

From top:

Evangelia Kranioti

Obscuro Barroco (video still; 2016)

Courtesy of the Artist; Centre d'Art Contemporain, Genève and Galerie Sator, Paris

Wael Shawky

Al Araba Al Madfuna I (2012)

Courtesy of the Artist and Sharjah Art Foundation

Bianca Baldi

"Pure Breaths," installation view at Swimming Pool, Sofia (2016)

Courtesy of the Artist and Swimming Pool, Sofia
Photography by Yana Lozeva



BIM

Geneva

The latest edition of the Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement opened its doors at the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva on November 9, just hours after the foreboding news of Trump's election. Andrea Bellini, Cecilia Alemani, Caroline Bourgeois and Elvira Dyangani-Ose imbued this edition with somber tones, reflecting a dark era of social and political upheaval that seems to leave human beings increasingly alienated.

Many of the works on view documented manifestations of social inequality; but they perhaps required a viewer involvement that goes beyond empathy. The image of another self who escapes the more you try to frame her recurred as a structural pattern. However, the medium's immersive nature favors an evolution of that attempt, in the same way that exoticism transcends into mystery, transsexuality into iridescence, ambiguity into dialectical confrontation. For example, in the work of British artist Emily Wardill, *I Gave My Love To Cherry That Had No Stone* (2016), the camera follows a dancer in the modernist spaces of the Auditorium Gulbenkian, in Lisbon; if initially the camera seems to stalk the actor, soon the building takes over, offering a thorough sweep of its architectural forms in relation to the human body. In Greek director Evangelia Kranioti's medium-length film *Dark Barocco* (2016), the story of a trans in Rio de Janeiro is told in parallel to that of a clown; both characters roam a mythical city, while the ecstatic events of the Carioca carnival slip into popular demonstrations for transgender rights.

In the end, the Biennale seemed to raise a dichotomy between a technique rooted in "craftsmanship" and the appropriation of the tools of mainstream cinema. Viewing contributions such as American artist Wu Tsang's video *Dulian* (2016) — a work that transposes to the present a homosexual love story from fin-de-siècle China, but ends up diluting its subject's criticality by emulating the style of a TV commercial — one is left wondering whether, in terms of a reconsideration of the normative role of technology, the queer gaze should also inform approaches to filmmaking.

by Michele D'Aurizio

Wael Shawky

Castello di Rivoli and
Fondazione Merz, Turin

Wael Shawky forges alliances between antitheses. His practice is an incessant amble between the poles of past and present, mythology and reality, written and oral history, light and dark, and life and death.

Fondazione Merz and Castello di Rivoli have dedicated two exhibitions to Shawky. The former presents *Al Araba Al Madfuna* (2012–16), a filmic trilogy about a mysterious Egyptian village where alchemy and mystic experience are still embedded in everyday life, while the latter retrospective is dominated by another trilogy of epic films, *Cabaret Crusades* (2010–15), in which marionettes enact the Crusades from an Arab perspective in a surreal and mythical mise-en-scène. Despite their differences, these exhibitions share certain leitmotifs. While *Al Araba Al Madfuna* moves back through time in a process of gradual archaeological revelation, the Rivoli exhibition follows the Crusades forward, critiquing our Western illusion of history's progress. Both works take inspiration from modern writings in Arabic, the first from the text of *Dayrut al-Sharif* (1983) by the novelist Mohamed Mustagab, the second from *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes* (1984), a book by Amin Maalouf. Shawky animates the two stories through an exquisite anti-naturalism, conveyed at Merz by young actors in fake moustaches reenacting ancient parables and, at Rivoli, by puppets whose heightened yet immobile expressions magnify the remorseless brutality of their actions.

By invoking the childlike realm of puppetry, the artist creates a distance that renders human tragedy tolerable. His poetic formula addresses modern relations between Western and Islamic worlds without the art spilling over into political manifesto.

These two shows reflect Shawky's attempts at checking historical narratives that seek cultural hegemony through supposed "authenticity." By illuminating different perspectives and micro-narratives, he exposes our distorted and partial vision of history.

by Giulia Gregnanin

Bianca Baldi

Swimming Pool, Sofia

We enter and are immersed in an audio installation. The words "*Tot tibi sunt dotes Virgo quot sidera caelo*" (Virgin, you have as many virtues as there are stars in the sky) emerge in a continuously rearranged fashion. Their 1022 different combinations recall, we are told, the number of stars in Ptolemy's universe; the statements function as both cosmic units of measurement and poetic assertions of desire.

A critique of both the metaphysics of desire and discourse's capacity for territorial agency is intrinsic to "Pure Breaths," the first solo exhibition of Brussels-based South African Bianca Baldi, whose research is dedicated to the literary contours of colonialism. *Livro de todo o Universo (Chopped and Screwed)* (2015) is a dual-screen video of a scene from *Hamlet*. Set in the opulent surroundings of the Geographical Society of Lisbon, whose founder, the Portuguese king Luís I, also translated the text, the videos reenact Hamlet and Ophelia's encounter in an arrestingly looped fashion as the camera orbits them hypnotically. Next door, *Country Matters* (2016) juxtaposes large-scale annotated English and Portuguese texts side by side.

The terrace outside displays a series of sculptural works set on different levels. *Insufflate* (2016) comprises three A4-size copper plates covered with semitransparent Tengu paper that quivers in the wind, grounded only by an accompanying dalmatian stone. These stones recur like a leitmotif in *Snake Weight* (2016), in which they agglomerate into a black serpentine form resembling an enlarged book placeholder.

Oscillating between conceptual and allegorical strategies, Baldi's work is strongest when it departs from mise-en-scènes. By arranging different narrative forms together, she manages to lead us, via sensuous plots and an ethereal conceptualism, through a critique of colonizing systems of knowledge inspired by her reflections on translation.

by Margarida Mendes