

Neil Beloufa  
*Remotely Speaking*  
22/01 2022 – 05/03 2022

A few years ago, well before the NFT hit mainstream, the Speculative Fiction writer William Gibson, who coined the term cyberspace (*Neuromancer*, 1984), told me that in the future the ability to point to the original version of something will become a very valuable skill and trade. Not surprising to hear from someone who has a prized collection of wristwatches. A true collector who only ever started using the internet himself in the late 1990s to use ebay for new acquisitions. This unique and original nature of the object, an obsession ever since the Byzantine era, has ruptured the internet with furious and often very poorly informed debates over NFTs. What seems to be rendered out of this mass hallucination, is that scarcity is a prized human quality that generates value and respect. One faction is stuck in a rigidity trap, mourning their 20th century on life support, while the other side is evolving this human trait to create digital scarcity.

The *Remotely Speaking* series of works by Neil Beloufa play on this age old tension made new again. It's been inflamed by the hibernation we've been doing over the pandemic. However, its roots, along with signs of the artworld struggling to legitimize the object again, began well before the pandemic. Pre-COVID, you could waltz around any art fair, say you liked something and a gallery attendant would show you an iPad with the entire catalogue of that artists work, flattening space and time, making it feel like all of the gallery's storage from home base, to freeports in Luxembourg and Singapore were accessible to you. Now that we, for the most part, had to cut back on the fair attendance, the online viewing room was sold as that new exclusive experience.

A series of reliefs, that recall (to this writer at least) the work of Gauguin, are carved out of MDF and finished with coloured leathers. This textured flatness, gives the characters and visages an air of being entrapped in gloss; like Han Solo frozen in carbonite. A formal touch that echoes further with augmented reality, allowing the figures to be re-animated. However, what they reveal may not be deep truths of fantastical stories, but rather the anxieties and trappings of an artwork relegated to a lifetime in storage, never satisfied with their position in the online viewing room. The artworks regard their artist as a revered parent, with adoration and respect. The essence of the artist's gesture, emotions and spirit live on in them, it's clear, but the layers of removal and abstraction from the real space of the exhibition and public has clearly soured their souls.

What's worse perhaps, is that as we learn to live in public once again, the artworks made during the loneliest days of this decade, may never see the light of day, forever being regarded as a storage of value, kept indefinitely in storage and traded frequently, hopping around darkened vaults... while newer works in the series are being exhibited in a post-vaccination world. Jealous of their younger and more prominent siblings, these older artworks ruminate and bicker away their days. However, their revenge is yet to come. They've thought of how to harness the power of the NFT themselves. If you'd like to take this work to your own storage locker, an NFT will accompany it in your crypto wallet. It's going to act like its authentication, issued by the gallery. However, new rules apply. Embedded in the NFT is a smart contract, which forbids it to change ownership before a certain amount of years has passed. You could sell the work, but it's authentication remains locked in your wallet until the time stamp passes. This means you better learn to love and live with this. You can't just hide it, show its likeness and trade it like a basketball card. HODL is crypto slang for *Hold On for Dear Life*. Protect the artwork, protect your investment and protect the cultural community you're involved with. This is the new ethos we're learning to live by. Stand behind artists and their community; we're all the better for it.

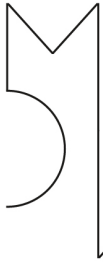
– Jesse McKee

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CLEARING



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The multi-layered practice of French-Algerian artist, Neil Beloufa occupies the space between various dichotomies. Reality and fiction, cause and effect, presence and absence are the polarities between which the artist's work begins to take form. Developing his reflection on these by combining various media, including sculpture, video and painting into single installations, Beloufa masterly manages to deconstruct our contemporary systems of belief by moving between the real and the imaginative.

Situating himself between these polarities, Beloufa's practice is deeply reflective. Examining established structures of power, incidentally, those within the "creative economy", whilst dwelling on the authority that is afforded by artists in today's society, Beloufa eliminates his dominant role by awarding agency to actors or materials, informing one another and coexisting in installations as though they are actors and props on a set.

Rejecting the alias of sculptor, or any alignment to a particular set of practices or creative processes, Beloufa works primarily as an editor, constructing scenarios to facilitate intersections between different meanings that viewers might build independently.

Neil Beloufa (b. 1985, Paris) lives and works in Paris.

The artist's solo exhibitions include *Digital Mourning*, Hangar Bicocca, Milan (2021); *The Enemy of my Enemy*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2018); *Global Agreement*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Frankfurt (2018); *Neil Beloufa*, The Pejman Foundation, Teheran (2017); *Projects 102: Neil Beloufa*, MoMA PS1, New York (2016); *Counting On People*, ICA, London (2014); *Production Value*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013).

His works have also been presented in institutional collective exhibitions such as *58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia*, Venice (2019); *Bridging the Gap*, Tsinghua University Art Museum, Beijing (2018); *Yellow Creature*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne (2017); *AVATAR AND ATAVISM*, Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Dusseldorf (2015); *La Biennale de Lyon*, Lyon (2013); *The Unicorn*, Cleveland Museum of Art (2013); *55th Venice Biennale*, The Encyclopedic Palace, Venezia (2013); *Wiener Secession 11th Baltic Triennale*, CAC, Vilnius (2012).

The exhibition *Remotely Speaking* runs in parallel to Neil Beloufa's show *Pandemic Pandemonium*, at CLEARING, Brussels (29/01 - 17/04 2022).

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