

Untold Narratives
13.09. - 19.10.2023

Krinzinger Schottenfeld
curated by Mohamed Bourouissa

Artists: Mohamed Bourouissa, Leonora Carrington, Neïla Czemak Icti,
Wifredo Lam

The Language of Chimeras

For the exhibition at Galerie Krinzinger in Vienna, curator Mohamed Bourouissa proposes an unexpected approach to sharing stories. Is it possible to capture infinity in an outline? Does this exhibition, entitled The Language of Chimeras, allow him to articulate a vision based on new values or new chimeras?

The juxtaposition of the artists Wifredo Lam, Mohamed Bourouissa, Leonora Carrington and Neïla Czemak Icti allows us to grasp the notion of global instability. How can we fail to see that these new connections produce a reversal of meaning?

Mohamed Bourouissa declares that his decision to handwrite Aimé Césaire's poem on the gallery walls in order to accompany Lam's drawings reveals the importance of the concept of language. It is a way of entering into communion and complicity with the artist and the poet.

For a poet represents, above all, human nature in its purest form. Deeply rooted in language, poets transcend human nature. Mohamed Bourouissa has always been part of the here and now. He is a person of the eternal present. He is both a stranger and a native of the same land and the same language as the artists mentioned above. For him, art is, in a certain form, a mother tongue.

A few extracts from quotes provide help in understanding the many paths and mazes he proposes in this journey:

„Language is something we share, something we sometimes think escapes us or something that we only understand in fragments, but it is also something that belongs to us and is fundamentally manifold. Language is something that is created, something that lives and that produces spaces in between, like other poetic articulations. Césaire’s poem unites all of these

aspects within itself and humbly evokes Lam’s universe. It is tinged with beauty, but also with a certain latent violence. Césaire’s perception of his encounter with Lam and its implications tells us about a fantastic world, a world made of ghosts, of chimeras, but also a world made of tenderness. A language of many worlds“. Bourouissa thus evokes these chimeric worlds inherent in Lam’s work, which can also be found in the fantastic drawings and paintings of Neïla Czermak Icti and Leonora Carrington.

In his video *Island*, the starting point of the project, Bourouissa recalls his collaboration with Estrella Diaz in regard to the film *Soy Cuba* (1964), asking her to gather on-site observations from her students as well as the memories of one of the film’s actresses and its screenwriter. The objective of this project was to propose a counter-history of *Soy Cuba* and its making. Through an animated cartoon, the video shows how in *Soy Cuba* an untrue image of the Cuban Revolution was created, an image which did not correspond to what Cubans experienced and how they felt living in their city. Are these chimeras a way of speaking about violence, or of escaping it for a moment in order to try to conjure it?

The notion of the chimera represents, for these artists, the interstices of history. The fantastic universes created by them enable a world where counter-histories as well as the unspoken exist and are acknowledged. Mohamed Bourouissa had entered the language of art as an explorer: each word was on the point of being born, expressions were creations, adverbs were immense ... The sentences became cavalcades, opening spaces before them through their energies, and yet, the old ghosts had not disappeared. This negative of reality, this counter-representation of reality,

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is expressed via intersections between film, drawing, poetry, and painting as well as by plural inspirations.

At the exhibition, this is reflected for instance through Neïla Czermak Icthi's work, whose characters draw inspiration from and are nourished by gore, grunge, science-fiction, or manga cultures, while being connected to her very concrete family, her intimate and daily universe. Mohamed Bourouissa shares „that he was influenced by Neïla Czermak Icthi's research on the forgotten Nigerian actor Bolaji Badejo, who played the character Alien (in the film Aliens by James Cameron, in 1986), and her broader interest in the figure of the Alien, in its relation to otherness and the “Other”. This research resonates with the fantastic and mystical aspect of Carrington's work, and her fusion of human and animal figures. Carrington too generates a vision of the chimera as a composite figure speaking about the soul, as for instance her bird-woman, who is the portrait of a deceased, shows. Her art is creating links between things, temporalities, and realities. This exhibition is also a reflection on the exile trajectories of Wifredo Lam and Leonora Carrington in the 20th century and their artistic migrations: Carrington was a European who settled in Mexico and Lam was a Cuban who settled in Paris. The exhibition wants to point out how these displacements nourished their work, allowing them to develop their universes.“

“Connecting these artists is the aspect of working from or about a territory that is not one's own. In a certain way, it had been this condition that I approached by taking an interest in Cuba and its history when I created the film Island”, states Bourouissa.

Neïla Czermak Icthi speaks from a place which seems very familiar, intimate, and sometimes autobiographical to me. However, it is a place where the fantastic emerges, as a way of transmitting and transforming the feeling of closeness. These unsettling experiences – when the hair of characters attending a family meal stands on end, when a hawk with a human head emerges on top of people embracing on a sofa – are temporal and spatial adventures. She manages to capture us in her net.

Finally, we explore the question of rituals that occur throughout our lives. The Annunciation becomes a premonitory moment of something that

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is about to happen (Lam/Césaire), turns into childhood memories, into birth and death (Czemak Ihti), into certain incarnations and symbols of maternity and femininity (Carrington), or into the collective memory of a film (Island) – all of this forms a certain constellation of moments that traverse our lives – a way of engaging us on a path that lies always ahead of us.

Mohamed Bourouissa, Sébastien Delot, and Margot Nguyen