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Biennale Of Moving Images

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Centre d'Art Contemporain



Heather Phillipson, *Put the goat in the goat boat and serve it hot*, 2014, installation view

In 2014, the Centre d'Art Contemporain (CAC) relaunched the *Biennale of Moving Images* – founded by André Iten in 1985 – after a 7-year hiatus. Andrea Bellini, the director of the Centre d'Art Contemporain and artistic director of the Biennale, worked with Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Yann Chateigné to revive the 13th edition of the Geneva-based biennial dedicated to video art. All 22 works displayed – either installed on one of four floors or screened in the centre's permanent 'Cinema Dynamo' – were commissioned and produced by the CAC in collaboration with, among others, the Fonds d'art contemporain de la Ville de Genève (FMAC), the Fonds cantonal d'art contemporain (FCAC), and HEAD – Geneva.

Aside from a focus on production over curating – a distinction made by Bellini in conversation – there was no overarching theme to this show of video works by an international group of young artists. Such a laissez-faire curatorial approach nonetheless allowed for a level of poetry and abstraction to emerge, particularly given the show's eschewing of overtly political positions. Even Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli and Federico Lodoli's documentary video *Fragment 53, Liberian Notes* (2014) – an uncompromising series of interviews with former Liberian warlords, produced together with Federica Schiavo Gallery – felt devoid of political judgment. Its power lay in its presentation of the normality of massacre from the perspective of its perpetrators. The interviews – interspersed with landscape shots – present war as an inevitable facet of history, seen here from the perspective of a country where the

machete and not the drone is still the weapon of choice.

In its anthropological approach, *Fragment 53, Liberian Notes* found parallels with videos by Jeremy Shaw (*Quickeners*, 2014) and Tom Huett (*Playing Fields*, 2014). Shaw's fictional documentary portrays a post-apocalyptic race of 'quantum humans' who become afflicted with a syndrome returning them to the ritualistic behavioural patterns of their predecessors. In Tom Huett's installation, two screens follow the predominantly male phenomena of body building and car customization. The screens show YouTube footage and collaged Instagram images with bodybuilder actors and online avatars interacting within these subcultures, as Huett portrays the curiously vain preoccupations which underpin them.

Other videos on display were more esoteric in tone. Pierre, the narrator of Ed Atkins's *Happy Birthday!!!* (2014) recounts strings of numbers such as dates and mathematical formulae interspersed with audio from Elvis's *Always on my Mind* (1972). The video highlights the tendency for humans to read meaning even into banal data. Arvo Leo's *Fish Plane, Heart Clock* (2014) portrayed a kind of dreamscape video-collaging the artworks of Canadian Inuit artist Pudlo Pudlat (1916–92) – who started making work in his forties after being encouraged by a local social arts programme – along with the landscape in which he lived. Here, the audience can see a reversal of the tendency outlined in Atkins's video: nature pervades humanity's inner world in the form of naïve images of fish, seascapes and hunting scenes, admixed with barren landscapes.

A parallel performance programme featured performances by Isabel Lewis – who ran a symposium and nightly bar – Alexandra Bachzetsis, Andrew Hardwidge and Mai-Thu Perret, underlining a sensation that for all its deliberate lack of curatorial direction, the *Biennale of Moving Images* was about interactions: the reclaiming of physical, neural responses to stimuli – both social and personal – as worthy of aesthetic consideration.

—by Mike Watson

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About this review



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