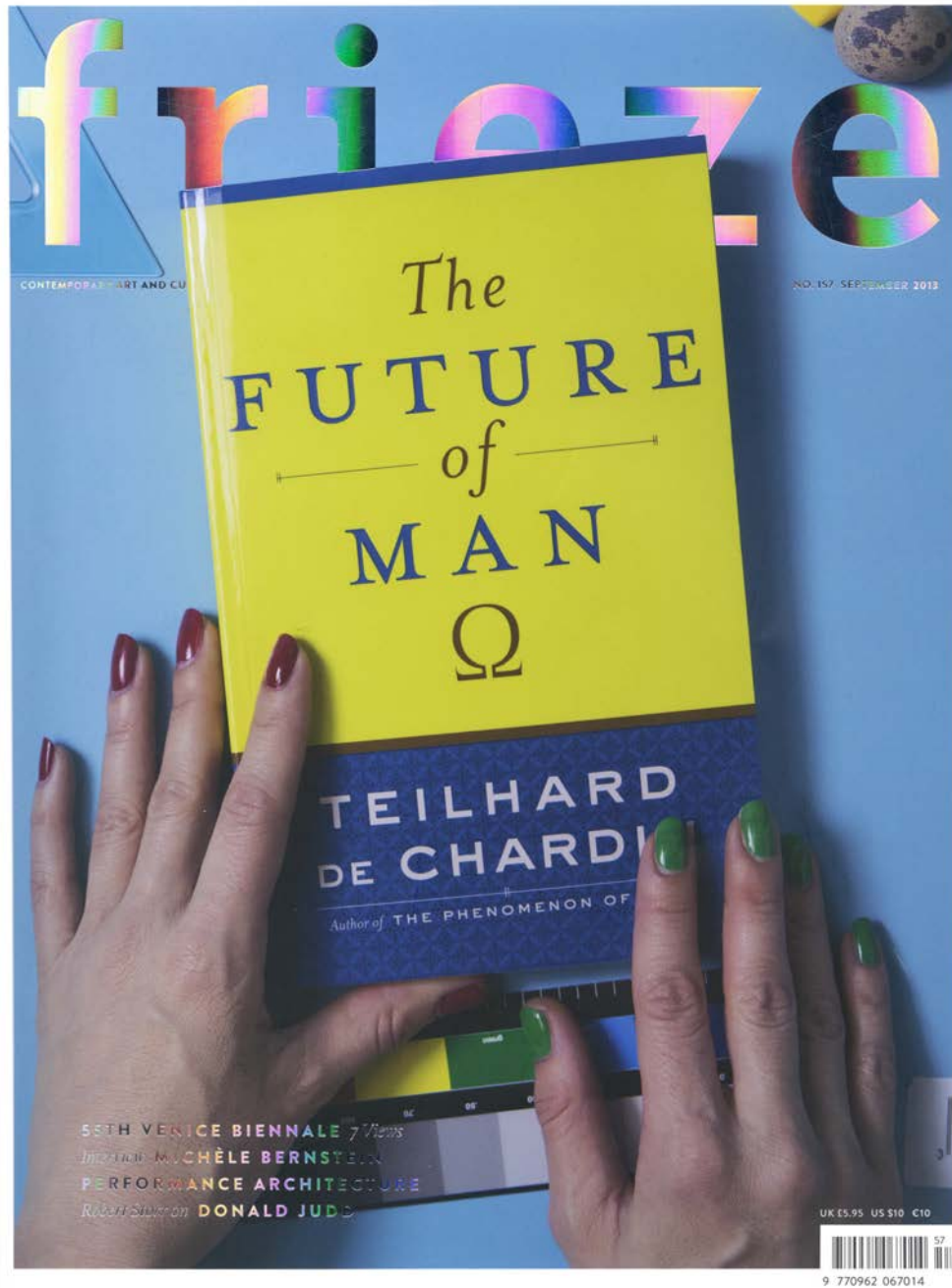


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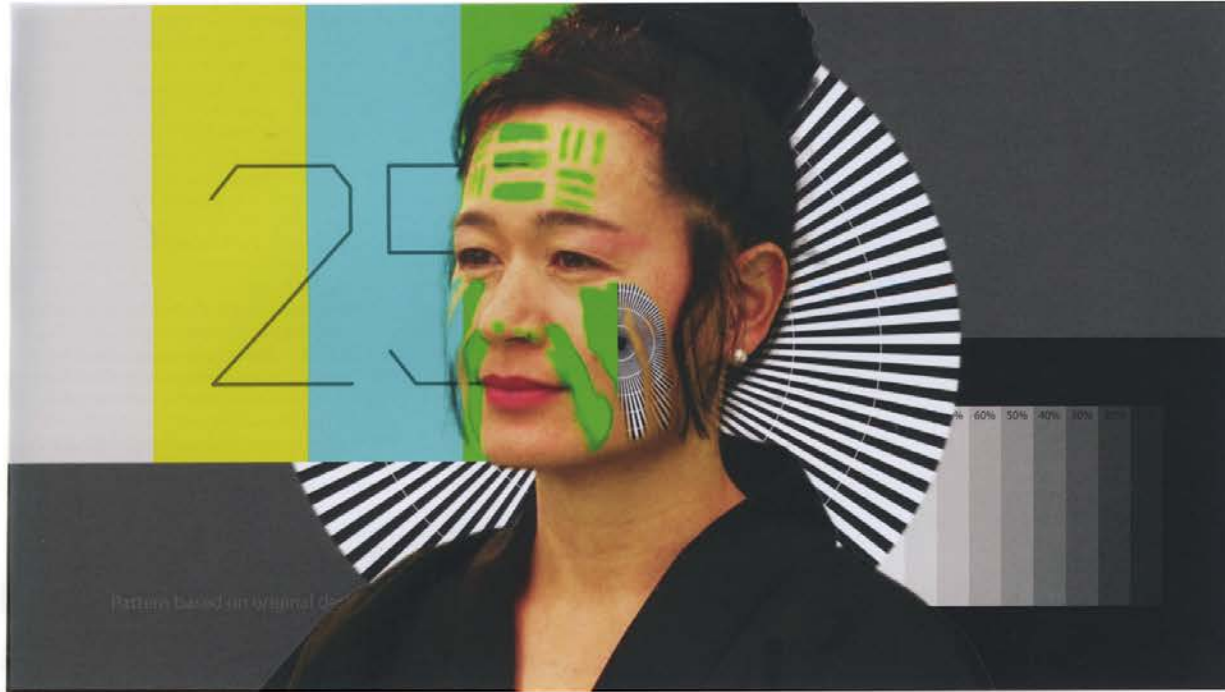
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One strand of 'The Encyclopedic Palace' involves recent video essays that use desktop production to tackle connections between technology and big philosophical questions.



THE FILM ESSAY

JÖRG HEISER

Massimiliano Gioni's 'The Encyclopedic Palace' may be contestable on the grounds of its combination of historical choices and 'outsider' leanings, yet one strand involves recent video essays using desktop production to tackle connections between technology and big philosophical questions. And big here means BIG: things like creation and visibility. The principal lesson of Postmodernism was that the grand narratives of the Enlightenment and Progress are over, and you might expect protagonists of what has been described as post-Internet art – which implies that online dabbling, per se, is anything but enlightening or progressive – to abide by that. But the works of Camille Henrot, Mark Leckey and Hito Steyerl reveal the tension between the banality of means and the questions they ask to be surprisingly resourceful.

There's a great deal of chutzpah involved. For example, Leckey's proposal for a touring exhibition themed around 'The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things' (on display at the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill, UK, until 20 October) deals with the question of how the digital animation of objects affects our lives in good, and often bad, ways – from dog-sculptures-as-loudspeakers to silly smartphone apps. For Venice, Leckey's idea has morphed into a kind

of honey-I-shrunk-the-exhibition. Using 2D pop-up displays and a TED presentation-style trailer, he's created a work that embodies the theme of the exhibition project itself, i.e. dumbness and things.

