

The Magic of the State is an exhibition and editorial project, taking place between Cairo and London in spring 2013. Each exhibition features a different constellation of works by the same artists, including new commissions, and a public program of performances, talks and screenings.

The project borrows its title from the eponymous book by anthropologist Michael Taussig. In this text, combining fiction with analysis, Taussig conceives the modern State as configured through a theatre of spirit possession into the living body of society. Historically placed at the intersection of science, religion and politics, the concept of magic exists in an integral relationship to that of power. Magic in its broadest sense is addressed within the context of the project: both secular magic and its connection to propaganda and mysticism with its claim to access supernatural entities and powers.

Magic's coerciveness lies in its power to transform, simultaneously holding together the desire to believe and the desire to doubt. Here, politics and magic, statecraft and stagecraft, converge as performance. The exhibition at *Beirut* opened with "Interpretation", a performance by Lili Reynaud-Dewar. The work features iconic Glaswegian club performer Mary Knox and Parisian experimental musician Hendrik Hegray in a recitation of the visionary political broadsheets of Sun Ra, woven together with the emancipatory force of free jazz of records from the collection of "La Grande Oreille", a record shop active in La Rochelle between 1975 and 1979. During the first week of the program, Rana Hamadeh enacted "Al Karantina", a newly commissioned lecture-performance that explores the relationship between resistance and contagion by considering the plague in ancient Athens as an allegory for the current Arab uprisings. Ryan Gander presented "In Use – (Alchemy Box # 39)" and "Ogenblik - (Alchemy Box # 101)", two sculptures made of common objects in which mysterious contents are sealed, that alchemically connect the exhibition spaces in Cairo and London; and "I had a Message from the Curator" a performance originally scripted for DOCUMENTA(13) in Kassel, Germany.

The invited artists adopted magic as a filter to chart, re-evaluate and disrupt the immanent and circular exchange of power forces through given social, economic and political structures. In Goldin+Senneby's installation "The Decapitation of Money", economic geographer Angus Cameron draws a series of associations between George Bataille's obsession with decapitation as a release of energy and his understanding of sovereignty, regicide and economics; the emergence of the Eurodollar in the 1950s and offshore finance beyond the jurisdiction of the sovereign state. For Liz Magic Laser's "The Digital Face", dancers Alan Good and Cori Kresge replicate the gestural movements from two State of the Union addresses: President Barack Obama's 2012 speech and George H. W. Bush's 1990 speech, claimed to be the first televised presidential address to feature gesticulating hands. Referencing Francois Delsarte's 19th Century studies in gestural expression,

the work exposes a studied body language that maximizes the American President's emphatic display. Anja Kirschner and David Panos' video installation "Ultimate Substance" examines the current Greek economic crisis by revisiting ancient myths and looking at how the introduction of coinage affected the emergence of abstract mathematical and philosophical knowledge.

Christodoulos Panayiotou presented a series of photographs selected from the Press and Information Office in Nicosia. The works excavate the rituals and ceremonies that underline the construction of a national narrative and the constitution of Cyprus as a modern nation state following independence from Great Britain.

At a time of uncharted and complex political transition in Egypt, the selected and newly commissioned works question the legacy of outmoded systems of beliefs and mythological principles within the modern state, pointing to the slippage between the prescriptive intent and the idiosyncratic manifestations of stately power. They chart the potential of alternative aggregations, and explore the possibility of resistance by thinking laterally and looking at unorthodox places. A compendium on art, magic and politics, featuring essays, spells, fiction and true stories in both English and Arabic, will follow the exhibition, with contributions by Will Bradley, Hany Darwish, Michael Taussig, a phone-conversation between Peter Lamborn Wilson and Evan Calder Williams, and others.

Conceived as a collaboration between *Beirut* in Cairo and Lisson Gallery in London, this project charted the encounter between two contrasting art institutions operating in very different contexts: a young independent not-for-profit space in the making and an established private gallery. This practice-based exchange opened up a shared space for reflections on the different economic, logistical, social and political realities these institutions inhabit.

Public Program

Sunday, 3 March 2013

19:00 Opening with *Interpretation*, a performance by Lili Reynaud-Dewar, with Mary Knox and Hendrik Hegray, featuring records from *La Grande Oreille* record collection. Texts by Sun Ra.

Tuesday, 5 March 2013

21:00 Lecture by Michael Taussig, Professor of Anthropology at Columbia University, New York and at European Graduate School (EGS) in Switzerland.

Thursday, 7 March 2013

19:00 *Al Karantina*, a lecture-performance by Rana Hamadeh.

Biographies

Ryan Gander

Ryan Gander was born in 1976 in Chester and lives and works between London and Suffolk. When looking for a definition of Ryan Gander's work one has to surrender to its multifaceted nature and the apparent incongruity of its formal manifestations. Emblematic of his method of working is the lecture series *Loose Associations*, begun in 2002, for which the artist weaves a web of facts and fictions, mixing autobiographical anecdotes with shared cultural and art historical references. Perhaps, each single work could be best understood as a fragment surfacing from a complex narrative, a journey of false starts and meanderings. Underlying Gander's linguistic and formal play are tactics of illusion and deception in which the viewer is complicit in fostering a multiplication of meanings.

