-room window, I had to adjust my stance to see it from the best perspective, where the crudely-cut and fused pieces of metal combine to form the silhouette of a female form. The artist's gestures draw through rebar the careful weight of a breast, the inviting curve of a clavicle connected to a turned shoulder and then a delicate wrist holding what might be a gun to what is likely her temple.

After experiencing so many complicated works within close proximity to one other, I was reminded of an overwhelming studio visit wherein the experiments and process overshadow any resolved work. Despite my general aversion to participatory *mise-en-scènes*, I did leave this exhibition with a sense of intended attachment to these carefully constructed scenarios. Punctuating domestic touches, like Plexiglas coffee-tables supported by cut-out metal feet and a duct-taped packing sectional sofa affected a sense of comfort designed to appease my reticent collusion.

A shelf lies underneath the mirror on the wall, doubling and bettering the appearance of several hand-built ceramic abstractions: hand-built forms so badly made they're good. With a dismissive wave of his hand, the artist seems to mock his very consignment, stating "everyone makes shitty ceramics at The Banff Centre, so I should too." It would be easy to accept this as a flippant remark if I didn't know it was a subtle homage to the ceramic garden, and a nod at the unspoken artists' ritual to leave a handmade object among the temple of plants where the artists gather to rest, discuss, and intimate.

A committed smoker, Beloufa's cigarettes linger as the only trace narrative connecting the installations. A rebar frame of resin on the wall encases the tiny flecks of ash as they float in their relative position to the timing of a small personal action, some closer to the foreground and

some in the background. The remnants of his experience in this place produce an archeological mantel of the exhibitions' final crystallization over time, and stays present in my mind well after the fact. The humor, pathos, and ego of this final arbitrary and postured gesture reveals the closest self-portrait of the artist in the exhibition: his humanity and ultimate interdependence with the audience, and the futility of the individual who must count on people, despite the fallibility of their relationships.

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OCTOBER 2014

1000 WORDS

Neïl Beloufa

TALKS ABOUT HIS CURRENT EXHIBITION, "COUNTING ON PEOPLE"

MUCH, PERHAPS MOST, art demands the allegiance of viewers; it seeks to persuade of its own relevance, to proselytize a worldview, or to guide you, however subtly, in what and how to think and feel. Neïl Beloufa's work does this too, but in a deeply equivocal way, one that recognizes the perpetually fraught nature of such a relationship between viewer and work. The Algerian-French artist's practice invites a different kind of engagement, one akin to what art historian Malcolm Bull has dubbed reading "like a loser": refusing—or being denied—the privilege of being the viewer who "gets it," who understands all the references, and is thus affirmed and flattered as a cognoscente, even a bona fide art-world VIP.

Beloufa questions the strange authority the artist has in today's society, the contradictions of art's role within the "creative economy," and the intellectual betterment art is supposed to provide. Is art a mirror, a lamp, or a hammer—a blunt instrument with which to shock the spectator into awareness? Beloufa seeks a way to bypass all of these hoary constructs, remaining skeptical about art's relationship to mimesis, on the one hand, and to control, didacticism, and propaganda, on the other.

In his new exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (and in the show's near-simultaneous staging at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada), the artist's sociopolitically themed videos; technologically and materially complex, seductive sculptures; and live CCTV feeds are brought together within an overarching installation characterized by a "logic of dismantling," as writer and curator Mihnea Mircan put it earlier this year. This results in an encounter in which things fall apart as much as they come together, based on the idea that opening something up is more productive than closing it off, that art should not be a puzzle that can be solved or mastered, that there is always something extra that cannot be domesticated or fully understood. Yet even as they recall the open work, Beloufa's sprawling concatenations aren't simply there to let meaning loose or shroud it in hermeticism; their unruliness seems particular to our time, to our sense of a surfeit of information, things, and even experience. The exhibition environment is thus filled with objects that are not quite props and not quite artworks, with various layered technological interventions (an electric people-counter attached to a metal swinging door, a moving wall onto which a video is projected) that dramatize the tension between control and its undoing—a tension that must remain unresolved to be meaningful.

