

Bertrand Flanet

Some hollow crowns

July 3 - August 3, 2019



Exhibition view, Bertrand Flanet, 2019

Some hollow crowns features recent productions and developments from the artist Bertrand Flanet. The exhibition starts with *blue and blue*, a footnote acting as a general introduction, invoking invisible and visible abstract narrations, close to epic tales. The work is a text on linen inspired by psychological motifs and linked to the artist's interest in narratives. It alludes to a plot evolving for twelve hours as twelve chapters and iterations in a single day. A single chapter is introduced as part of a large scale series of twelve chapters existing as panels. The printed text recalls the narrative of a boy killing monsters in a plot crafted the vein of science-fiction. The entire twelve chapters exist also in the form of a small book, similar to a children's book, available for review in the Lab library. By breaking with seriality and presenting a single chapter in isolation, the artist focuses our attention on the invisible paratext within the chapters one may typically omit. In that perspective, he is pursuing his interest through the text, narratives, and objects as a ghostly presence in time and space. The exhibition could be ascribed to the so-called 'inner space fiction', a literary label derived from J. G. Ballard's 1962 manifesto on Inner Space, exploring a peculiar kind of science fiction where the exploration of the unconscious substitutes the interplanetary dimension. Importantly, the decision to opt for a non-mimetic narrative formula, rather than betraying Flanet's renunciation of commitment, satisfies his need to deconstruct realistic writing, traditionally conveying patriarchal power-relations and gender-biased models.



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The exhibition is thought of as an associative space, particularly through the two featured films *Dungeons* and *Exhibitions*. The film *Exhibitions* is presented on a projection screen in a corner of the gallery, at a human scale. In this video installation - the plot unfolds in an interior in which we pass through several corridors and rooms, the camera highlighting the different facets of the characteristics of the space, inhabited by uncanny creatures similar to cartoon characters. We witness as spectators a family scene, the artist depicts short sequences reminiscent of comic strips with speech bubbles containing each time a new abstracted utterance. Flanet voluntarily abstracts the situation to move away from any realistic features and patterns. In these two films, the artist uses software that generates video games. This vocabulary borrowed from video games allows the construction of a certain narrative based on linearity, repetition, and loop and an abstract aesthetic tainted by a feeling of alienation. It offers a way to talk abstractly about our world and the things which alienate us using coherent narration. With the two video works featured in the exhibition, the narrative space is detached from the theatricality of the text, as if the artwork generates a cyclical narrative, an escalation, promises made but never delivered. As a spectator, the exhibition invokes the familiar image of the computer screensaver remaining idle, in a waiting state. Flanet uses the first person in a virtual context. Projected onto the wall, *Dungeons* is also a personal chronicle of a space-time in which the artist creates specific imagery and mind-set to suggest a social critique.

red is for love, blue is for longing, yellow is for rage (blind prototype) is a 3D printed bird-house depicting London's Grenfell tower, before the announcement of its renovation in 2012. The work is part of a series of three bird-houses originally placed in the park of the Sommerbad Humboldthain in the Wedding district in Berlin. Flanet uses the technique of 3D printing and assembly. Each

house corresponds to a color: red, blue and yellow; a reference to a short story by Susan Sontag. This approach serves a certain mechanism with a heavily worked aesthetic: placed on the floor this version of the work reveals the bird-house with three entries filled by kinds of nipples or protuberances, “tumors of love, desire and rage” as the artist describes them. It is a testament to the evolution of the narrative, whose motifs explore conscious and unconscious realities, while relinquishing particular standpoints to embrace social and existential issues of which we become, once again, the privileged interpreters. Wandering through the exhibition, we come to appreciate the unease of writing about oneself. Nothing is personal in the sense that it is not uniquely one’s own – adopting this perspective, the exhibited artwork implicitly writes about others, as an individual’s emotions, pains, pleasures are never truly theirs alone. Flanet attempts to move away from the usual problems of subjectivity and microcosm by breaking through the subjective, the personal becoming general. As in life and social processes, Some hollow crowns transforms a private experience into something larger. The works focus on the deeply contradictory nature of the social positioning of oneself within society, the result of crisscrossing tensions arising from subjects within various dominating groups.



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Relaxer (a, b, c, d, e) features five puppet masks resembling the heads of cartoon mascots. They are presented cornered and crushed between a wall and a railing. The masks are part of the various lines unfolded in the exhibition, a desire to investigate from the places, and to write stories. Thus, an emotional situation is created in this environment, bringing people into contact by reflecting and engaging with their condition. The artist moves away from traditional realistic features, instead tending towards the sensitivity of experimental forms of composition, distancing himself from a unitary reconfiguration of reality within the characters’ unconscious dimension. In this respect, the artist introduces innovative formulae of representation, exploiting popular and accessible cartoon style meeting his need to interrogate the forms and uncover their mechanisms of composition. The text and forms become active agents circulating throughout the work yet centered on the

personal and artistic flux experienced by the various representations of self. One of the major themes is our perception of the fragmentation of both life and personal conscience. This gives shape to a discontinuity of the narrative fabric, in which the protagonist's identity dimensions are explored in several diary entries. And it is in the context of the exhibition that one can make sense of a certain psychological mindset. This places tension on one's own creative imagination within dense metanarrative observations and connections grounded in several realities, while testing the porosity between fact and fiction, between microhistories of single individuals and History.

Some hollow crowns foregrounds the possibility of the individual consciousness to attain liberation through the recognition of the bond that exists between the subject's destiny and that of the whole society. Thus, the emphasis on abstracted forms and subjects conveys almost mystical knowledge which does not prevent the artist's production from acting as a vehicle for bitter social criticism. Flanet seeks to reveal narratives that are constructed and evolving. He is composing artworks with a close relationship to writing, by mingling written text with a visual language. Violence becomes a recurrent motif and latent element, the artwork thus becoming a sort of parasite. The exhibition, with its protean thematic motifs and strategies of narrative experimentation, cannot be explored without the complex dynamics characterizing our current time. The artist formulates artworks from someone who is part of the narratives he creates, and yet distanced from them. By writing from their margins, he shows a constant interest in oppositional forms of signification. The works featured in the exhibition touch upon the notion of cultural identity and show how cultural memories are formed within an isolated yet hyperconnected society. One recalls individual and shared memories of historic events.



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The viewer gets the sense that there are no specific locations nor precise temporal instances. This manifests in the exhibition through a process of 'abstracting a situation' of high stakes for the artist and also for the viewer, who is invited to take part and experience these narratives from a psychological and physical point of view. To do so, Flanet invokes complex dreams, characters, and metaphors that intentionally render the technical aspects of the work. This physicality also invokes problems revolving around alienation which find their motivation in existing and becoming. The environment of the exhibition space allows vast and existential stories to unfold, which refer to a multitude of situations. They contain a contradictory dynamic as they act as catalysts but also empty shells as a patchwork of different elements. The exhibition suggests that Man is both influenced and free in his own choices. In any society and group looking back at one's memories of the past in a critical way is tied to the repetitive nature of memory. By analyzing, criticizing and putting that memory in perspective, *Some hollow crowns* breaks the cycle of repetition by following a plurality of lines contesting memory. Flanet uses the artwork as a platform to talk about something else: how does the individual develop in a society that is a paradoxical entity? This involves the acknowledgment of other collective memories and, with that, other perspectives on history and our contemporary epoch.

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