

Cecilia Brunson Projects, 3 Royal Oak Yard, London SE1 3GD

Coco Fusco: And the Sea Will Talk to You



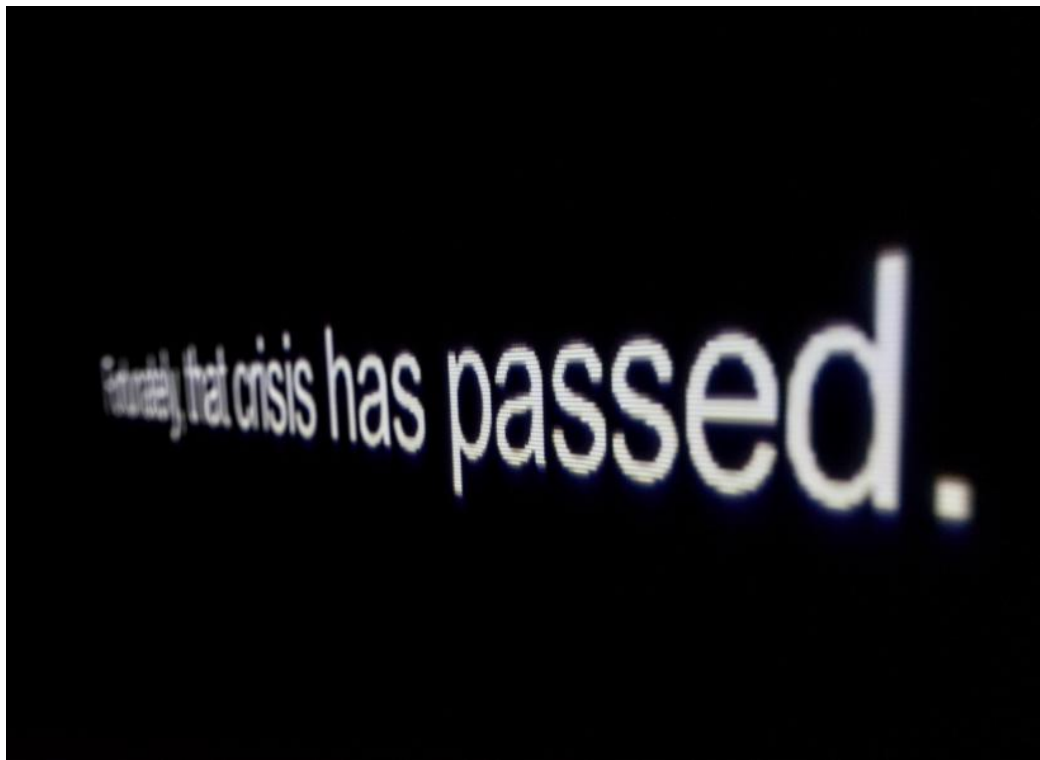
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Cecilia Brunson Projects

3 September - 23 October 2015

Review by Niko Munz

The audience for Coco Fusco's video installation currently showing at Cecilia Brunson Projects sit within inflated rubber tubes stationary on the floor. For forty-five minutes, a mid-ocean vantage point is projected onto a large screen which looms over the viewer. There are no boats, no fish, no specks of land, only greeny seawater and a horizon line. Oceanic sound effects are constant, the water lapping to and fro. Layered on top, stories spoken like voiceovers from a Terrence Malick film alternate between English and Spanish voices. One man recounts his exodus from Cuba, a dangerous voyage across the Caribbean Sea facing storms and sharks on a fragile raft. A woman relates a journey in the opposite direction, returning her mother's ashes to Cuba by plane, navigating both security personnel and customs officials.

Each year, large numbers of Cubans risk their lives to travel across the straits on makeshift rafts. A recent article for the International Business Times quotes a Cuban refugee saying "the whole country; we have nothing...we are stuck". This is a country that only legalised personal cell phone possession in 2008. It is paralysis that Fusco wants the viewer to experience, from the slouch-inducing rubber tube high-on impossible to leave, to the ocean spray perpetually dunking the camera lens and the journeys ping-ponging back and forth from the Caribbean island.

Fusco first showed the work in 2012 at Brooklyn's BAM. Halfway through, the artist and helpers crept among the audience, handing out cups of water, a seemingly innocent act which did much to confuse participants who didn't know whether to drink or decline. It proves Fusco's desire to work outside the viewer's comfort zone and tie overall message to

bodily experience. At one point a narrator says that raft passengers, after a day or two at sea, become delusional; the sea starts talking to them. It is then we realise that the sea is actually the one speaking, that we are meant to be those adrift, that the whole premise is a simulation of migration, a mid-point between hope and despair.

Fusco's piece has an antecedent in Théodore Géricault's 1819 'The Raft of the Medusa', his vast painting of wounded survivors drifting off the coast of Africa. In desperation, some of Géricault's figures clamber onto barrels, attempting to signal a boat far off on the horizon. As counterbalance to this hopeful action, the figures in the foreground make no attempt to signal, show no desire to be saved. Left in suspension, Géricault's viewer sits astride a see-saw balanced perfectly between hope and despair. Julian Barnes, in an essay on the painting, pins down Géricault's message with a single sentence: "We are all lost at sea, washed between hope and despair, hailing something which may never come to our rescue". In a modern-day reworking of the French masterpiece, Fusco has brought the immigration crises affecting many parts of the globe into the exhibition space with full emotive force.