—*Alexander Scrimgeour*

"Counting on People" is on view at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, through Nov. 16; travels to the Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre, Canada, Nov. 8, 2014–Mar. 1, 2015.

FOR A LONG TIME, I've been interested in notions of singularity and standardization—I once made a series of works with pictures of Chicken McNuggets, which are made using four different casts and become unique only when they get fried. My new show, taking place almost simultaneously at the ICA and the Banff Centre, will work in a similar way. The same pieces will be present in both locations, but they will be articulated differently, like two interpretations of a musical score.

I've also been thinking about how affect is represented in modern societies through different interfaces and digital tools, and how we try to rationalize it. And that led to the title "Counting on People": I wanted to have something about both emotional dependency—counting on someone—and the other kind of counting, from data processing, economics, finance, and mathematics to basically any kind of statistical control. To put it more romantically, I'm hoping the exhibition will be about data rationalization, politics, and love.

One of the big works in the show is going to be a new film, *Data for Desire* [2014], which I'm shooting with some North American party kids and some French mathematicians—all in their early twenties. The kids are going to enact a fantasy house party, with beer pong, romance, seduction, jokes, and drugs, and deer wandering around the garden. We'll interview the kids and track their biological data: hormone levels, sweat, heart rate, and so on. Then we'll show the French group the footage and give them a set of biological data—some of which will actually be fabricated—and they'll come up with equations to predict who's going to get together and what else might happen at the party. The variables they'll define will inevitably be based on the global fantasy of North American culture, and the attempt to rationalize the party will be a failure from the beginning, because of these cultural differences and the unpredictability of attraction.

Desire is also central to another new video, *Home Is Whenever I'm with You* [2014]. It's an hour-long goofy sci-fi drama about how everyone, including me, wants to be somewhere else, in contact with half of the world, all the time. With Skype, for example, it doesn't matter where we are, whether we're at our desk or in front of a CGI background with a 3-D fish tank. I want to convey something of how our relationship to imagery has changed through interfaces like YouTube and Vine (a postmodern haiku generator). Part of the movie is CGI: There will be monsters attacking the world in windows on the screen behind the characters skyping one another about love.

And, in fact, I also want to make a gigantic dinosaur sculpture, using every formal vocabulary I can find. I want it to address the Internet's effects on hierarchies of imagery—that a cat playing piano can be as famous as Madonna or Jurassic Park—and so on. It feels superromantic to me, reducing all that discourse about technological change to children's stuff, prehuman history, which at the same time only exists in fantasy and fiction.

These meditations on fantasy scenarios—on desire and rationalization—tie back to a video I shot a few years ago called La domination du monde [*World Domination*, 2012], which will also be on view. For this project, I asked people that I found on the street to take on the role of president in a fictional scenario. I told them they should solve a local problem by declaring war on another continent and then explain to me how that war will solve it. Their rhetoric becomes borderline racist at times, but in a way that might reflect how extremist ideologies arise, or shed light on the psychology of waging war in general, since what they describe is not that far from Thatcher's Falklands rhetoric, George Bush's Iraq rhetoric, etc. At both the ICA and Banff, the film will be projected onto a motorized wall. The wall is a deceptive machine: It is made to be useless, as the image projected on it won't move. Its only function is to theatricalize the display and create tension for the viewer as it deforms the image and creates a kind of special effect.

