COMMON NOUNS | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z | 123..

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Archeonauts: When curating is Art

Archeonautes, April 28 - June 3, 2017. The full press kit (PDF)

Curated by Valentina Peri : Group show : Morehshin Allahyari, Nicolas Maigret & Maria Roszkowska, Laurent Mignonneau & Christa Sommerer, Eduardo Kac, Quayola, Evan Roth.

At first sight, the show gives the impression of a haphazard gathering of pieces. Then a more sustained attention leads into philosophy. And, indeed, the title Archeonauts, by itself, indicates a coherent and global philosophical intention. The presentation text par the curator (see press kit) strengthtens the project's coherence as well as its originality and ambition.

To begin with, Peri uses a neologism. She

Material Speculation, Isis , by Morehshin Allayari. The USB key visibly tells us of perenniality.

is not the first to use it (see on Youtube, a website created in 2013, it seems), but at least not frequent. But she expands on her philosophical intentions : "this neologism pinpoints an anthropological universal involved in a quest for meaning through an archeological gaze". A wide angle perspective, into which she has selected the show pieces, some by the gallery's accustomed artists (Kac, Sommerer & Mignonneau) but also newcomers like Moreshin Allahyari (her website).

Under unassuming attitudes, Peri hides a keen and active philosophical mind. Not so optimistic by the way. Quoting Mark Fisher, she sets a quite desperate stage : "... while 20th-century experimental culture was seized by a recombinatorial delirium which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available, the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion." But that is only to show that other futures are still possible.

That can particularly be said about digital art, at least in its present state (see our, more optmisic for the future, report Deep Identity). And the show turns this feeling of World's end into a paradoxical assembly of old (1980's) pieces and new ones turned backwards to a disappearing past.

Seen fromt this inspired

A bale of dustbin papers? Four monthes memory!

standpoint, each work reaches a maximum of meaning, which perhaps will escape the attention of the casual passer-by, and even more so in the vast junk yards of the large shows in Paris, Basel, London or Miamin, built for the rich with their Platinum passes and VIP limos.

Data excess and oblivion is exposed by *Forgetting Summer* (Evan Roth, 2017). It looks, just like a big bale of waste papers. It is indeed a kind of joke about Internet overflow of documents. Actually, " This physical representation of our lost digital histories was created from four months worth of Internet browsing data, resulting in a 1.5 x 0.42 meter long

vinyl print compressed using an industrial compactor". Pulling our leg? Perhaps, but also a sort of really massive meditation about communication and big data.

Nealrly by symmetry, **Perenniality** is saved by 3D printing combined with USB keys in the *Material Speculation, Isis* (2015-2016) Moreshin Allahyari. At first sight, just beautiful crysltalin reproduction of some Hatra (see Wikipedia) sculptures, threatened by political turmoil in the region. A double security is brought by the two conservation mode. The memory card includes images, maps, PDF files and videos (including the 3D model files). If long term preservation would be the real aim of such works, simpler and more usable processes would be appropriate, for example multiple distribution among perennial institutions of the files with the pertinennt documentation. Then the true role of such art pieces seems us to foster public attention to past preservation and its digital means.

Back from the past also, *Reabracadabra* (1985, restored

A minitel screen reanimated by video (Not the kind of image you could have on the french Minitel, as far as we remember).

in 2014-2015) is an example of **reviving old digital art works** with some technical gimmicks. For instance, the Recode Project recreates works of the 1970's and by a kind of retro-enginering re-programes them (in Processing language). Or the **Demoscene** ancient computer architectures (e.g. Commodore 64 to create new applications and notably games). Or the Pamal (Preservation & Art - Media Archaeology Lab), which reconstituted a Video server for Eduardo Kac. To make it more simple, the model proposed at Charlot's is only a video reproduction of an actual Minitel service (probably after the 1985 Brazilian model and not the French standard product).

On the same vein, but less technical and limited to hardware, *Shanzai Archeology* (2016 ?) by Nicolas Maigret, Clément Renaud and Maria Roszkowska is a collection of Chinese fancy smartphones. Peri sees this work as the preservation of a Oriental form of creativity, doomed to obsolescence due to China's integration into the international standards and regulations.

Silhouette Series (Evan Roth, 2017) connects Internet ant the long tradition of shadow puppets.

We do'nt see clearly how *Iconographies Holofernes after Artemisia Gentileschi* (circa 2015) fits into the Archeonauts thematics, if not as an algorithmic processing of ancient paintings, without an explicit relationship between these algorithms and the subject. From Duchamp's coax to Florent Aziosmanoff"s Living Mona Lisa archeonautism (if we can say so) has a long and rich curricu

Egometer (Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer, 2017) is the last example of this couple or artists transpositions of simple technologies into digital art pieces. They reached a summit with their Life Writer (2006), which added a sophisticated artificial life altorighm to a vintage portable typewriter. Here the game is simpler and funnier. Egometers stands llke a winsome wink to the visitor arriving and still dubious to enter a a mysterious trip into the gallery.

To conclude, the pessimist will take the show as one more fancy assembly of contemporary pieces imaginatively wrapped into a philosophical discourse. The optimist wil let himself be caught into this kind or time-shattering magic (*) where the curator is an artist by herself. But is not this ambiguity typical of today's contemporary art?

PIerre Berger
May 2, 2017

(*) On the same vein, Dadaism will inspire another show at Charlot's, Sept. 9 - Oct.10. (dates to be checked).

Egometer: Old wood framework for a contemporary wink at our Ego.