Another example of chutzpah is to prescriptively title a work, as Steyerl does with *How Not To Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File* (2013), and then to follow it literally. Steyerl plays with didacticism to hilarious effect in the form of a mock instruction clip about how to avoid being seen in an age of digital surveillance. Her proposals include becoming smaller than the pixels of high resolution satellite surveillance (protagonists with boxes on their heads), or vanishing in virtual shopping malls using green-screen effects, Burka-style.

Henrot – who was awarded the Silver Lion for promising young artist – pulled off the feat of creating a 13-minute micro-budget video entitled *Grasse Fatigue* (Dead Tired, 2013). Its focus is no less than a short history of nearly everything. The video opens to a soundtrack of slow breathing accompanied by a shot of a MacBook screen, almost blank save for its generic galaxy wallpaper, and a film file icon bearing the video's title. In principle, this is the classic establishing shot of avant-garde film since Dziga Vertov – here are the means of production! – only this time it involves not film stock, projector or camera but an ordinary computer. Windows pop up, a simple drum beat sets in and, as the breathing turns into

a hiphop-style spoken word (delivered by Akwetey Orraca-Tetteh, a New York-based member of the band Dragons of Zynth), what unfolds is a mindboggling collage of creation myths and speculations, from the Central African deity Bumba to current Big Bang and quantum theories, from Creationism to Darwinian evolution. Henrot's point is to explore how these concepts compete and intertwine in an age of radical online simultaneity or, more specifically, what happens if this stream of creation-consciousness is combined with seemingly intuitive choices of imagery layered on top of one another like cluttered files. These include shots of taxidermied birds in the archive of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., multicoloured marbles pushed across a board by quick hands or soap bubbles on a model's smooth skin. What happens is that the Last Poets-style urgency of gaining a political voice collides head-on with the deadpan, mute, Christopher Williams-esque conceptual reframing of scientific and commercial imagery.

