

Neil Beloufa

Remotely Speaking: Talking Works

September 18 - October 23, 2021



There's an autumnal worry that deepens this newest series by French-Algerian artist Neil Beloufa. The rich, creamy leather that skins these works undulates over shaped wood. The swathes of leather tell one story wrapping the surface, the wood beneath hints at another. Their colors puzzle into scenes of quiet anxiety. Deep ochres and pumpkin oranges, plums and grays and lavenders piece together moments of isolation, concern, simultaneous distance from and connection to a fraught world, screens winking out at us from the flicker of their light. A cord snakes out from each work and connects to a plug below, divulging the mechanism that allows the works to glow from within. The contoured wood beneath the leather reveals its form only when viewed at the right angle like a secret reflection in the magic glass of our touchscreen phones, the lonely mirrors of our laptops.

Beloufa has always had brilliantly devious insight into structures of power and media, taking them apart with elegant films shaped by provocative MacGuffins and in installations and objects that reveal their construction, both in material and meaning. Historical precedents abound from Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* from 1961 as a conceptual ancestor; sometimes it feels like the artist accidentally blended Harun Farocki, Hitchcock, and *Rambo* into a very curious Saturday matinee. But the keenness of Beloufa's intellect coupled with his wry sense of humor and his (mostly) uncynical view of human nature creates artworks that brilliantly explore the often ridiculous involutions we have with our machines and the culture (and catastrophes) we produce with them. Visually, the works in *Remotely Speaking: Talking Works* open a new territory for Beloufa, even as their construction clearly feels linked to his previous objects. They are pictures, almost painterly. You can nearly feel the assertive Pop figures of Kiki Kogelnik or the goopy jokes of John Baldessari, maybe even some whisper of an obscure cartoon in these visually simplified people and scenes.

The visual cues hint at a kind of soft disassociation, the sensation of oncoming or ongoing calamity as seen from your sofa. All the titles nod at the experience of watching seriously bad things happen from the cocooned isolation of those in wealthier places. *Talking About Sunglass, UV Protection, and Style* (all works 2021) is, indirectly perhaps, about global warming. *Talking About the Defense of the Magic Forest* can either be mystical psychedelic check-out, some cryptic reference to an escapist video game, actual deforestation, or all of the above. *Talking About Meat Consumption and Its Global Impact* is clearly more obvious in its reference, but less so is the late-night figure on their desktop computer, the moon winking from the window as they doomscroll through the news. And *Talking About Beach Holidays During a Wildfire Summer* is the most sharply pointed—the restless attempts at restorative normalcy during a clearly very fucked moment in the world. Individuals caught holding moral responsibility caused by systemic failures from the safety of their homes. Here we see the tension, the hypocrisy, the worry, the desire for both healing pleasure and our bumbling attempts to be aware and do right as the world burns around us.

One could insert an advocacy for systemic change, and perhaps Beloufa feels sincerely that this is the case. In this body of work however, Beloufa is gifting us an epiphanic awareness, a revelation of the clear, amorphously tragic, and often ridiculous reality of exactly where we are right now.

Neil Beloufa (born in 1985 in Paris, France) is a French-Algerian artist who lives and works in Paris. He studied at École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts and at École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris; California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, USA; Cooper Union, New York; and Fresnoy – National Contemporary Arts Studio, Tourcoing, France. Beloufa has presented recent solo exhibitions at Pirelli HangarBicocca (2020), Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2018); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); Pejman Foundation, Tehran (2017); K11 Art Foundation, Shanghai (2017); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2016); and Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2015). He participated in the Venice Biennale in 2013 and 2019, the Biennale of Contemporary Art in Shanghai in 2014, and the Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2013. This is Beloufa's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery.