

PRESS RELEASE

AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand

curated by Lorenzo Balbi, with the curatorial assistance of Sabrina Samorì

Istituzione Bologna Musei | MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

January 23 - May 3 2020

Opening Wednesday January 22 2020 7 pm

Bologna, 21 January 2020. AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand is the collective exhibition that inaugurates the 2020 exhibition program at MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna.

The Sala delle Ciminiere of the Bologna museum is transfigured by the peculiar presence of works created by seven of the best known contemporary artists: **Ed Atkins, Luca Francesconi, Apostolos Georgiou, Ragnar Kjartansson, Susan Philipsz, Cally Spooner and Apichatpong Weerasethakul.**

The exhibition, curated by **Lorenzo Balbi** with the curatorial assistance of **Sabrina Samorì**, is open to the public from January 23 to May 3, 2020, and is one of the main projects of **ART CITY Bologna 2020**, the institutional program of exhibitions, events and special initiatives promoted by the Municipality of Bologna in collaboration with BolognaFiere, in coincidence with Arte Fiera.

The theme of cyclical time and the shift away from a linear representation of time pervades the contemporary scientific debate, to the point that physicists have come to see it as the central issue in a revolution in thought that is leading us to reconsider the very idea of time, through new theories such as string theory or loop quantum gravity.

AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand aims at inquiring into the theme of **loop**, repetition and cyclicity in the present time, by looking at things from different perspectives, through the works of artists who have made this issue the focus of their research.

The exhibition project develops through different approaches: a **sociological** one, which looks into the impact of new technologies and organizational systems on the psychological and physical systems of humans; a **philosophical and religious** one, which draws inspiration from forms of knowledge and experience based on holism, reincarnation, and a cyclical conception of time; and an **ecological** one, which propounds new models of production and consumption based on a new awareness of rural culture.

The authors of the works that will be displayed in the spaces of MAMbo come from different parts of the world, and the fact that they problematize the issue shows that there is a critical debate around time, and the forms of knowledge and power arising from it, in contemporary art.

Moving between different media - **performance, video, sculpture, painting, photography** and **installation** - the project offers visitors a journey through immersive environments characterized by different degrees of temporal intensity.

The Greek artist **Apostolos Georgiou** (Thessaloniki, 1952, lives and works in Athens) creates paintings that portray men and women in work and home settings. Immersed in an estranging atmosphere, his characters experience everyday life scenes that reflect the fears, distress and torment of a middle class alienated by the repetitiveness of employee work and family life. Using a tonal painting technique that involves bold, squared brushstrokes, Apostolos Georgiou portrays men and women trapped inside their everyday home and work environments.

Observing the clothes and the few details in the paintings, we can recognize a 1950s setting, the era that saw the rise of a new service-based society, which brought with it specific work and family models that would become prevalent in Western society.

Thanks to his careful use of the non finito (unfinished) technique for building his environments, the artist transfigures a historical period into a timeless dimension. That which does not change, and emerges from the face of the characters, are the feelings, the inner life of human beings who are reclaiming their own reality.

Suspended in a dead-end narrative atmosphere, these figures look clumsy and unable to manage their own life situations, so they take refuge in themselves. Their inner world is made visible through the gestures and the surreal situations depicted, as they nervously hand flowers to their beloved, stay motionless among playing children, clumsily hold sheets of paper in their hand, gesticulate frantically, or work in the country wearing office clothes.

As in a tragicomic story, the characters end up exposing their fragility even as they try to mask their fears.

Ragnar Kjartansson (Reykjavík, 1976, lives and works in Reykjavík) with his nihilist, disenchanted attitude, Ragnar Kjartansson questions, and plays with, contemporary stereotypes. His research stems from the same narrative, linguistic, and identity-bound clichés produced by Western culture, which include, among others, the objectifying of the female body, the ideal of the maudit artist, machismo, and North-European Romanticism. Kjartansson's take on these themes is underpinned by a question about the existential condition of the human being, of which he often gives a tragicomic portrait, one that is able to involve spectators in an intense emotional experience.

Bonjour (2015) is an environmental performance consisting in an imposing stage set that reproduces a portion of a French village, probably in the 1950s, down to the smallest detail. While a woman is picking up a flower vase to fill it up at the fountain, a man goes out of his house to smoke a cigarette and greets her. She answers shyly, walks back to her house, and finally turns back to take one last look at the stranger. This five-minutes scene repeats continuously for the entire duration of the show, accompanied by the music of the famous Charles Trenet song *La Mer*, 1946. While emphasizing the various elements that characterize the Romantic style in cinema and theater, the work gives a visual image of the 'ever-new' that is inherent in the repetition of the same gesture. In Bologna the performers are: Luca Arcangeli, Serena Dibiasse, Giulia Lorenzelli, Roberto Papavero, Francesca Pedone and Sergio Scarlattella.

