

EXHIBITION

THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION

Art and Tactical Magic

September 19, 2008 – January 11, 2009



DATES

September 19, 2008 –
January 11, 2009

VENUE

First floor galleries

VISITING HOURS

Tuesdays to Saturdays
(including holidays)
from 11am to 9pm

Sundays, from 11am to 3pm

CO-PRODUCED BY

MARCO, Museo de Arte
Contemporánea de Vigo /
Frankfurter Kunstverein

CURATOR

Chus Martínez

Goshka Macuga. *Madame Blavatsky*, 2007

ARTISTS

Jonathan Allen (UK, 1966; lives and works in London)

Center for Tactical Magic (Berkeley-based art collective, founded in 2000 by Aaron Gach)

Roberto Cuoghi (Modena, Italy, 1973; lives and works in Milan, Italy)

Michele Di Menna (Vancouver, Canada, 1980; lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany)

Claire Fontaine (Berkeley-based art collective founded in 2004)

Aurélien Froment (Angers, France, 1976; lives and works in Paris, France)

Mike Kelley (Detroit, USA, 1954; lives and works in Los Angeles, USA)

Joachim Koester (Copenhaguen, Denmark, 1962; lives and works in New York and Copenhaguen)

Maria Loboda (Cracow, Poland, 1979; lives and works in Berlin, Germany)

Goshka Macuga (Warsaw, Poland, 1967; lives and works in London, UK)

Eduardo Navarro (Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1979; lives and works in Buenos Aires)

Olivia Plender (London, UK, 1977; lives and works in London)

Ride.1 [Ronny Hansson, Jonas Kjellgren, Stig Sjölund] (Uddevalla, Sweden, 1962 / Gävle, Sweden, 1962 / Timrå, Sweden, 1955)

Allen Ruppersberg (Cleveland, USA, 1944; lives and works in New York and Los Angeles)

Kerstin Stoll (Nürnberg, Germany, 1969; lives and works in Hamburg, Germany)

Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan (West Yorkshire, UK, 1971 / Norfolk, UK, 1967; live and work in en Glasgow, UK)

Adrian Williams (Oregon, USA, 1979; lives and works in New York, USA)

WORKS ON DISPLAY

Coproduced by MARCO of Vigo and Frankfurter Kunstverein, the group show **THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION. Art and Tactical Magic'**, curated by Chus Martínez, aims to document the new interest of artistic production with regard to magic and the unknown, understanding magic in a political sense, as a resort, as a methodology, and as a new way of individual resistance. The exhibition features nearly thirty works including photography, video, film, installation, sculptural works, and the performance *Feedback – Jack of Many Trades*, by the group of artists Ride.1, to be performed during the opening. In addition to the works exhibited, the show includes a photograph by Erich Consemüller from the Bauhaus Archive — at the entrance hall — and three films by filmmakers Maya Deren, Werner Herzog and Jean Rouch, all of them at the visitor's disposal at MARCO's Library/Documentation Center, from Tuesday to Friday, from 11am to 8pm.

Marcel Breuer/Erich Consemüller (Pécs, Hungary, 1902 – New York, USA, 1981 / Germany, 1902 –1957)
Bauhaus- Szene: Lis Beyer oder Ise Gropius im Stahlrohr-Armlehnsessel von Marcel Breuer, 1925/1926

Maya Deren (Kiev, Ukraine, 1908 - New York, USA, 1961)
Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti, 1947/1951, 54'

Werner Herzog (Munich, Germany, 1942)
Invincible, 2001, 130'

Jean Rouch (Paris, 1917 – Niger, 2004)
Les Maitres Fous (Mad Masters), 1955, 36'