I'm not a sculptor, I'm an editor: I edit in videos and I edit in sculpture and I edit in space; I construct meaning by relation. A work isn't the actual object but the relations I have built with it; my intention is to facilitate intersections between the different meanings that viewers might build on their own. Often the production of a work is explicitly collaborative, too, and the relationship between myself and the participants is always changing: Recently, for example, I was sent by an arts organization to do a project in a school in the banlieue. As I am a bien-pensant person, I didn't want to use the kids for my own benefit, so I proposed that they make every decision about a movie that I would make for them. I wanted to be the interface, to be their iPhone, to play their robot. At first, when I asked them to write a script, they were like, "Fuck you." But when I started writing FUCK YOU on the blackboard, they realized I was serious, so they started to talk about things that really interested them: Cristiano Ronaldo, love and betrayal, WALL-E, the wrestler Rey Mysterio, a soccer field, a private plane, a gym room, and a fight, that kind of thing. I really liked the scenario.

But in the end, it failed: The kids stopped caring about the project and didn't want to go through with it. Though they're twelve years old, with way more difficult lives than mine, I decided that if they didn't want the film, then I would make it mine, almost like I was taking advantage of child labor. It might be slightly perverse, but acknowledging the failure of a kind of institutional gentrification project (through an artist working in a school) felt more honest than being paternalist or just feeling guilty.

The result is another new video, *VENGEANCE* [2014]. Since the students didn't finish doing the voices for the characters, we added a robotic voice on top of their arguments with me, which will be dispersed through the space of the show and synchronized with CCTV cameras remaking the movie by shooting live footage, filming sculptures in the show as if they were Disney cartoon characters and making the exhibition into a film set.

I didn't want to be so precise and didactic, because earlier this year I did a show at the Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard in Paris in which I became somewhat fascist and authoritarian—usually I am more interested in opening meanings up than in controlling them. I structured that exhibition like a movie: I was controlling the way people moved through it, the way they thought, and the way they laughed. I tricked the viewers a bit.

In theory, I prefer it when an object or a film stays unbalanced, when viewers aren't sure they can believe me and have to take responsibility for their own opinions. This is why I like failures and "betrayals" so much, as they offer tools with which viewers can step back from the works.

Sometimes I bring people with me and then I lose them, or sometimes I lose them first and try to catch them back; it's always a game. But as much as I may hate authority, the question of power is something I ask myself about all the time. Even if I shoot with real people without knowing what I'll get out of it, I know that I control things. Maybe that's why I try to undercut myself, so that I don't brainwash the audience too much. It's a permanent fight—but it's also mostly a losing one, and one that certainly involves me lying to myself.

Communication is the Enemy

Neïl Beloufa talks about participation and resistance in his artistic practice

by Maurizio Cattelan

Untitled (2014). Installation view at Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris (2014). Photography by Aurélien Mole.

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.

MC: The mass of digital images and the redefinition of the way art is distributed seem to be moving us away from the real experience of artworks. Your sculptures are distributed as photos but your films are as films…

NB: Even if it's a bit sad, I think it suits me that way. I like the fact that everything is mediated by documents because they're such perverse tools. It's hard to understand my work from photographs, so I get the impression that people find them more interesting than they actually are. I like the idea of a hyperreal world where signs of the existence of a phenomenon replace the phenomenon itself. You yourself have made some pretty photogenic artworks, haven't you?

Real Estate TBD 1 "COUCH" (2013). Installation view at François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles (2013).

MC: Yes, I guess I'm haunted by the power of strong images. You instead are much more "atomized" in a way. The work is not offered to the viewer immediately, don't you think?

NB: Again, I often lie to myself and dream about not being authoritarian. Communication is the enemy, and to some extent avoiding "one-liner" works is in the service of that resistance. I think of myself less as a sculptor, more as an editor; my work happens in the relationship between the viewer and the work — not in the frame of the work itself. The relationship I intend to build is "theoretically" open-ended and should lead to questions rather than answers or explanations. I want to make the viewer responsible for what they decide to understand. I don't want them to trust me. I want a viewer to treat me with the same suspicion that the work encourages them to treat mainstream imagery.

