

Frieze

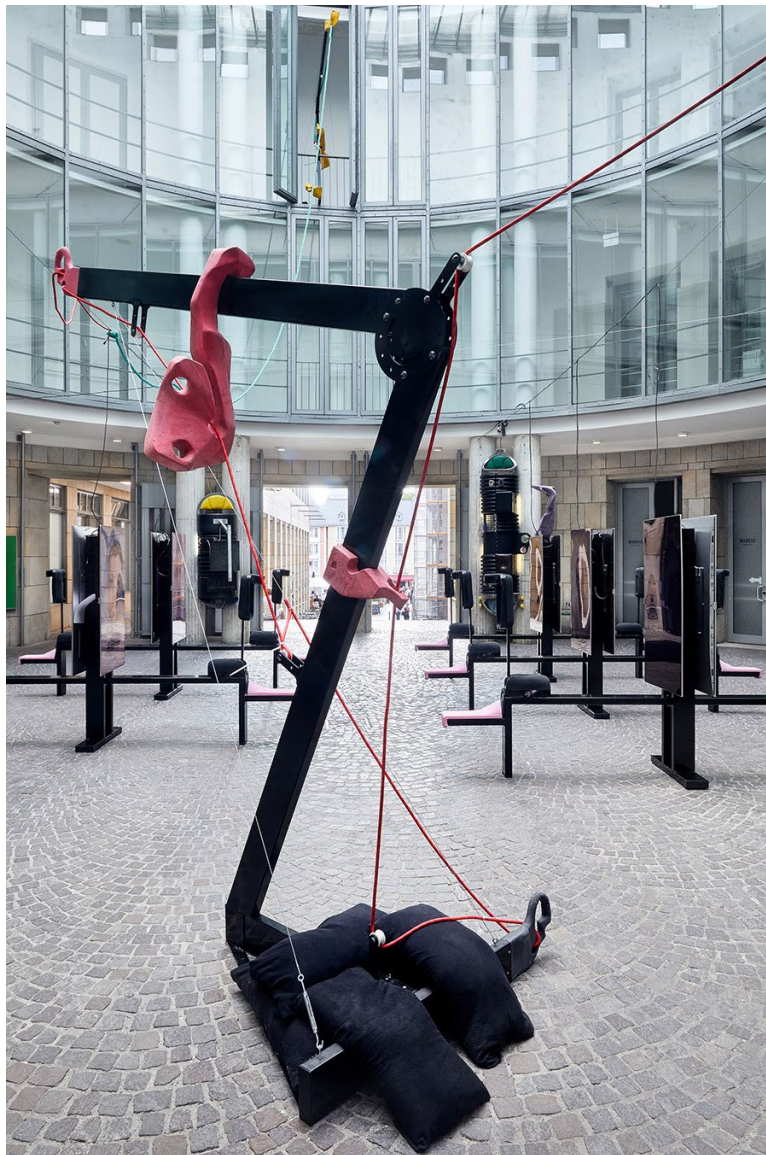
Reviews /

Neil Beloufa Reveals the Multi-Dimensional Mechanisms of Power



The two sections of Neil Beloufa's exhibition, 'Global Agreement', reference, repeat, layer and loop one another, but this relationship only reveals itself ex post facto. At first, it is a strictly bodily encounter. In the central rotunda, Beloufa has installed a set of gym-like training devices that double as viewing stations for a series of videos, collectively titled *Live Invention* (2018), displayed on vertical screens. Rendered in black steel, the structures are rigid, imposing and speak to ideas of discipline, yet they remain playful, almost frisky: in order to watch the videos, viewers have to sit on rough, foam-filled cushions and look through ominous black viewfinders, similar in design to knights' visors. Once in position, their movements restricted and their bodies uncomfortable, they are confronted by a series of pre-recorded faces displayed in the style of mobile video chats.

The faces are of young soldiers from different backgrounds, each of whom is interviewed about their life in and outside the army. 'The real war is here every day,' says a man driving a car; 'I don't need to talk about politics in my country,' says another, calling in from home. 'Boom, boom, boom,' recalls a woman in a hanging egg chair, 'It was so loud – and we were naked!' These intimate dialogues expose memories, personal convictions and habitats but they also retain a sense of universality, underscored by the uniformity of their presentation. This carries through into the exhibition design itself: the screens are arranged so that everyone can observe everyone else observing others – voyeurism here is a very public affair. Beloufa offers up an allegoric materialization of social media, a force that not only facilitates the formation of global communities but, consequently, goes to great efforts to standardize and control them.



Neil Beloufa, 'Global Agreement', 2018, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; photograph: Marc Krause

Inside the Kunsthalle, the second part of the show centres upon a single film, *We only Accept the Love We Think We Deserve* (2018), which is projected onto a back wall. In order to reach the work, viewers must pass through a corridor similar to that of an airport security line, while mirroring Plexiglas walls, enlarging prisms and reflecting projector lights intercept and interrupt the view. The film is a palimpsest of the earlier interview footage, fragments of which are shown in their pre-edited forms, playing out upon Beloufa's own desktop computer. This footage has been spliced with additional documentary material – of soldiers scrolling through their Instagram feeds, explaining how they pose for photos, re-enacting situations from past operations – and evocative CGI-animations of soldiers moving through empty fields, flooded by the light of the setting sun.

Set within its immersive, refractive environment, *We only Accept the Love We Think We Deserve* creates a dynamic meta-narrative that reflects on the production of fiction on several levels. In contrast, the work in the rotunda is an apparatus of observation and, by the same token, violence: one that promotes homogeneity and anonymity as desired effects. In these two parts, Beloufa brings together a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, which, as in our daily lives, are framed and re-framed until fiction and fact



Neil Beloufa, 'Global Agreement', 2018, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; photograph: Marc Krause

fuse. Authorship is shown to be as loose as it is vast, while reality itself becomes a multi-authored narrative constructed from every cardinal point. If we are ever to address power, Beloufa seems to suggest, we must first reveal the mechanisms that dictate the very act of observation. And perhaps that's why, as we pursue our 'Global Agreement', we are returned to the point at which image construction begins: our own perception.

Neil Beloufa, 'Global Agreement' was on view at Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, from 23 August until 28 October 2018.

Main image: Neil Beloufa, 'Global Agreement', 2018, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt; photograph: Marc Krause

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