

L'art même #82, Fall 2020

Lucile Bertrand – They used to sing – 30.10 > 23.12.2020

Irène Laub Gallery – 29 rue Van Eyck, 1050, Brussels, Belgium – irenelaubgallery.com

Biennale d'Enghien, Miroirs #3 – De terre et de ciel – 05.09 > 20.09.2020

Avenue Elizabeth, 7550 Enghien, Belgium – expo-miroirs-parc-enghien.be

I feel really awake – 17.09 > 25.10.2020

Maison du Peuple, Parvis de Saint-Gilles, 1060 Brussels

“WE MUST NOT FORGET TO TELL THEM”

"To awaken consciences is to wake up the language, to shake it, to turn the words back towards this still sensitive root which leads them back to the source. Poetry can force the passage so that what has been covered by the inanity of that which says nothing and runs to our ruin can finally be heard."¹ This formulation borrowed from Sylvie Gouttebaron can illustrate with a certain acuity the militant approach of Lucile Bertrand (Paris, 1960; lives and works in Brussels) who notably presided over the production of her first striking video entitled *amnesia* (2014-2018) described by Philippe Hunt as a "work of combat"².

Following her exhibition *Tu Te souviens ?* (Do you remember?), specifically conceived for the Maison des Arts de Schaerbeek (Brussels) in 2014, the artist is now pursuing, in the spaces of the Irène Laub gallery, the development of her inclusive, transversal and plural discourse around disappearance, through various proposals, both philosophical and plastic, which, like embedded narratives, respond to and feed off each other to sketch out a completely new statement.

One of the foundations of human history, the movement of individuals and goods, is approached by the artist from different points of entry with the aim of reminding us that the phenomenon of migration is in no way symptomatic of our times and that it remains, despite everything, subject to multiple interpretations depending on the places, people and circumstances surrounding the departure. Initiated in 2017 on the occasion of her solo exhibition *Travelers and Strangers* at the Kentler International Drawing Space in New York, the series on travel narratives highlights the personal journeys of individuals who have deliberately or not left their country of origin to settle elsewhere for a time. While two rescue blankets recount the adventures of women on the run, her recent production, *Des routes et des mots* (Routes and Words), focuses on the journeys of some of the writers who have left their mark on world literature. En regard, Lucile Bertrand reconstructs in her own words the imaginary exile of a migrant woman through what she calls a "text-poem". Aiming to accentuate the boldness of the project by the numerous risks it generates, both physically and mentally, the artist uses mostly the verb and accompanies each step through a phase of hesitation, negotiation and even constraint which, inevitably, results in a payment of money.

Under the appearance of an innocent curtain of oxidized vegetation – strongly reminiscent of the foliage and pods characteristic of wisteria, a plant as luxuriant as it is toxic – the triptych *The*

Invisibles gradually reveals some of the most pernicious aspects of the excessive exploitation of natural resources and of the mobilized laborers. By providing both an abject and objective portrait of a real but non-exhaustive share of economic activity on a global scale, these three drawings highlight the (in)direct repercussions, both ecological and human, caused by the production and consumption patterns of industrialized societies, whose ramifications extend far beyond their territories.

In a second level, everyone will agree that we are witnessing a progressive disappearance of the sound diversity emitted by living beings, characterized among other things by the growing scarcity of bird species and the decrease in the number of speakers of certain languages and dialects throughout the world. From this inescapable state of affairs, Lucile Bertrand wished to privilege the fact over the cause by working on the restitution of these vectors of cultural and biological unity through an immersive installation, *They used to sing*, "a kind of abstract punctuation which, like furtive appearances and disappearances, randomly inhabit the exhibition space as if to fight against oblivion"³. Conceived from recordings from freely available digital sources – and interpreted by the artist using informal phonetic transcriptions to be assembled in scores⁴ – three compositions broadcast, according to their personal rhythm, whispers, whistles or fragments, sometimes distinct, sometimes intermingled, all interspersed with more or less sustained silences.

Anchored in a process of constant departitioning and interdependence, Lucile Bertrand's distanced practice is seen as an unfolding narrative to be apprehended with patience, according to an approach that is both singular and global, which aims again and again to shed light on phenomena and events that are generally anterior, in order to take a different look at current societal issues. Thus, after focusing on the question of the memory and traumatic consequences of wars through the testimonies of writers from several parts of the world, the visual artist turns her attention to the abundant and no less problematic documentation that discusses on Franco-Algerian history since colonization, in an attempt to reveal the dissensions and, beyond that, to bear witness to the sufferings engendered on each side of the Mediterranean, but also at the heart of their respective populations. Begun in the summer of 2019, this new long-term video project is rooted in the exploration of a common past in the light of political and literary writings produced in France and Algeria, which, on both sides, reveal an "extremely fragmented, conflict-ridden and taboo memory"⁵. As this vast undertaking of reconciling, which is necessary for the construction of any individual and collective identity, is at the stage of analysis, we will have to wait a few more months to discover its results.

Clémentine Davin

1- Quote from an op-ed by Sylvie Gouttebaron, director of the Maison des écrivains et de la littérature in Paris, entitled "Awakening consciences is awakening language" and published in the online edition of *Libération* on December 7, 2018.

2- Philippe Hunt, "Lucile Bertrand at Espace Contretype, Brussels – A(M)nesia", in *H ART Magazine* #178, November 2018.

3- Quote from Lucile Bertrand from a meeting in Brussels on February 27, 2020.

4- One of these scores will be unveiled and made available to the public during the next edition of the Biennale d'Enghien in which she is participating.

5- Lucile Bertrand, *loc. cit.*