But again, by trying not to make propaganda, I make a kind of propaganda of my own; I end up being just as authoritarian a communicator. It's a permanent struggle in the work that is doomed to fail. The show that is currently up at the ICA in London and at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre pretty much deal with these ideas.

Installation view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013). Photography by Brian Forrest.

MC: We often hear the term "post-internet." Is this of any interest to you?

NB: Godard said: "I'll only believe in an image produced by a computer when computers are programmed by blind people." In the West there's nothing new under the sun except the fact that the nerd has officially taken over from the alpha male. Right now, humanity is collectively brainstorming how best to organize and process so much information (just think about Wikipedia, Google, and so on). In formal terms, that might be why we are seeing so many tubular steel structures or artworks involving shelves or hangers — including mine. This is probably just a hasty illustration of computing or the Web, while others are simultaneously using ceramics or tie-dye painting, which, by contrast, give the impression of being artisanal. We see this in several current artistic practices, and it's not fundamentally different from what was being done before.

MC: I've noticed that your sculptures are often human scale.

NB: That's true. Often 1.8 meters or eye height, or sometimes the height of a desk or a household pet. I like things to stay human. It's a bit silly, but it's also the reason why I like visible failures, lack of efficiency and a sense of messiness in my pieces. It's a way of reacting to a world in which everything is turned into a productive industry, and you only feel you exist if you're growing. And in art, if it's bad it doesn't matter; you can say you did it on purpose — it's not like surgery. And even if it's not a conscious statement, I think the domestic formats you find in the work of many artists reflect an awareness of the art market's role that, "naturally," we quietly accept.

MC: You seem to be pretty interested in the works of other artists. What about curating shows as an artist? You seem to enjoy the exercise, as you've done it several times. Isn't it tough?

NB: Actually, I'm not really that interested in the works. I mostly respect artists. I mean, looking at works I realized that I was mostly seduced when my ego was flattered and when basically I was recognizing something. In other words, I was enjoying having thoughts I already had confirmed for me in interesting ways. So in a way my judgment over artists is now mostly based on what I know about the person doing it. If a work at first seems weak, but if I respect the person who made it and I believe in their intentions, I trust the work.