CATALOGUE

On the occasion of the show, MARCO of Vigo and Frankfurter Kunstverein have published a catalogue including a text by the curator Chus Martínez — 'An Index of Ideas Taken From the Other Side. Magic as a Case Study' —, together with other essays on magic culture and the unknown, just as in Simon During's 'Tricks, Traps and Transformations' which summarises the key theses in his book *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), available in Galician and Spanish for the first time in this catalogue, — Lars Bang Larsen — 'The Surface No Longer Holds', about the tendency in contemporary art which uses magic methods as inspiration — and a text by artist Jonathan Allen — 'Deceptionists At War' —, which deals with connections between magic and politics, taken as an introduction to the chapter on artists and works on exhibit.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Former Frankfurter Kunstverein's director, Chus Martínez is MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona's chief curator from July 2008. She took her degree in Philosophy and Art History from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) before continuing her academic formation in Germany (Tübingen and Berlin Free Universities) and the United States (Columbia University and the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York). Her professional experience began in 1995, at the Hamburger Bahnhof-Museum of Contemporary Art of Berlin; from 1999 to 2001 she was the co-curator of Parker's Box, an art centre in Williamsburg (Brooklyn, New York). Returning to Catalonia, in 2001 she curated the exhibition 'Vostestaquí. Art Contemporani a Barcelona', at the Palau de la Virreina, and the Fundació 'la Caixa' Espai Montcada art centre. From 2002 to 2005, she was exhibition curator at the Sala Rekalde in Bilbao, and she was director of the Frankfurter Kunstverein since 2006.

A particularly outstanding initiative at the Frankfurter Kunstverein is the residency programme 'Deutsche Börse Residency Program', whose beneficiaries have included, amongst many more, such Spanish artists as Patricia Esquivias and Cova Macías. She also directed a research and exhibition project on the idea of the playground in art, whose first part was presented under the title of 'The Great Game to Come'. The outstanding exhibitions staged at the Frankfurter Kunstverein include those devoted to such artists as Wilhelm Sasnal, Gardar Eide Einarsson, Pensée Sauvage, Manon de Boer and Armando Andrade Tudela. Moreover, in 2005 she was the curator of the Cyprus Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennial, whilst for the last three years she has also been a member of the Carnegie International Advisory Board and of the International Association of Curators (IKT).

VENUES

- Frankfurter Kunstverein: June 7 – September 7, 2008
- MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo: September 19, 2008 – January 11, 2009

INFORMATION AND VISITS

Gallery staff provide assistance and information relating to the exhibition as well as the usual guided tours:

- These are held daily at 6pm
- Customised tours are available for groups subject to prior arrangement. Please telephone 986 113900/11.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Following the presentation in Frankfurter Kunstverein, the halls at MARCO's first floor hold the group show **'THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION. Art and tactical magic'**, as a result of a coproduction between both institutions.

'THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION' – a title borrowed from the political economist Karl Polanyi – is the phrase, which describes the promise of change that magic embodies. Transformation delineates what magic does: a transfer of power. The artists in the show stress this quality as the trait that can help us to understand the role of the producer – the artist – and the viewer as a participant in a ritual. 'Tactical magic', the subtitle of the show, means using magic as a methodology to reflect upon questions beyond the realm of the spiritual. The contemporary artistic interest in magic concerns the capacity to deal with events that belong to different logics and disciplines. Thereby we are taught how to deal with breakdowns of logic, and to find the potential in what is incoherent and impossible. Through a subject like magic, we gain a new perspective into the organization of social space, into the existence of grey zones between the rational and the irrational. In search of new ways of seeing and new channels for communication and cultural action, contemporary art production is conscious of the present ideological difficulties that deal with magic or the occult.

In recent years western civilisation has shown an increased interest in spirituality and in opportunities to achieve social change through transcendental forces. The current western culture is a bizarre hybrid of a rational basis, which originates in the era of Enlightenment, and approaches of spiritual madness. Dealing with reactionary forces, superstition, the occult, the obscure, magic, at the same time keeps possibilities alive for change and for promoting experimental attitudes.

'THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION' sets out to document a new interest that contemporary art production has taken in magic and the occult. The art works and projects presented in the exhibition are not about the 'spiritual'. Rather they show how magic can be employed as a methodology and a critical potential that challenges our views on society and notions of communication. In this way, artists use magic tactically, to explore mechanisms of how knowledge is transmitted between individuals and within collectives.

The works featured in **'THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION'** confront the spectator less with the visible but rather with the sensual and intuitive. The exhibition thus establishes a narrative of various possibilities for cultural analysis. Beside works of well-known artists such as Allen Ruppersberg and Mike Kelley, the show presents numerous works of younger artists, who have developed new works for this exhibition.

BY THE CURATOR

"Using magic as a materialist practice with a critical purpose sounds like a contradiction in terms, if not like the world turned upside down – because what could be more ethereal and fanciful than esoteric knowledge? But as we know magic changes the terms of engagement – so might it not, in combination with art, also be used to change its own terms; to open its own secret doors as well as some of those in the world?

