

Investigations of a Dog

DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art

Inspired by Franz Kafka's eponymous 1922 short story, 'Investigations of a Dog' comprises a series of exhibitions produced by the Foundation of Arts for a Contemporary Europe (FACE), a newly founded collective of five European non-profit institutions. In a process resembling a game of 'Telephone', the respective curators drew from a pool of about 40 art works – to which they added and subtracted for various reasons – to interpret the narrative of a dog examining its own existence to the point of alienation. The show developed and changed as it travelled over the course of two years and five venues: from the inaugural show in autumn 2009 at Turin's Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo; to the Ellipse Foundation Contemporary Art Collection in Cascais, Portugal; La Maison Rouge, Paris; Magasin 3 Stockholm Konsthall; and finally the DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art in Athens.

While the inaugural exhibition in Turin was a broad examination of the perils of personal identity and isolation, the Athens edition is darker and more political – the Italian culture's comic-irony was lost in translation – evoking the inner workings of a neurotic brain. Curator Nadja Argyropoulou has employed the DESTE Foundation's labyrinthine, irregular rooms to map a mental construct in which the arrangements of works serve as mnemonic triggers for a pervasive sense of revolution. In the entryway, Bruce Nauman's inverted Untitled (Suspended Chair, Vertical III) (1987) is reflected in Jeff Koons's imitation-Mylar balloon, Moon (1994–2000), portraying both the inevitability of human cruelty and the possibility of escape through the fanciful rabbit hole of the reflective object. To the left of the entryway, Sigalit Landau's video Barbed Hula (2000), in which the artist mutilates herself, blocks passage to the exhibition spaces, forcing you to walk around it. In the next room Kimsooja's Bottari Truck (2005), laden with colourful bundles, which had third-world nomadic associations in previous incarnations of the show, becomes a vehicle for political refugees, parked in front of Artur Z' mijewski's 2009 film Democracies, a look at nationalist and other activist gatherings.

About this review

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By *Cathryn Drake*



[Back to the main site](#)

The shaky constructs of nationalism and its associated marginalization are highlighted across the room by David Hammons' African-American Flag (1990), hung next to Thomas Hirschhorn's deconstruction of Swiss identity, Spin Off (1998). At Magasin 3, the emphasis was on the powerlessness conferred by social identity, in a room that included African-American Flag alongside Kara Walker's mural depicting African-American racial stereotypes, Untitled (2005), and Maurizio Cattelan's Untitled (Gerard) (1999), a faceless, seemingly homeless person wrapped in a blanket, off in a corner. Either combination of these works suggests that paranoia is an essential condition of human survival.

The varying juxtapositions of art works in each successive exhibition of 'Investigations of a Dog' brought out diverse sensations and meanings, in a sort of meandering meta-metamorphosis. In fact, the show at La Maison Rouge was introduced with Roberto Cuoghi's portrait of collector Dakis Joannou (Megas Dakis, 2007) morphing into the mythological harpy, initiating a cogent 'game of gazes' focused on the collector as the anima in question. In all of the exhibitions, the outsider position embodied by Kafka's dog is compared with that of the artist, who uses an unorthodox language to scrutinize the world from a subversive stance. But just as the dog's quest for a single truth is an impossible one, the power and meaning of the artists' works is subject to the curatorial imperative, which determines where and how they are shown. This is the real beauty of the FACE collaboration: together the works from the various collections enrich and contaminate each other to form multiple readings rather than a hermetic single vision – thus the importance of community to us 'dogs', otherwise condemned to unintelligible whimpering.

Cathryn Drake

Frieze

3-4 Hardwick Street, London EC1R 4RB, 020 7833 7270