

Mad child of a wise mother

Curated by Clément Delépine

October 12 – November 25, 2018

Amongst the many American legends, there is a malediction which exclusively targets the presidents. When William Henry Harrison waged wars on the sacred land of Native Americans in 1811, he unleashed the curse of Tecumseh (or Tippecanoe). When elected a year evenly divisible by 20, Tecumseh condemns all American presidents to an inescapable death before the end of their term. 7 presidents succumbed to the curse, including Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy. By surviving an assassination attempt in 1981, Ronald Reagan seems to have conjured the malediction.

When Reagan's Chief of Staff published his memoirs in 1998, he revealed that for 7 years, the First Lady Nancy Reagan hired a psychic to neutralize the nefarious effects of the curse. Each important presidential decision was first sanctioned by the voyant from San Francisco who drew charts and calculated horoscopes to ensure that the planets were positively aligned for the success of this or that enterprise.

In the early 1980s, politics of the world's greatest power were under the influence of the same kind of superstition that made Voltaire once declare: "Superstition is to religion what astrology is to astronomy, the mad daughter of a wise mother."

This presidential anecdote isn't the narrative frame of this exhibition, nor clairvoyance its focal point, however, the works exhibited here question one's relationship to superstition as a performative force which still exercises a very strong influence in our modern times.

Tom Friedman's plinth sits in a corner of the room. An occultist cursed it. The curse, whose strength and effects remain unknown, stands exactly 11in above the top of the plinth and fills a spheric space of 11in diameter. The usual warning to visitors to refrain from touching the artworks resonates louder.

As a pigment, Doris Guo chose soot for her drawings on glass. The soot comes from joss paper, fictional banknotes traditionally burnt during funerals in many countries in Eastern Asia to provide the dead with resources in the underworld. The face value of such banknotes, occasionally emitted by a Bank of Hell, often reaches extravagant numbers, 100 millions dollars to 10 billions dollars, although the notes are typically incinerated in an aluminum bucket.

The installation of Jutta Koether conjures any malevolent intention one could suspect from this exhibition. Her gesture echoes the coin to be paid to the ferryman Charon or the coins thrown into fountains. Coins are a very common symbolic vessel. More expensive to produce than their face value, American pennies have almost been demonetized and serve mainly as lucky charms.

The photograph of Louise Lawler depicts a wishbone from a series of a 100 eaten between 1994 and 1995. Traditionally snapped apart by 2 guests at a same dinner, it grants a wish to the winner of the longer part. Lawler photographed these bones intact, holding the full potential of all their promises and evoking the spiritual charge sometimes imbued in food.

Lastly, the painting of Patricio Lima Quintana represents a haunted house, a doghouse, not that different from the one where Mickey Mouse was trapped in a famous 1929 cartoon. The frame is made of lead, possibly an allegory of the philosopher's stone that can turn lead into gold, which triggers a reflection on the volatility of the value of art.

Mad child of a wise mother recalls with Voltaire that if necessity sometimes pushed men to eat other men, it is superstition that immolated them.

Tom Friedman

Untitled - A Curse, 1992

An 11inch sphere of space floating 11inch above the top of a pedestal cursed by a witch

133.4 x 28 x 28 cm

Courtesy the Artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

Doris Guo

A Long Bucket, 2018

Soot on glass, custom frame

28 x 35,5 cm

Courtesy the Artist

Jutta Koether

Fortune, an extra, 2014

1 US Penny and 1 Euro Cent coins thrown in the exhibition space

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the Artist

Louise Lawler

Bone, 1997

B/W photogram with text on mat

31.75 x 24.13 cm, ed. 35 of 100

Private Collection, New York. Courtesy the Artist.

Patricio Lima Quintana

Only vulnerable to enchantment, 2018

Ink and gouache on paper mounted on wood and lead

30 x 30cm

Courtesy the Artist