When people ask me if I want to organize a show, I'm happy to do it. But I'm not a curator at all; I'm expert on nothing. And most of the stuff I've been curating is more intuitive editing than exhibition making. Also, since I produce shows 24/7 for myself, I've become an experienced technician of exhibitions. But I don't think there has been any kind of authorial position when I've curated. It was more like playing songs on my iPhone during a party.
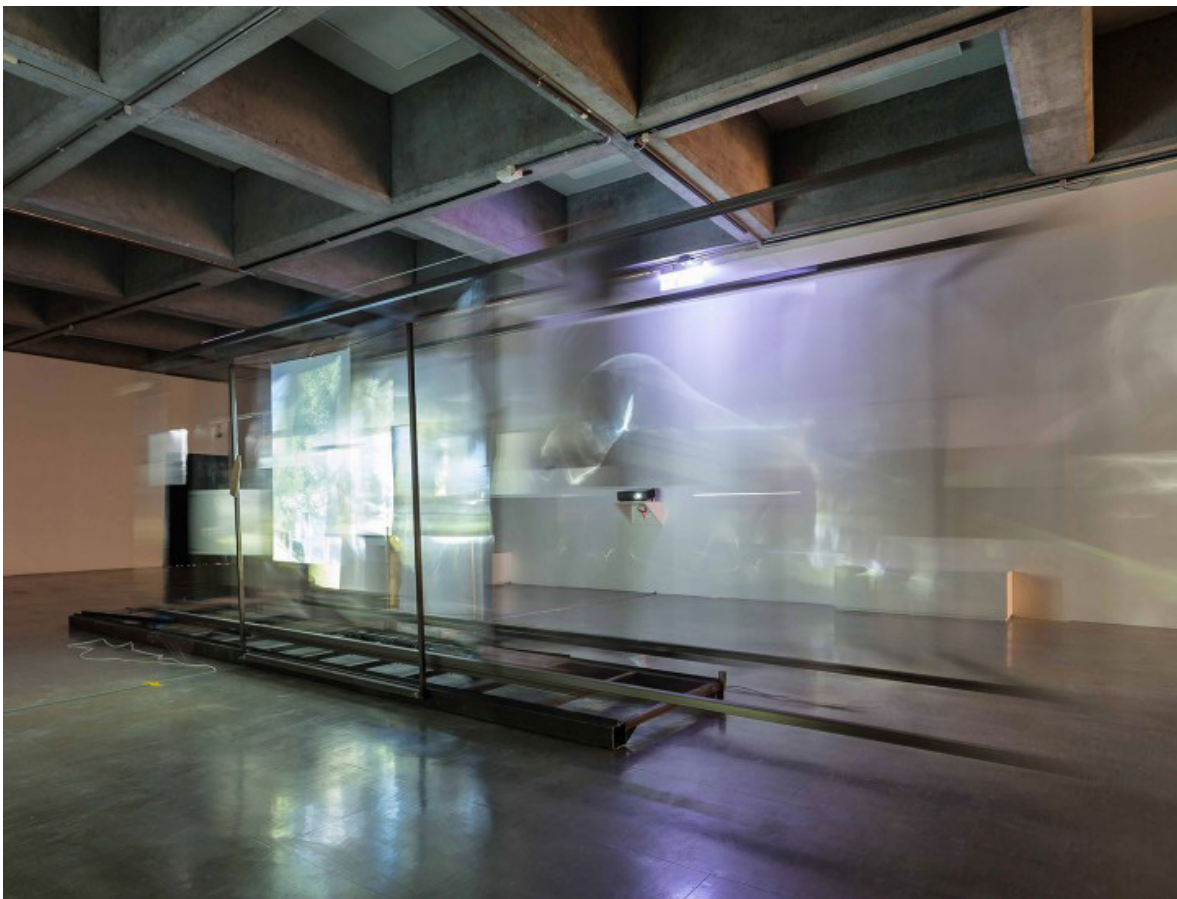
Installation view at the 9th Taipei Biennial (2014). Photography by TFAM.

GHEBALY

MC: You talk a lot about not setting up a hierarchy, and yet you say you "naturally" produce things for a market. Are you a Marxist or a free-market capitalist?

NB: I think that the amount of work I do is the most important value in my system, but I'm naturally happy when a work gets sold. The market is a means to an end for me, and I am a consenting tool for the market. I can hardly criticize something I accept and belong to.

What I aim for, above all, is the autonomy of my pieces, which means I don't want to have to talk about them to make them exist, and I don't want to care about what context they're in. Similarly, I look for financial independence so that I don't have to wait for people to offer me projects before I produce them. I'd like my economic model to be like the one invented by the Wu-Tang Clan, but on a different scale. From their very beginnings, they laid down a set of rules that aimed at creating a hip-hop dynasty that would last for centuries. On a yearly basis, each member brought out a solo album with the support of the other members and with a different recording company, so as to control the market, avoid competing with each other and being number one each time. Every four years they produced a new album together, and at the same time they trained new members who would one day replace them. It worked until one of the members died, which made the collective albums less interesting.

It would be great to construct a similar system for the production of artworks. Artists would be responsible for the art production of their era: established artists would finance emerging artists, who would in turn finance the following generation. They would finance each other and feed the market and institutions without being dependent on them. Would you be a part of that?

MC: Why not? Are you trying to set a generational trend, a sort of group of like-minded artists like in the '90s? Your generation seems much more individualist though. How can you believe in the power of the "clan"?

NB: I don't like communities when they're about stating a message or an image. Meanwhile, I don't know why between me and my government there shouldn't be a medium-sized structure: something between me and my bank, or me and Fed Ex. Because in each conflict with them I lose because I'm too small. Maybe we could start unionizing the art world. Even though I agree with that, at the same time I am part of a weird, hardcore, liberal, anarchistic, individualist industry. There is a kind of super-vulgar notion of singularity in the way we work. I'm not really sure what to believe.