Cally Spooner (Ascot, 1983, lives and works in Athens and London) looks into the pervasive nature of the new data economy which, thanks to the evolution of information media, leads to a progressively tighter control on the social and inner life of individuals. In particular, Spooner focuses her attention on language and its ability to create situations, to support economic systems and to influence minds and bodies, often in an invisible way. Each work is initially conceived as a text, which gets gradually reworked, changing its structure according to the medium used. This reworking procedure can be regarded as representative of how the artist thinks of strategies of resistance: to keep a state of “spatial and temporal restlessness”. *DRAG DRAG SOLO* (2016) is a video originated from a closed-door shooting session that was part of a broader project titled *On False Tears and Outsourcing*, presented at the New Museum in New York in the same year. The choreography developed from a free interpretation of sports-derived motions, of business team-building exercises and practices, and the gestural expressiveness of romantic movies, with the purpose of reflecting on the use of protocols and conventions as an answer to a need for communication. It would be inappropriate to refer to *DRAG DRAG SOLO* as a documentary work - rather, it is as a further reworking of a work that was conceived as finite. Through her mediation practice, Spooner operates on a level that she defines a “rehearsal of means”, treating the filming of discourse, in this case a performance, as a tool to destabilize a pre-established order. The time of rehearsal and of attempt, with its persistence and expectation, holds within itself such temporal intensity as to upset the neoliberal chrononormativity.

In *Il Calendario delle Semine* (Sowing Calendar, 2009), **Luca Francesconi** (Mantua, 1979, lives and works in Mantua) narrates how “*it was with agriculture that humans first felt the need to confront time, organise it and start managing it, and hence develop theories about it*”. According to the artist, rural culture has the ability to turn time into something that can be modelled, something physical and tangible, and this allows human beings to base their life on a circular rhythm, in which everything recurs every day under a new form. Observing this particular chain of events, Francesconi develops his own works from partial modifications he makes on found objects, and from representations of tools, animals and vegetables drawn from popular rural iconography. As part of his reflections on biological cycles such as digestion, and on productive ones like crop rotation, the artist brings our focus back on a direct relationship with nature, stressing how extreme industrialization in today’s society has led to a distortion in production and consumption.

On display is new production, objects as well as historical works that address both topics, rural life and cyclical time. In the first room, a group of sculptures depicting stylized iron men, with heads replaced by fruit and vegetables, stages the power mechanism existing between a recruiter of day labourers and a group of field workers. The choice of iron for the body of the figures symbolically divides the earth from the head of humans, stressing just how depersonalizing farm work can be.

In the second room, Francesconi provides an extensive reflection on the natural cycles, showing different types of fish species in showcases and on shelves (real fish, fake fish, and fish represented in a new shape or form). The fish are captured at specific stages in their biological

transformation. Other objects, like a snakeskin and the work *Snake of the paddy fields (Indochina)*, from 2016, a snake made of pebbles and rice balls, refer the viewer to the meaning that this animal has acquired over time in describing and visualizing cycles, eternal return and the endless metamorphosis of bodies.

Cyclical time also lies at the root of reincarnation. **Apichatpong Weerasethakul** (Khon Kaen, Thailand, 1970, Lives and works in Chiang Mai, Thailand) is one of the best-known Thai artists. He has devoted most of his research to retelling the memory of a country, Thailand, which in the past few years has been subject to brutal military occupations, aggressive extractive policies and a nationalist control of the cultural sphere. Returning to the places of his childhood, the artist tells his story through a personal reading that provides precious evidence of the beliefs and superstitions that still mark the everyday life of the population. Stories of ghosts, spirits and reincarnations give shape to an ever-changing universe, where each creature is part of an endless, cyclical regeneration process.

Conceived as something organic, his film works and installations develop from an interaction between light and darkness (which is the source of atmospheric change), as well as from the coexistence of different levels of time and reality. *A Letter to Uncle Boonmee* (2009) a video that is part of the broader project *Primitive*, was inspired by a book the artist received as a gift from a monk. The book is about Boonmee, a man originally from the North-East of Thailand, who could tell the story of his past lives. As a tribute to Weerasethakul's region of origin, the work is set in Nabua, a village ravaged by the nationalist militia. The script for this short film draws inspiration from the different reincarnations of Boonmee and the stories told by the children and relatives of the imaginary protagonist.

Ed Atkins (Oxford, 1982, lives and works in London) The research of Ed Atkins develops from his thoughts on the representation and creation of subjectivity in an age marked by digital mediation. In his videos, society is observed through the eyes of an avatar of the artist, reproduced by means of CG (computer-generated) models, and portrayed in moments of loneliness, desperation and torment. *Safe Conduct*, (2016) is a video installation comprising three large monitors hanging from the ceiling, resembling those found in airports, stations and shopping malls. The video follows a digital surrogate of the artist, depicted almost like a corpse, as he wanders about the check-in and baggage claim areas of a desert airport. The body of the character is hacked to pieces, which appear on the conveyor belts among banned objects such as guns, and references to death like skulls and blood.