It's also the case – despite the difference in tone – with Leckey and Steyerl. Seen together, the works of all three artists touch on the central political challenges and aesthetic needs of our time – vis-à-vis corporate power and gadgetry, state power and surveillance, creativity and ideology – in broad but apposite strokes.

Jörg Heiser is co-editor of frieze and co-publisher of frieze d/e based in Berlin, Germany.

Camille Henrot

Q

What do you like the look of?

What images keep you company in the space where you work?

Cameron Jamie's *La Peur du lieu inconnu* (The Fear of the Unknown Place, 2001) – a found image of an Indian man walking on a tightrope with a donkey strapped to his back. The donkey is blindfolded. When I saw this image, I immediately felt it was the perfect representation of what artists do.

What was the first piece of art that really mattered to you?

A black and white engraving, in an Expressionist style, of what appears to be an angel falling from the sky. It was at my grandmother's house, and I used to spend hours looking at it, trying to understand what was going on and why someone who had wings would ever fall. It wasn't until some years later that I discovered my mother had actually created the image. I now know that it was a depiction of Icarus.

If you could live with only one piece of art what would it be?

If you mean that I would have to get rid of all the works of art I already own except one, I would keep my Sottsass Carlton shelf. If you mean that I could own any work of art I wanted to, I think I would choose *The Piano Lesson* (1916) by Henri Matisse; I always used to feel frustrated that I couldn't have it in my own home, so I could work out why it disturbs me so much. On reflection, though, perhaps Paul Klee's *The Concert Party* (1907) would be a better choice: it's a beautiful and significant work but it's not the artist's greatest masterpiece, so owning it would not be such a heavy responsibility.

What is your favourite title of an art work?

Klee's *Head of Man, Going Senile* (c. 1922).

What do you wish you knew?

Everything! That's why I decided the focus of my research at the Smithsonian Institution would be the history of the

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People's faces when they are very surprised.



Cameron Jamie
La Peur du lieu inconnu (The Fear of the Unknown Place), 2001,
serigraph on paper, 80 x 60 cm

universe. It was a brutal experiment in the limits of knowledge and in my own capacity for physical endurance. I also wish I knew how to speak English better; I wish I knew how to drive a car; I wish I knew how to empty my head; I wish I knew how to use the Internet more wisely; I wish I knew where to start and when to stop.

What should change?

The way humans regard animals, the way men regard women, and the way women regard themselves.

What should stay the same?

Dogs.

What could you imagine doing if you didn't do what you do?

I spend a lot of time thinking about this every day, but that doesn't mean I would actually like to do the things I think about. I often imagine myself having to find the solution to problems on a global scale like

climate change, economical disparities and the inequalities of economic globalization. I get very excited when it comes to politics, but I try to refrain from communicating it in my work because I think it's always boring. When it comes to politics and art, if things are unilateral then the complexity of politics is not respected.

What music are you listening to?

All kinds of good music: calypso, electronica, afro beat, soul, hiphop. For almost a year now, I have been addicted to 'Jasmine' (2012) by Jai Paul. I went through a stage of listening to this song obsessively: I would put on these huge headphones I have and play it really loudly as I walked down the street. I'm not sure exactly why or how – it might have had something to do with the compression of the sound – but this song really inspired me to make my film *Grosse Fatigue* (Dead Tired, 2013). Right now I'm listening to a lot of ambient music; I'm fascinated by the healing power of music.

What are you reading?

I've just finished Jeanette Winterson's *Boating for Beginners* (1985) and currently on my desk is *Red Fox, The Catlike Canine* (1986) by J. David Henry, a boreal ecologist who also wrote *How to Spot a Fox* (1993). Another book I found very interesting recently is *Du divan à l'écran* (From Couch to Screen, 1999) by Murielle Gagnebin. Offering a psychoanalytical take on how viewers interpret works of art, the author considers the contradictory desires that animate art works and how they can become objects of personal fantasy. Gagnebin's is an anthropomorphic approach to the art object, assuming the work has its own personality and neuroses quite independent from the artist's neuroses. Also on my desk is *Why Translation Matters?* (2010) by Edith Grossman and, at night, before going to sleep, I'll read *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem* (1939) by William Faulkner.

What is art for?

It's to help human beings feel less resigned; and to help others feel happy despite their resignation.

Camille Henrot lives and works in Paris, France, and New York, USA. Her work has recently been exhibited at SculptureCenter, New York; the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK; and the Louvre Museum and the Centre Pompidou, Paris. Her video Grosse Fatigue (2013) was produced through the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship Program in Washington, D.C., USA, and won the Silver Lion at the 55th Venice Biennale, Italy, which runs until 24 November. Henrot will have solo exhibitions at the New Orleans Museum of Art, USA, in October, and at Chisenhale Gallery, London, in February 2014.