MC: What's your relationship to dealers, collectors, curators, critics?

NB: I'm not super professional, although I try to be. So, basically, I try to consider humans as humans, and not to have relations with people whom I don't like as human beings. I sincerely hope that I don't discriminate between someone with or without power; but I definitely bend sometimes, and then get crazily guilty about it.

MC: Are you a cynic?

NB: No, I'm not.

Neïl Beloufa (b. 1985, France) lives in Paris.

Selected solo shows: Mendes Wood, São Paulo; Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; François Ghebaly, Los Angeles; Kunstraum Innsbruck; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Zero…, Milan; Kunsthaus Glarus; Balice Hertling, Paris; The Western Front, Vancouver.

Selected group shows: Victor Pinchuk Foundation, Kiev; Taipei Biennial 2014; New Museum, New York; Collection Lambert, Avignon; ARGOS, Brussels; NBK, Berlin; C-l-e-a-r-i-n-g, New York; Carlier | Gebauer, Berlin; David Roberts Arts Foundation, London; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; 12th Biennale de Lyon; MoMA PS1, New York; 55th Venice Biennale; Murray Guy, New York; Secession, Vienna; Sculpture Center; New York; Centre George Pompidou, Paris; Kunsthaus Bregenz.

Beloufa's solo exhibition "Counting on People" will be on view at the ICA in London until November 16, 2014, and at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Centre until March 1, 2015. The exhibition will travel to La Casa Encendida in Madrid. In 2015 Beloufa's work will be on view at the Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, and at the Lehmbruck Museum in Duisburg.

Maurizio Cattelan is an artist based in New York.

FRIEZE

FEATURE - 01 FEB 2012

In Focus: Neïl Beloufa

Documentary films and sci-fi encounters; assumption, truth and magic

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, Neïl 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

Kempinski, 2007, DVD still. Courtesy Balice Hertling, Paris, François Ghebaly, Los Angeles, and ZERO ..., Milan

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.

'Les Manques Contenus' (The Missing Content), 2011, installation view, Balice Hertling, Paris. Courtesy Balice Hertling, Paris; photograph: Guillaume Ziccarelli

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 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.

Neïl 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.

Out There | Neïl Beloufa's Brave New World

Photographs by Amanda MarsalisNeïl Beloufa at his installation at Galleria Zero at Art Basel.

Like many artists responding to our duplicitous marketing- and infotainment-driven world, Neïl Beloufa, a young French Algerian video artist based in Paris, works in the interstices of fact and fiction. In "Kempinski (2007)," which was on view last year at the New Museum, Beloufa uses a simple tweak in tense to build an eerie alternate reality. Shot at night in Mali, "Kempinski" features interviews with local inhabitants in rural settings — in a crowd of oxen, in bushes, in dusty courtyards — who speak about things from telepathic communication with stars, animals and machines to teleportation via light and sound, as if they were present-day realities. The scenes are lit by handheld, corded fluorescent lights that could, if you squint, be mistaken for alien technology, and the subjects' assertions register as farcical deadpan: Beloufa's tone of choice. The narration plays on a viewer's superficial ideas of where primitive magic and futuristic science might meet, hinging on that rhetorical switch from "will be" to "is."

The untrustworthy narrator made two appearances during Art Basel Miami Beach last week, with videos prominently on view in the booths of the Los Angeles dealer François Ghebaly at N.A.D.A., and at the main fair with Galleria Zero from Milan. Both presentations included ornate systems of sculptures and collages that further riffed on perversions of "truth" and the arbitrary path of congealing meaning in this day and age.

Beloufa's "People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water (2011)," played on an art piece that doubled as a projection screen.