The idea of circularity and eternal return can be found in different aspects of the video, as in the music of Maurice Ravel's *Boléro*, which repeats in a gradual, steady crescendo, thereby emphasizing the subject's sense of anxiety and captivity. Atkins thus endows an image with a body and an identity that dissolves when faced with the pervasive presence of security systems and today's politics of terror.

The exhibition opens and closes with an audio work by **Susan Phillipsz** (Maryhill, Glasgow, 1965, lives and works in Berlin). Susan Phillipsz looks into the emotional and psychological space that is created from the relationship between sound, architectural space and subject.

Playing on an unexpected experience of her works, Phillipsz allows the public to recover a lost emotional intensity, and restores public spaces to their role as hubs for meetings, conversations and feelings. The works of the artist smash the neutrality of today's non-places, turning them into sites of cultural transmission. *Guadalupe* (2003-2019) is an audio work the artist created during her residence at Artpace in San Antonio. Consisting of field recordings and synthesized sounds, the work evokes the feelings of disorientation and loss experienced by a stranger in a foreign country. Through a combination of several sound elements, spectators are suddenly projected inside a crowded public space, whose noise is compounded by the echo of a slow, instrumental version of the folk song *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* by Hank Williams. A few seconds later, somebody starts to whistle, while a voice over a PA seems to set the scene in a bus station. A woman, here Phillipsz herself, asks for directions to Guadalupe, but never actually makes it there. After a few silent seconds, as if off the scene, the artist is cheered up when she meets a stranger who sings Williams's song live for her. The work is built on a repeated circular movement which recalls the nervous motions of a traveler seeking for directions and facing several problems, among them language barriers. In this exhibition, *Guadalupe* is presented in a never-before-seen version, enhanced by field recordings found by the artist, from the time she was living in San Antonio.

AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand is complemented by a publication issued by **Edizioni MAMbo**, and edited by **Caterina Molteni**, which includes a critical essay by curator **Lorenzo Balbi**, explanatory texts for the individual works on display, and a study section with texts and contributions especially written by the artists, as well as unpublished content on the topic of the exhibition, commissioned from international contemporary theoreticians such as philosopher **Federico Campagna**, anthropologist **Elizabeth Povinelli**, and Molteni herself.

For a deeper visiting experience, the exhibition includes mediation activities organized by **MAMbo's Educational department**.

AGAINandAGAINandAGAINand is made possible thanks to the precious support of our main sponsor, **Gruppo Hera**:

"An exhibition like this could not fail to attract our attention - says Giuseppe Gagliano, Hera Group's Central Director of External Relations - because the theme of cyclical time and, above all, circularity is the beacon that guides the transition towards increasingly sustainable development models in which Hera is engaged alongside the communities it serves. For too long, we have imagined innovation as a straight line, extending into infinity. Today, on the other hand, innovation is also and above all, knowing how to retrace one's steps, to rediscover and reuse, restore value and recover. The reflections of these artists, therefore, are of great interest to us

and, in supporting the exhibition with conviction, we believe that it can engage and captivate even the broad and demanding audience that MAMbo, year after year, can continuously surprise”

The exhibition is produced also thanks to our sponsor **Gruppo Unipol** and designed in collaboration with **LAMINARIE**. Technical sponsor: **Freak Andò**.

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Exhibition

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Artists

Ed Atkins, Luca Francesconi, Apostolos Georgiou, Ragnar Kjartansson, Susan Philipsz, Cally Spooner, Apichatpong Weerasethakul

Curated by

Lorenzo Balbi, with the curatorial assistance of Sabrina Samorì

Promoted by

Istituzione Bologna Musei | Area Arte Moderna e Contemporanea

Venue

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, via Don Minzoni 14

Exhibition period

January 23 - May 3 2020

Opening

Wednesday January 22, 7 p.m.

Opening hours

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays 10 am - 6.30 pm

Tuesday 10 am - 10 pm

opening hours during ART CITY Bologna 2020

Thursday January 23 10 pm - 10 pm | Friday January 24 and Sunday January 26 10 am - 8 pm |

Saturday January 25 10 am - 12 am

Admittance

temporary exhibition € 6 full-price ticket | € 4 reduced ticket | owners of Card Cultura € 3 reduced ticket

Combined ticket temporary exhibition + Permanent collections of MAMbo and Museo Morandi € 10 full-price ticket

Combined ticket temporary exhibition + Permanent collections of MAMbo and Museo Morandi € 8 reduced ticket

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