

Than Hussein Clark

Waves (Das Glückliche Rothschild)

20.09 - 26.10.2013

Opening reception: 20.09. at 19:00

Mathew is pleased to announce the debut solo presentation of Than Hussein Clark (b. 1981) - "Waves (Das Glückliche Rothschild)". Constructed as both a hyperbolic critique of Edmund De Waal's "The Hare with the Amber Eyes" (2010), in which the British ceramicist tells the story of his family's collection of Japanese Netsuke (17th-century miniature sculptures), the only remaining elements of his family's fortune -at one point rivaling the Rothschilds- that was lost in the Second World War and as a souvenir of the revival performance of Mozart's Don Giovanni, which marked the opening of the Vienna Staatsoper in 1869, the exhibition continues the artist's interest in the queer affinities between registers of design, mechanisms of display and autonomous politics.

Cutting through the center of the gallery, "Konnigratz/Hamichuri/Konnigratz/Hamichuri" (All works 2013), Clark's hand-tufted carpet produced with Dovecot Studios (Edinburgh, UK) crosses the artist's research in the decorative schemes of historic civic architecture and the interiors of early twentieth-century Vienna in order to articulate the first in a series of spatial and functional reversals which mark the exhibition. The carpet, a gilded stucco ceiling positioned on the floor, mutates Neo Rococo and Japonisme design references in a series of roundels to harness the potential of what Le Corbusier, in his attack of the interior of Charles Garnier's Paris Opera, called "an architecture of lies." Employing both the massing of ornamental languages that Le Corbusier found so perverse, and what the artist has called a "certain queer trajectory of the linear", the carpets iconography narrates the scandal which marred the construction of the Vienna Staatsoper, during which the architects of the building August Von Sicarsgard and Edwaurd Van der Null (lovers and professors at the Vienna Academy) performed a double suicide after miscalculating the foundation line of the opera house by a meter.

This narrative begins a series of cancellations marshalled against De Waal's continuous memorializing of genealogical inheritance - an attack which takes sculptural form in Clark's first works in bronze. In "Cancellation: Binoculars" and "Cancellation:Lens", original De Waal ceramics, laser cut and reglazed, perch on double patented bronze supports taken from direct casts of hand-lathed lengths of Japanese cedar bound with silk ribbon. Extending out into the gallery space, these branches are in turn supported from wall-mounted brass sconces highlighting the artist's interest in the moment in which mechanisms of display begin to repurpose the object via its presentation. The circular motifs of both the carpet and the repurposed ceramics are echoed in the circular roundel which pierces the surface of "Love is Not a Feeling". Part door and part architectural facade, the mirror and brass construction, recalling architectural details of both the Staatsoper and the terrace doors of the Haus Wittgenstein doubles the carpet's length while cutting the gallery in two.

These connections between architecture, performance and design are further staged in the system of display that the artist has developed for the rest of the objects in the exhibition, a kind of counter collection set against the objects which form the centre of De Waal's narrative of loss. Drawing on the presentation strategies of early collections of Japonisme objects in the west, Clark has produced a series of steel supports patinated in faux verdigris for handmade shelves in sycamore inlaid with shagreen. These display a series of new works in glass, "Commandatore 1-4", in which Clark instigates a negation of De Waal's co-option of Japanese minimalist aesthetics. Here cast opaline milk glass disks are decorated with pate de verre motifs resembling overblown sushi platters, gongs, and kabuki head-ware. This counter collection is completed by a series of three leperellos with embossed covers, "Catalogo i Questo (Red, Blue, and Grey)", each displaying photographs of Netsuke taken by the artist. Stretched beyond recognition, these photographs form a collection of motifs and series of linear marks drawn across the gallery space.

The larger shelves which support the leperellos also feature further works in bronze. Inspired by both the artist's research into the death fantasies of English author and ceramic expert Bruce Chatwin and the artist's ongoing correspondence with sculptor Claude LesLannes, bronze casts of hand modelled Javanese fruit bats have been integrated into the patinated steel supports. Recalling both gargoyles and caryatides, the bats, hanging from the repositioned ceiling (the carpet on the gallery floor), allude to one of Chatwin's many fabricated explanations of his AIDS-related sickness: an alleged infection from bat feces.

The exhibition, in scripting the links between the ways in which the interior stages the formation of subjectivity and the ways in which architecture produces citizenship, narrates the political dimension behind supposedly ethical and aesthetic modes of taste; a process of indoctrination from which the artist does not exclude himself. Stacked behind the mirrored architectural facade, a series of three collages called Dougo Chu (or "stage drawings" - the Kabuki word for set designs) depict 1) Clark's mother in front of an early 18th-century vitrine filled with Japanese porcelain and Netsuke 2) the vitrine with its doors open and 3) the vitrine with its doors closed. Taken in a portrait sitting arranged at the artist's family home in New England, the photographs are painted over with gold metallic ink and isolated fragments of late 19th-century Japanese woodblocks from his family's own collection. In replacing the protagonists (both human and non-human) in De Waal's text with the elements of Clark's own biography, these collages position both the artist and his production as being born into the economic and genealogical structures that the exhibition sets out to dismantle; recalling a line from the script produced for the performance at the exhibition's opening: "Forget it all, everything. Family, friends, and ghosts. The object's most persuasive position is hate - learn this and learn this well."

Than Hussein Clark (b. 1981) studied Art History at the University of Edinburgh and Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, London. He currently lives and works in London and Hamburg where he is studying for a masters degree in time-based media at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) Hamburg. He was the recipient of DAAD Prize for Outstanding Contribution by an International Student in 2013. Recent exhibitions, projects, and performances include Homes and Gardens, 2013 (Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles), Love is colder than Capital, 2013 (Mathew, Berlin), Volcano Extravaganza 2012 (curated by Nick Mauss and Milovan Fortonato), The Photographers Tragedy (Beton Gallery Hamburg). His collaborative work with Villa Design Group has been recently presented at the KUB Arena (Kunsthau Bregens) and the BundesKunsthalle Bonn. Upcoming projects include a solo presentation at WCW Gallery in Hamburg as well as the publication of a 52-part serialised novel with Villa Design Group beginning in 2014.