For "The Analyst, the researcher, the screen writer, the cgi tech and the Lawyer (2011)," at N.A.D.A., Beloufa asked a cast of professionals to interpret an aerial view of an ambiguous road scene depicting trucks, figures and police cars. "They build a full fiction out of their analysis, but nothing correlates," Beloufa says. "Except for the lawyer, they all just say bad things, because it was shot from a helicopter." Indeed the free-associative descriptions of what is happening on screen — the scene of a breakup, a staged abduction, anti-terrorist surveillance — reflect a culture of paranoia informed by the tropes of news cinematography.

Galleria Zero showed "People's passion, lifestyle, beautiful wine, gigantic glass towers, all surrounded by water (2011)," a pitiless condemnation of Vancouver disguised as a promotional video for the city. With a Riot Girl lilt that compulsively scoops up in uncertainty, the first subject on screen begins, "People are beautiful here … they have a really good work/life balance." The interviewees' meandering zeal for their utopian home paints the ideal of outdoorsy, cosmopolitan "quality of life" as a nebulous and narcissistic purgatory, and the film ends in a horrific display of fireworks over a glittering cityscape.
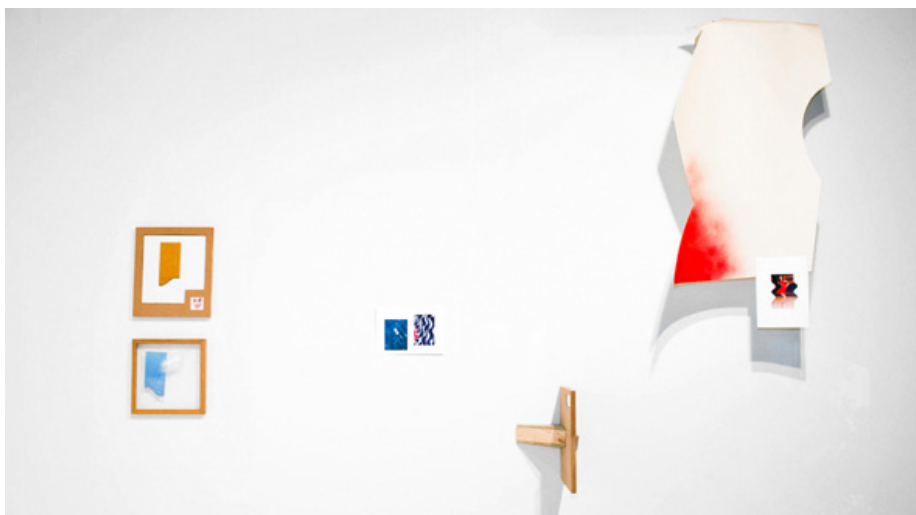
Other pieces by Beloufa hanging on the walls at his installation at Galleria Zero.

The works surrounding this video (one of which served as a screen) mixes pure forms with appropriated images celebrities and places. In "Definition, Cloud (2011)," for example, Angelina Jolie's face is pasted below a crudely cut out rectangle with one undulating side. Beloufa is interested in Jolie (a k a Lara Croft) as "the beauty for new technology" — an actress who represents perfection in the digital age. Another work pairs a swerving abstract shape partially spray-painted red with a photo of Beyoncé in a red dress, her edited midsection also swerving like a vertical sine curve. "That's supposed to be a heart, and that is a pixelated Taj Mahal, and that," Beloufa says, pointing to an image of a group of women in a rainbow of dresses digitally streaked in a rainbowlike horseshoe shape, "is another bad joke, but it's private." Like his videos, Beloufa's tangible artworks exploit a desire for an authority who knows and cares what's going on and has organized everything in a way that explains it. But Beloufa, of course, withholds such comfort. Asked if the architectural forms that serve as the projection's three-dimensional screen recall a particular building, he answered, "No, nothing is particular."

FRANÇOIS GHEBALY GALLERY

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.

Entering 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 is 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*