

Neil Beloufa *Democracy*
Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles 11 June – 30 July

Who are you? Or rather who do you think you are? Or even who do you think you're supposed to be? What changes when somebody's watching, the cleverness you display in your media avatar, the difference between what you wish you were and who you really are?

In his videos and installations, Neil Beloufa is always playing with this permeability between fiction and reality, with the performances that come with living up to what we think we are or should be. In his videos, actors often make up what they think their characters should be doing, sometimes performing fictive versions of themselves. The fact that their performances are self-consciously constructed is never absent from the spectators' view, from the cinema lights that sometimes appear unhidden on his sets to the elaborate frames and screens he concocts to display the videos. Every part of what was made and how it was made is on view, down to the empty boxes of cigarettes that were smoked during the installation. A whole set of wallworks here, *Chutes d'Atelier* (2016), is just things made

of scraps from Beloufa's studio: leftovers from other works.

A whole (albeit small) house, made from rebar and translucent resin, frames the video *Data for Desire* (2014). The house comes complete with all the accoutrements of domestic life, from a television and computer to a broom and dish-drying rack. These things that we own and that own us articulate a role we play as active members of modern life, shaping us and our day-to-days with their symbolic value. As rebar constructs, the house and all its objects are totally useless, just cheaply reproduced simulacra of the real thing, and all wholly empty. The whole is less like a glass house and more like those old Dutch homes with huge front windows that allow everyone to see what you own and how well you're performing your role in society. The video depicts two groups of six twentysomethings: a 'pseudo-scripted' party of flirting resort-town workers in Canada, and student mathematicians in France trying to get an algorithm to predict who will fuck whom at the party, all of this interspersed

with spooky scenes of life in the resort town: tourists snapping pictures of white-tailed deer and elk eating foliage next to giant satellite dishes. The natural and unnatural rub against each other in long, languid shots.

Alongside all the studio-scrap wallworks, a video titled *World Domination* (2012) is projected on a huge mechanical dinosaur, a fake fossil made according to what the artist vaguely remembers a dinosaur is supposed to look like, composited from pictures he saw online. The video depicts nonactors pretending to be world leaders trying to decide how to solve their political problems by invading other countries, nuclear options hinting at possible extinction. The things they say sound like the kinds of things uttered by politicians, but listen closely and they don't actually make any sense. Not so different, really, from what politicians actually say while they perform their roles as politicians, like a reality-TV star running for president. Little wonder that Beloufa titled his show *Democracy*.

Andrew Berardini



Democracy, 2016 (installation view).

Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy the artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles