



PRESS RELEASE

L'homme nu

Volume 1/3: Anthropomorphic appearances

"I had been searching for a society reduced to its simplest expression. That of the Nambikwara was one to such an extent that I only found men there."

Claude Lévi-Strauss

Alexandra Bircken, Sebastian Hammwöhner, Mathieu Mercier, Jean-Luc Moulène, Sarkis, Franck Scurti, Didier Trenet, Bernhard Walter

Curated by Aurélie Voltz

Opening on Monday 22 January from 6 P.M.
23 January - 7 April 2007

Setting greater store by direct discovery and dialog, the show "L'homme nu" (The Naked Man) features works that have been grouped under the theme of an anthropological reading. The idea here is to rediscover forms and cultures, both ancestral and contemporary, with a particular focus on humanity. The representation, environment and lifestyle of humans form the three parts of this program. In their abstract, concrete, imaginary or poetic way, in situ artworks, sculptures, drawings and objects contribute to transforming the face of a multicolored universal landscape. This blend of cultures and the analysis of their mechanisms are an echo of the overarching theme of hospitality proposed by TRAM.

Borrowed from Claude Lévi-Strauss, the title "L'homme nu" proposes to view man in his simplest state, as a kind of dummy to be dressed, with the different layers playing the role of succeeding impressions of civilizations, cultures, community practices, or social mores. This is man viewed in terms of influences that range indifferently from the familiar to the exotic geographically or historically. Anthropology is taken here as more than a subject and is treated in a roundabout way. Like a new manner of seeing, it brings to light a certain number of works that involve a sensitive approach to humans. In this regard, the featured artists, who come from very different worlds and do not necessarily share the same view of human society, have been brought together through the works presented here. The selection, arrangement and contrast of these might suggest a personal collection of objects, sparking our curiosity and raising questions, rather than any theoretical demonstration attempting to provide answers to those questions.

The first volume in the trilogy, called "Allures anthropomorphes" (Anthropomorphic Appearances), is devoted to human representation in its broadest range of forms. On the one hand, visitors will discover a number of works that tend to highlight the Westernization of cultures. While Franck Scurti, with his "White Memory," clearly alludes to the dwindling of forms in African masks and their consequences for

the loss of memory, Mathieu Mercier draws a parallel between these same objects, which take on magic properties and allow access to supernatural spirits, and the sports culture of baseball in America. The mask is used here by two very different cultures for protecting oneself from danger, or even from the other, in a context of coming together since games are akin to a ritual act. "Le masque jaune" (The Yellow Mask), a drawing by Jean-Luc Moulène, features a head in its generic, almost abstract form as a bodily sign. Moulène approaches mythologies from an odd, unusual direction. It's not about getting back to one's roots; rather, as the artist makes clear, it's a question of "extraction," even "updating." Bernhard Walter has contributed a piece that certainly has a touch of derision about it. The visitor climbs a makeshift set of stairs to come face to face with two roughly modeled clay heads displayed on a high-up shelf. Between the two, there is the distance and chasm of one culture vis-à-vis another, the irony of notice taken, of an interest in what man has often destroyed by merely studying it. Sebastian Hammwöhner has harmoniously worked to fuse an object and its discoverer. "Mr. Gabbeh," a drawing depicting a rug with a stylized face, boasts the name of the man who invented these ornamental motifs. The rug is doubly embodied, included among the ranks of portraiture and hung on the wall.

The other aspect of the show focuses on works that are probably more hybrid, mixing different cultures and appropriating forms, colors and styles. These are objects that display a concern for being free of any and all references. Sarkis's "Le masque touché" (The Touched Mask) is exemplary in this regard. The piece brings together an early-20th-century Tibetan shaman mask and a 19th-century Indian stone tray, adding fluorescent plasteline hair to the head. Centuries and civilizations jostling here yield an obviously striking result nonetheless. Didier Trenet's "Les jeunes travestis" (The Young Transvestites), is a series of kerosene stoves lined up and dressed in tutus. Thanks to the mismatching of their size and genre, they offer up a look that is as strange and indefinable as Alexandra Bircken's tiny "Goldfinger," a figure that boasts a gold toe and is made of wool and twigs. While the former brings to mind the theater, disguise, mise en scène, or burlesque shows, the latter is more suggestive of fable and a narrative playing out in the imaginary.

Faced with these different types of artworks, visitors may find themselves nonplused, to say the least. Yet one thing is certain. All of these heads, masks, busts and silhouettes—more or less hieratic, stylized, artificial or simply evocative, and fashioned from raw, natural, or man-made materials—always give off a profoundly human feeling. Without teasing out any particular trend, you can draw a parallel with certain artists at the turn of the 20th century. Archaism? Primitivism? What we recall is that that radicalization of form sprang at the time from a need to restore representation of the human face.

Discussion : Le printemps de l'hospitalité (Spring of hospitality)

Monday 2 April 2007 at 8 PM

Debate with Annabelle Boissier, anthropologist, co-founder of the group « Socio-Anthropology of Fine Arts in peripheric contexts », Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, with the curator and the artists of the exhibition. Moderation : Thomas Michelon, cultural attaché and co-director of the French Institute in The Netherlands.

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