

ARTFORUM

Artforum
Sohrab Mohebbi
Shahryar Nashat
Best of 2019
December 2019

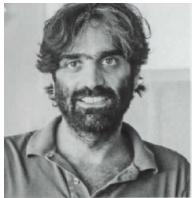
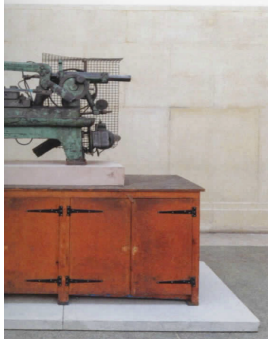


Photo: Matt Greenwood

SOHRAB MOHEBBI

SOHRAB MOHEBBI IS A WRITER AND CURATOR AT SCULPTURECENTER, NEW YORK. HE HAS RECENTLY ORGANIZED, IN NO PARTICULAR SOLO EXHIBITIONS BY FIONA CONNOR AND BANU CENNETOĞLU AND THE GROUP SHOW "SEARCHING THE SKY FOR RAIN."



7

ERIC WESLEY (LOS ANGELES) According to some, this is a nonplace, a cipher for a distant habitation. "Timbuctoo" spoke to this fugibility of work that was as unlocatable as folded deck chairs hung on the wall like a totem of fake rocks; the body also hung on a wall; a pile of lumber sat in the mill. In the gallery's back room, a pedicure model of a woodland campsite, a chair sat in the mezzanine, lounging in a culture misassembled.

5 MIKE NELSON (TATE BRITAIN, LONDON; CURATED BY CLARRIE WALLIS AND ELSA COUSTOU) Mike Nelson brought the dismissed and discarded material residue of "dematerialization" into the Tate Britain's airy, Beaux Arts-style Duveen Galleries. Sundry industrial artifacts, including heavy knitting machinery, factory equipment, steel awnings, and woodwork from army barracks, were here stacked, rearranged, and reassembled in a meticulous museal installation evoking a cross between the Brancusi studio and a junkyard.

6 OLGA BALEMA (BRIDGET DONAHUE, NEW YORK) What is the least amount of art that can constitute a work? Balema's exquisite and scanty show "brain damage" proposed an answer. Composed from elastic bands, staples, and nails, the spread of thirteen pieces resembled a deteriorating set of intersecting grids. Reducing art to the bare minimum, the exhibition tiptoed the line between artwork and its absence.



5. Mike Nelson, *The Asset Strippers* (detail), 2019, mixed media. Installation view, Tate Britain, London. Photo: Matt Greenwood. 6. Olga Balema, 8. 2019, elastic band, paint, glue, nails, staples. Installation view, Bridget Donahue, New York. 7. Eric Wesley, *Untitled (light rocks)*, 2019, mixed media, 75 x 16 x 16". 8. Shahryar Nashat, *Keep Begging*, 2019, HD video on LED wall, color, sound, 11 minutes 10 seconds. Installation view, Swiss Institute, New York. 9. Horse figure, ca. 13,000 BP, limestone, 11 x 9 1/4 x 2 1/4". From "Préhistoire: une énigme moderne." (Préhistoire: A Modern Enigma). 10. Tony Cokes, 3# 2001, video, color, sound, 3 minutes 50 seconds. Installation view, Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London. Photo: Andy Stagg.



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SHAHRYAR NASHAT (SWISS INSTITUTE, NEW YORK) On the topic of fugitivity—or what I call strategic indeterminacy—there was also Nashat slamming a hairy HD armpit into the viewer's face: Do you want identity? Do you want sex? Do you want meaning? Do you want violence? Do you want the othered body? Do you want exile? Do you want the exoticized? Do you want Islam? Do you want my discourse? *Keep Begging*.

9

"PRÉHISTOIRE: A MODERN ENIGMA" (CENTRE POMPIDOU, PARIS; CURATED BY CÉCILE DEBRAY, RÉMI LABRUSSE, AND MARIA STAVRINAKI) In our time of museological upheaval, institutions are experimenting with a number of approaches to exhibiting the global canon. There are corrective measures, there are formal measures, there are decolonial measures, and there are cross-cultural narratives. The brilliantly complex "Préhistoire, une énigme moderne" had some elements of each, albeit with a more or less Euro-American focus. A cousin of last year's groundbreaking "Neolithic Childhood: Art in a False Present, c. 1930" at Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, the exhibition surveyed modernism's fascination with, and continual revision of, the origin story. In the nearly pitch-black first gallery, a spotted skull hung near a Paul Klee—a ferocious start to a curatorial tour de force.



10

TONY COKES (GOLDSMITHS CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, LONDON; CURATED BY SARAH MCCRORY AND NATASHA HOARE) How can we sustain the work of interpretive communities? Tony Cokes's brilliant, discursive dispersion is finally getting its due. His exhibition at Goldsmiths CCA, one of the artist's most comprehensive institutional shows to date, includes *Testament A: mf ika k-p x ke rip*, 2019, a remarkable new commission based on Kodwo Eshun's memorial lecture for Mark Fisher. Against a background of music by Burial, Shackleton, and others, we encounter a cavalcade of text: "The practice of joy is at the same time the mobilization of joy, in the interest of its own self-protection. The only way to protect joy, is by practicing it . . . a joy that is practiced by the differentiated positions, and the antagonistic alliances, and the factional forces." □

On view through January 19, 2020. Co-organized by the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA, and ARGOS Centre for Audiovisual Arts, Brussels.



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