Magic is the shadow trailing processes of enlightenment. That is, as a knowledge form it is not compromised by teleology or the myth of progress. It is not meant to make us arrive at a point in space and time that has been designated by utopian ideal standards for living; nor is it subordinated to economic calculations. One could argue that this kind of knowledge is paranoid, in the original sense of the term whose etymology is constructed of 'para' (next to) and 'nous' (reason). In this context this shouldn't be taken to mean the loss of sanity through the disappearance into an interior world, but literally an order where things are *next to reason* [...]

[...] It is made increasingly difficult to gain an interpretive distance to the world, both in terms of space and time. To approach the world through a reason-next-to-reason, then, might help us establish a gaze on this state of affairs; a gaze that may be oblique, and that surely is not disembodied and disinterested, but that will help us consider – or get a feeling for – the totality of this cultural predicament. In this slightly convoluted way – but contemporary culture is nothing if not convoluted – magic may turn out to be the best antidote to a positivist universe. It is, in its own strange way, a tough medicine; but perhaps that is the awakening that is called for when our emotional attitude has been reduced to a neutral core.

[...] We usually associate magic anthropologically, with knowledge forms of so-called primitive cultures. However our own doesn't hold back in magic procedures: it pays tribute to 'knowing' things by feeling them with the gut (...); or it establishes peculiar relations and exchanges between the properties of persons and things. Images appear as real beings and things become vital when they perform and 'appear as' persons. This is a kind of capitalist animism in which things are not just dead, represented labour, but processes of living forms. Anyone who has interacted with the robotic half-presences that populate the Internet economy will know what I am talking about.

With an appropriately comical expression, the philosopher Henri Bergson called this accelerated, modern condition 'topsy-turveydom'. The world is no less uprooted when things around us in this way begin to act on their own, making us hard pressed to tell for sure what is the other side and what is this side. In such a fluid modernity we need forms of critique that can go anywhere, and fast. With magic we can address what is literally deadly serious, if not tragic, about contemporary life, at the same time as it provides us the means to turn a trick or pull a bluff on the powers that be.

[...] Today the dialectics between nature and cultural reason has collapsed, because nature has been vanquished and economy has taken its place, which is what reason must now confront. And so magic does not seem more unreasonable than so many other things. In fact, exactly because its terrain is that of disembodied energies and uncontrolled intelligence it might serve as a starting point for re-addressing the desires and needs of persons, not things. With esoteric forms of knowledge we can inject opacity into exchanges of global information that are so rapid and flickering that they appear to be diaphanous. The question is, are those desires for real change and transformation, hybridization and métissage, so urgently felt in magic operations, necessarily anathema to processes of enlightenment?

This paradox embodies the way magic becomes tactical when employed as a knowledge form (to use the term developed by Aaron Gach and the Center for Tactical Magic). When we in this way cut magic free from its transcendental moorings of the 'after' and the 'beyond' and employ it in the here and now to navigate the grey zones between the rational and the irrational, it becomes an urgent address to the devices culture uses to reproduce itself.

[...] We usually take esoteric to mean something arcane and difficultly accessible that exists only for the initiated few. Knowledge that demands to be opened by way of secret codes. These codes you can learn, but then there is something more... you will have to believe too, in order to pronounce the codes convincingly; or you will even have to have been chosen to be one of the initiated few. However, examining the concept of the esoteric more closely, it describes something outside knowledge in the proper sense of that word: it is nobody's and it is everybody's since it deals with what cannot be known: death, emotional situations, what is beyond the limits of our body, what is culturally speaking out of place. In this case the esoteric is not something that implies a reduced number of hermetic access points, but is instead seen to open up a spectrum of accessibility. This is how magic can help us address the urgent questions of how to address and represent the social and the political in a post-social, post-political era."

Chus Martínez

Curator of the exhibition

[From the text 'An Index of Ideas Taken
From the Other Side: Magic as a Case Study',
in the catalogue of the exhibition.
Frankfurter Kunstverein/MARCO, 2008]

REQUEST FOR GRAPHIC MATERIAL

EXHIBITION

'THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION. Art and Tactical Magic'

GRAPHIC MATERIAL AVAILABLE TO THE PRESS:

CD including texts and photographs of the exhibition in different formats.

IF YOU WISH TO RECEIVE DOCUMENTATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND SEND IT BY E-MAIL, FAX OR MAIL POST TO:

MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporánea de Vigo

Rúa Príncipe 54
36202 Vigo (Pontevedra). Spain

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