

FORT GANSEVOORT

ARTFORUM

ARTFORUM Magazine

December 2018

Claire Tancons 10 Best of 2018

Clair Tancons



CLAIRE TANCONS

CLAIRE TANCONS IS A CURATOR AND SCHOLAR INVESTED IN THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF THE POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS OF PRODUCTION AND EXHIBITION. SHE RECENTLY COCURATED THE TOUT-MONDE FESTIVAL IN MIAMI AND IS CURRENTLY A COCURATOR OF SHARJAH BIENNIAL 14.

1

TUