

others are harder to identify. In *Nutella*, 2016, for example, are those goblets of Belgian beer and waffles, or are they glasses of red wine and pieces of chocolate? The execution is loose enough that, on first glance, it remains playfully uncertain. And any of those things locate the imagery in Belgium, more or less.

The titles themselves offer no obvious clue to the paintings' meanings. *Nutella*, for example, only identifies the two jars of the nutty chocolate scattered among the many objects rendered in it. Sometimes the titles are factually incorrect: *Six Papayas*, 2016, for instance, depicts six halves only, thus three complete papayas, plus three bananas and one Nike sneaker (not a pair). And yet without the title of one of the more subdued pictures, *Five Toilet Papers*, 2015, it might be difficult to ascertain what is being represented. Again, however, the title plays with us—this time grammatically, for comedic effect. In Bernhardt's oeuvre, signs, motifs, and objects from various times and places simmer in a gumbo of global culture—tropical fruit, Smurfs, Duracell batteries, Chap Stick, Rubik's Cubes, toucans, kiwi fruit, Nikes. The juxtapositions can be amusing, but they also bring to mind Claude Lévi-Strauss's comment that in an age of monoculture, travel is no longer possible. What we have in Bernhardt's world, instead, is a series of incongruous images encountering each other as if trapped in an endless game of Pac-Man.

Much like that video game, some of her paintings have anachronistic or even nostalgic overtones. The batteries, for example, recall the 1990s, when, pre-iPod, the tracks of the New York subway system were littered with double A's, tossed off the platform after use, while Pac-Man and Rubik's Cube echo the '80s—outdated and yet appropriate avatars for the sloppy digital world we inhabit, where our contemporary symbols are now as easily recycled from previous decades. Even the shoes are difficult to date—it's hard to tell if they are current or vintage.

A large quilt, *Playing Games*, 2016, displayed in the exterior gallery windows, further complicates the tension between what her work depicts and what it means. The large work patches Dutch wax fabrics with images of President Barack Obama and small details of mosques. In this context, the accompanying figures and figments of consumer culture acquire a directly political context. The uncertainty of whether Obama's presence, sewn into the quilt repeatedly, is affirmative or critical makes the work all the more resonant, providing a sinister tone to the lightheartedness of Bernhardt's paintings. They do not resolve into an easy statement of the iconography of our era. Instead, they present playful but perplexing riddles of migration and consumption.

—Aaron Peck

BRUSSELS

“Répétition”

FOUNDATION BOGHOSSIAN–VILLA EMPAIN

Some exhibitions of contemporary art aspire to abstraction in their location, such that what is presented in New York might be seen without sensible alteration in Paris or Mexico City. Other shows speak more immediately of their times and to their places, and this category includes Nicola Lees and Asad Raza's “*Répétition*.” It could hardly be otherwise, given that it was hosted by an institution—the Fondation Boghossian–Villa Empain—dedicated to fostering a dialogue between the Middle East and the West through art, and that the show opened in Brussels a mere two months after the attacks on the city.

To the ear of its Francophone audience the show's title meant two things: *repetition*, in the general sense shared with English, as well as *rehearsal*. But what was being repeated and rehearsed? At least to begin with, *accidents*. Repetition, for many artists in the show, is a

way of inviting accident. The show's inspiration, and its most iconic work, was *Accident*, 1963, a lithograph by Robert Rauschenberg. It was given this name because the stone with which the artist was working cracked in the process of its making. Yet the first work encountered by visitors to the foundation's elegant home in the Villa Empain was an even more visceral expression of this theme: Mariana Telleria's *Before Our Birth*, 2016, is made from the twisted wreckage of countless automobile accidents, gathered and transformed by the artist into a work that occupies the space heavily, like a frozen catastrophe. Beyond was a stack of newspapers prepared by Rirkrit Tiravanija in which the news is not good. Against the backdrop of the Belgian daily *Le Soir* is printed in bold letters: THE DAYS OF THIS SOCIETY IS NUMBERED. The message seems clear enough, until one notices its grammatical error. Is this to say that those who announce the end of things, those who see imminent collapse, are ignorant? And why printed over *Le Soir*? Because of its collaboration with the Nazis (when it was they who lived and worked in the Villa Empain)? The notification tends to confuse, if only because the point of getting it wrong is so hard to get right. Perhaps it was an accident.

The most intensely rehearsed repetition in the show was a hugely engaging dance piece by Andros Zins-Browne titled *Already Unmade*, 2016. Its notion is to reverse the flow of creation. In a dance of varying (but significant) duration, the choreographer literally deconstructs earlier pieces, moving from completed pieces to their halting and uncertain first movements. Each repetition is different, breaking apart different dances from the choreographer's repertoire and recombining them with one another, each time in interaction with visitors. The word *accident* once meant “happening” (its literal sense in Latin) and, it would seem, still can.

The open, iterative, and relational elements for which Raza is best known are not, however, limited to dance. As the show went on it changed, permuted by the exhibition's hosts. Elements from the Ljubljana International Center of Graphic Arts and Moderna Galerija—such as Rauschenberg's lithograph and works by such figures as Max Bill—were placed alongside newer works including those by Sophia Al-Maria, Becky Beasley, Will Benedict, Andrea Büttner, Shannon Ebner, Konstantin Grcic, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Deanna Havas, Sanya Kantarovsky, Heinz Peter Knes, David Maljkovic, Radenko Milak, Anna Ostoya, and Roman Uranjek. Their positions, however, were not fixed, and over the course of the exhibition works were periodically reinstalled amid the static sculptural and cinematic contributions by Abbas Akhavan, Nairy Baghramian, castillo/corrales, Mike Cooter, Dexter Sinister, Latifa Echakhch, Istvan Ist Huzjan, Hilary Lloyd, Jumana Manna, Otobong Nkanga, Lydia Ourahmane, Giles Round, Zin Taylor, and Erika Vogt.