Goldin+Senneby

Goldin+Senneby is a framework for collaboration set up by artists Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby since 2004. Simon Goldin was born in 1981 and Jacob Senneby in 1971, both in Sweden, where they live and work. They explore juridical, financial and spatial constructs through notions of the performative and the virtual. In their body of work known as Headless (2007-), they approach the sphere of offshore finance, and its production of virtual space through legal code. Looking at strategies of withdrawal and secrecy, they trace an offshore company on the Bahamas called Headless Ltd, while a ghost written detective novel narrates their investigations. Since 2010 their work has focused on The Nordenskiöld Model, an experiment in theatrical finance, in which they attempt to (re)enact the anarcho-alchemical scheme of 18th-Century alchemist August Nordenskiöld on the financial markets of today.

Rana Hamadeh

Rana Hamadeh was born in 1983 in Beirut, Lebanon, and lives and works in Enschede and Amsterdam. She works on extensive discursive research projects that generally question the conditions of spectatorship as well as the boundaries, authority and mechanisms of meaning production. Bringing together visual, performative and theoretical frameworks, Hamadeh constructs ever-growing constellations and networks of associative docu-fictional narratives that reflect upon linguistic, discursive, legal, and physical modes of violence along with its political and social articulations. She initiated in 2008 and 2011 two on-going artistic/curatorial projects, GRAPHIS N°127 and Alien Encounters, which comprise different levels of collaborations with other artists, illegal immigrants, writers, civil servants, housewives, and designers among others.

Anja Kirschner

Anja Kirschner was born in 1977 in Munich, Germany and David Panos in 1971 in Athens, Greece, and they live in London and Athens. Working collaboratively since 2006, Kirschner and Panos have been at the forefront of explorations into narrative form within recent artists' film and video. Frequently drawing on literary and historical sources as a means of reflecting on the present, their works collide film genre motifs and theoretical discourses, melodrama and digital effects to create a

distinctive filmic language that subverts existing categories. Extending and challenging the tradition of Brechtian anti-naturalism, their films explore the relation of art and culture to political economy and power.

Liz Magic Laser

Liz Magic Laser was born in 1981 in New York City, where she lives and works. Her performances and videos intervene in semi-public spaces such as bank vestibules, movie theatres and newsrooms, and have involved collaborations with actors, dancers, surgeons, and motorcycle gang members. She stages situations, dialogues, monologues or plays in the urban environment, and its population becomes both her audience and her extras in the resulting videos. Her recent work appropriates the dominant performance techniques and psychological strategies used by the media and politicians to sway public opinion. Liz Magic Laser is her real name from birth.

Christodoulos Panayiotou

Christodoulos Panayiotou was born in 1978 in Limassol, Cyprus, and lives and works in Paris, Berlin and Limassol. Christodoulos Panayiotou's multidimensional work addresses issues and concerns ranging from the complex contemporary understanding of what constitutes "the public" to the construction of national identity and history. He frequently takes ceremonies, festivals, and theatrical spectacles as points of departure from which to explore the structures and customs that inform social experience. His process also engages the archives of the press and regional and state agencies of his country, Cyprus, to reflect on how interpretations of a collective sense of identity are dependent on the manner in which images and information are arranged and presented.

Lili Reynaud-Dewar

Lili Reynaud-Dewar was born in 1975 in La Rochelle, France, and lives and works in Paris. Her relatively epic projects combine performance, video, sculpture and involve her friends, her family and lately, her own body. Confronting her own biography and practice to the legacy of emblematic figures such as Josephine Baker, Sun Ra, and Jean Genet, she seeks to disrupt the expectations related to her own background and her role as a contemporary artist. She is currently working on a series of videos involving her own body - naked and blackened - dancing in various art spaces: a work in progress, with no planned ending, that she considers a sort of fidgeting institutional critique, fuelled with vitality. She is the co-founder of *Petunia* a feminist art and entertainment magazine and writes regularly for various publications.

Michael Taussig

Michael Taussig is an anthropologist known for his provocative ethnographic studies and unconventional style as an academic. He was born in Australia in 1940 where he studied medicine at the University of Sydney. He earned a Ph.D. in sociology at the London School of Economics. He is currently a professor of anthropology both at Columbia University in New York. He is most acclaimed for his "ficto-critical" writing which crosses between fiction and social science, art and critique. He is the author of numerous articles and books, including: *Walter Benjamin's Grave* (2006), *My Cocaine Museum* (2004), *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in a Colombian Town* (2003), *Defacement* (1999), *Magic of the State* (1997), *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (1993), *The Nervous System* (1992), *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (1987), and *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (1980). His book on drawings in ethnographic notebooks spurred the thematic interest in notebooks in general at the last Documenta (13), and he will be referring to beauty and fashion in his talk here on *The Magic of the State*.

Support

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