

Ioana Nemes
Relics for the Afterfuture (Brown)
Jiri Svestka Berlin
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We live in an era at the end of time. The information age has brought knowledge to its knees, and sent history through a process of a de-constructions and disconnections that have shattered its near holy stability. What we have is no longer history but rather the fragments of such, cut off and fashioned to serve the new politics of information and development. The Afterfuture is a reference to a chronology that starts where this future ends and stops at the beginning of a new primitivism. It is a model of time presented as objects that allows us to unearth the past through the future, a method by which we might consider time as a spiraling helix that interlocks to give a structure to the passage of all ages. It is also an idea which speaks to the core human desire to substantiate a grand continuum of human life, one that can give us access to the timelessness of the "true" human soul (its culture and instinct) while assuring us of its continued persistence. As these questions reach towards the incomprehensible issues, in object form they appear to symbolize the markers that line that near sacred path into the depths of human identity.

Set in four chapters, Relics for the Afterfuture is a series of sculptural events, each of which has been assigned a color relevant to its conceptual local. Brown has been assigned to Romania, White to Greece, Red to America, and Black to Africa. This, the Romanian Brown chapter, begs the question: What has happened to the ritual potential of these traditional objects through their global contextualization as native European, yet inherently exotic folk craft? It is also interesting to consider the history of this transformation and the German experience and participation in this process. In the spiritually bereave age we live in, where do our exhausted Christendom and the persistent Pagan or folk musings of European culture unite to define clear communities, stimulate conflict and resolution on such debated social norms and behaviors across the continent and with in specific member states. What can still be considered traditional and how should we approach the traditional as an object? What is the true cost of loosing the markers of folk identity to globalization or mass cultural hegemony? What is the future of tradition and the traditional in the EU?

The objects included in this exhibition have been conceptualized by the artist Ioana Nemes and partly produced by masterful traditional craftsmen from all corners of Romania using techniques that are still preserved in its rural reaches. These techniques, which after Romania's entrance into the EU have largely begun to loose their once functional ritual role, have begun to be emptied of their essence as potent magical symbols. That is to say the folk functionality of such traditional objects has been replaced by the market potential of an exotic handicraft.

The material substance of Nemes Sculptures are subtle references to and critiques of western modernity; concrete, the main element in eastern block architecture was shunned after the 1989 revolution in Romania, but eventually accepted for its functionality and, when cast and struck with precision, was finally embraced by contemporary Romanian

Architects and the artist herself as a marker of refinement. Hailed as a miracle substance upon its invention in the mid nineteenth century, the development of synthetic resin shaped the course of western history. Sticking to a minimalist pallet of hues, the artist incorporates new advanced polymer resins in her work, to produce a massive, manufacturing look that instantly reminds us of the close interlinking of kitsch, neo-pop and mass cultures unsatisfiable hunger for "authenticity". Bronze as well as a wide array of natural materials such as wood, horsehair, sheepskin, horn, wool, and feathers, communicate forms and textures that speak to the basis of European cultural heritage and mythological identity.

The prototypes for these works are each carved by the artists out of clay, molded and cast. The motifs presented are those of abstracted traditional and shamanistic objects from various historical regions of Romanian such as Brasov, Vrancea, and Maramures as well as details from the traditional costumes of these regions including their decorative elements such as, tassels, strings, seams, knotting and weaving. These traditional shapes are transformed by the unusual material properties of their substance and the formal austerity of the artists' pallet. Grey tones, blacks, dark wooden hues and the natural pigmentations of hair and skin combine with ultra modern construction technique and materials that transform these shapes into hybridized organisms, their form blending recognizable, traditional, Romanian folkloric entities with objects of a darker, ultimately contemporary yet strikingly modern aesthetic.

Like Brancusi before her, Nemes celebrates the future through the primitive as a hyper stylized neo-primitive or post-primitive. This combination, which in the case of her masterful predecessor leads to the initiation of modernity in sculpture, is grounded in the facility of extreme minimalization and simplification of ancient form, which is used to unearth the substantial or essential semantic communication of the form itself.

The sculptures and paintings in this exhibition try to reconnect, organically and synthetically, the broken bonds between traditional objects and their sacred, ritualistic potential. It is a release of that wild and powerful energy which brings us back to the roots of European cultural identity, a tumultuous force that lies just beneath the surface of contemporary European aesthetic austerity and new formalism. It was in the rawness of Primitivism and the ultimate refinement of Futurism that Giacometti also discovered just such a contradiction strong enough to create the tension to bring his perfectly smooth, luxurious, surrealist forms to life. Objects which unite their traditional cultural identity and sacredness, that is to say the ritualistic potentiality or the power of an objects to nourish our society, our roots and our need for these roots, with a focused formulative or even calculative content and form, based on the material ideology of contemporary sculpture. This is of course a reflection of the action of our contemporary "object" and "information" society in sculpture, a merger of symbolic meanings that you can find in all of the most successful sculptural works of the past 5 years. Having pushed sculpture in this new direction, masterful works by artist like David Altmejd, Berlinda de Bruyckere, Wim Delvoy, etc, have, like Nemes' work, been able to merge temporal contexts by synthesizing objects that appear to come from a separate reality that can still manage to incorporate and heal the rather painful extremes of our increasingly dislocated sociological and personal identities.

Torn between the self-construction/deconstruction processes produced through the interaction of the "actual" and the "virtual", (as described by Gilles Deleuze) we have been able to reconstitute a contemporary form of ritual nourishment through art. This is nourishment for the "soul", which we need much more than food or water, in order to survive. It should be noted that these are Relics for (not from) the Afterfuture, a linguistic inference that places us a few steps before its arrival. This exhibition is therefore a marker of the coming rebirth of fading cultural identities, which have so far been unable to synthesize their past and present identities simultaneously, through the activity of contemporary art production, focused on the power of persistence and appearance of a timeless future.

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