So many artists, works, accidents, rehearsals, and repetitions made for a rich—and evolving—experience, an admirable effort on the part of the curators. One way of fostering international dialogue is to present a collision or collaboration of cultures in a didactic manner, telling you



Mariana Telleria, *Before Our Birth*, 2016, car wreckage and mixed media. Installation view. From “*Répétition*.” Photo: Asad Raza.

what you are to see and think about what you see, with all the historical, social, and political dots already connected. The strength of this show, however, lay in how far it was from the parochial notion that this interaction must follow set talking points and play to (stereo)type, leaving, instead, the question with the visitor, as in a real dialogue.

—Leland de la Durantaye

STOCKHOLM

Anastasia Ax

GALLERI ANDERSSON/SANDSTRÖM

Anastasia Ax has an appetite for destruction, but of a certain kind. I remember her going wild in her work *Exile*, 2011, at the music festival Way Out West in Göteborg, Sweden. In a big tent, she built up a landscape of white sculptures in plaster, old books and fabric, and other materials. Accompanied by the darkest noise music (by Dasha Rush, Oni Ayhun, and Marja-Leena Sillanpää), Ax reentered the space and began to spit black ink on the sculptures while breaking them with her bare hands. Finally, the audience joined in and destroyed the installation by dancing and tearing down the sculptures. The extraordinary thing was that this transformative act seemed totally without irony. To be able to create this kind of aggressive metamorphosis of an exhibition space in a music context without making it look like a critical comment on rock-music or performance-art clichés was definitely an achievement. In retrospect, I think this had to do with the intense but careful focus that characterized the artist's presence. What I am sure of is that Ax is one of the few performance artists whose work really makes sense both in music festivals and white-cube galleries.

Naturally, the connection to rock, with its emphasis on the idea of spontaneity, is less pronounced in art contexts, where one becomes more aware of how the destructive and transformative aspects of performance are consciously choreographed. Getting violent with a sculpture could also be understood as a means of questioning its economic value, its potential for being collected and preserved. In her recent exhibition "Copyright," Ax showed two new works in which one witnessed inanimate objects in constant transformation. The artist's part of the performance was hidden, though viewers could still imagine her body in action.

"Copyright," 2016–, is a series of sculptures based on reams of copy paper in different brands, all made and purchased in Germany. With water and her own hands, Ax had carved out a small crater in each batch of paper. Through her manual labor, she is both accelerating and making visible entropic decay. When I saw them, they were beautiful; today they might be gone. "Kathimerini," 2015, is a series of large-scale wall pieces that from a distance look like dry skin. Seen up close, they reveal themselves as more performative paper works, made from blank leftover sheets of newsprint from the financial supplement to the Greek newspaper after which the series is titled. Ax manipulated pages of the periodical with water to produce these fragile art objects.

"Kathimerini" is undoubtedly an artistic comment on the economic crisis in Greece, and perhaps also on the

function of contemporary financial journalism, but the very fact that "Copyright" was made in Germany—by an artist who lives and works in Athens and Stockholm—suggests an allegory of German/Greek relations. At least since Johann Winckelmann and the invention of art history in the age of the Enlightenment, German culture has had a passionate relationship to an idea of Greece. To connect the two countries as Ax does in a commercial art gallery today is a speculative way to raise the question of art in our current economic situation by way of recent political conflicts between Germany and Greece. How that all adds up is harder to tell, but the two works amount to an idiosyncratic reflection on the ambiguous state of art, politics, and economy in Europe today.

—Fredrik Svensk

OSLO

Oa4s

1857

As Joyce Carol Oates would have it, "Our lives are Möbius strips, misery and wonder simultaneously." Yet in a climate of xenophobia, political tension, and violence throughout the European Union, the Amsterdam- and Mexico City-based Oa4s (On All Fours) used this single-planed surface as the prompt for an exhibition heavy on wonder and free of misery. The duo (Michael Ray-Von and Temra Pavlović) positioned the Möbius strip as a literal and figurative motif by which



View of "Oa4s," 2016.

to frame a collection of poetic (if occasionally precious) meditations on atemporality. The exhibition's weighty title, "The Fencer and the Beekeeper: A Treatise of the Mechanics of Engagement of Two Discrete Objects in Space and the Miracle of Collaboration Outside Time," introduced the viewer to its protagonists and theme, while the twenty-three-minute looped video work *A Spiral Is a Circle Without Hands or Time* (all works 2016), installed on the floor of the gallery's front room, outlined its stakes. The video—surrounded by a wall-mounted fencing glove (*Narrator's Glove*), a cast-latex Möbius strip draped over a two-by-four suspended between two sawhorses (*Bricolage*), and a paper Möbius strip takeaway that served as the show's press release—was shot in 1857's vaulted main gallery and depicts the actions of two characters: the fencer, who is positioned as defensive, guarding against her competitor's attacks, and the beekeeper, who must move forward "to stay one step ahead of the bees." In the voice-over that accompanies

Anastasia Ax, *COPYRIGHT Copyright*, 2016, paper, 12¼ × 8¼ × 4¾". From the series "Copyright," 2016–.

