

*Notes by James Richards on the works in Alms for the Birds*

1. Tolia Astakhishvili *Which Bitch is a Witch?*, 2001 digital video, looped

This video originates from an ongoing project by Tolia Astakhishvili about an imagined school in which children learn to decipher the disguises used by witches that haunt the building.

2. JX Williams (AA Bronson) *Spirit Sticks (objects to be grasped)*, 2008 Set of 7 implements, each leaning against the wall, wood, steel, rubber, straw. JX Williams (AA Bronson) *A Stick to Hit the Devil*, 2008, sledge hammer, gaffer tape, rubber coated metal.

AA Bronson, working under the alias JX Williams, (itself a readymade – a name used by film industry producers who no longer want to be attached to a particular film project) offers up props – a hammer, table tennis bat, pick axe etc. – all of which have been used in the past for casting spells.

3. Elijah Burgher *Mictlantecuhtli's grin*, 2013, painted drop cloth

These ambiguous symbols feel old and new at the same time. Burgher's symbols are described as Sigils; signs associated with different forms of magic dating back to the Renaissance, or possibly earlier. There is no standard catalogue of Sigils; they are customised for the personal wish-fulfilment of whoever made them.

Painted with acrylic using a paint roller onto large suspended drop cloths, this aspect of the artist's work has its origin in rituals he was devising and conducting around 2011 - combining Austin Osman Spare's Sigil magic, fragments of European ceremonial magic, and his participation in AA Bronson's *Invocation of the Queer Spirits*.

Initially the drop cloths functioned as either portable temples or spaces for conducting rituals. Although, strictly speaking, the paintings are no longer utilised for rituals, the architectural function continues; a soft architecture of flags and false walls.

4. Tony Conrad *Untitled 1 and 2*, 2014, glass panels and metal fittings.

Described by the Artist as 'Minimalism at its most aggressive' the two *Untitled* glass works stem from a body of work around prison interiors, around the flickering of control that happens between those incarcerated and those incarcerating, those being looked at and those looking.

These works hang like screens, or partitions within the space and are manufactured from toughened glass. Each has a small aperture drilled, suggesting a kind of communication or viewing point through secured space.

5. General Idea *Maracaibo*, 1991, set of 10 chromogenic prints

Late in his life and ill, a Venezuelan friend of Artist group General Idea, was having to clear out the contents of a second, secret apartment he kept at the harbour front in the City of Maracaibo. Used for his sexual encounters, his apartment becomes the setting for what are, by turns sweet, sexy and fragile portraits. The photo-album was re-photographed before being destroyed and presented by General Idea as a deadpan record and window into his love life, recording all those who passed through it.

6. Adrian Hermanides *Alms For The Birds*, 2009 installation of found photographic and domestic materials.

Alms for the Birds, or Sky Burial, is a funerary practice found in the Chinese provinces of Tibet, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia. There is no need to preserve the body, as it is an empty vessel. The human corpse is incised in certain locations and placed on a mountaintop, exposing it to the elements for natural decomposition or consumption by animals, especially predatory birds. The function of the Sky Burial is simply to dispose of the remains in as generous a way as possible.

An assembly of found objects; the crumpled remains of a repossessed apartment in Berlin, it's a tender but author-less archive of the remnants of human presence. Displayed with little editing or hypotaxis, the leather mattress, plastic poncho, lipstick, film negatives and photos are abandoned, naked and exposed to the viewer's scrutiny. Retrieved, they begin to speak for themselves and to each other, forming a web of clues to the life, work and obsessions of whoever might have once animated them in reality.

7. Matt Mullican *Untitled*, 2014, framed color photograph. Documentation of a drawing made in the bathtub while under hypnosis.

Matt Mullican executes performances while in a trance. Before undergoing hypnosis, he speaks with his hypnotist about what he wishes or should do under hypnosis – for instance having breakfast, sing, read the paper, draw or paint the wall – and then does these things following the hypnotist's

directives.

Hypnosis is described as an altered state that differs significantly from 'normal' daytime consciousness that censors many unconscious capacities, making them inaccessible. In the trance of hypnosis it is possible to have contact with these submerged functions. Mullican claims that he achieves a deeper understanding of self through hypnosis. About his hypnosis- alter ego, he speaks with reserve. He literally says: "that person".

8. James Richards *Untitled (The Screens)*, 2013, 4 slide projectors, 320 x 35mm slides.

*Untitled (The Screens)* presents 4 slide projectors throwing images culled from a single book on techniques of theatre make up. At times tender, gruesome and kitsch, we see the application of painted undercoats, laying in of hairs and simulation of freckles before grazes and cuts are synthesized. The hand gestures, the tenderness and care of the depicted action jarring with the increasingly violent appearance of what is being rendered.

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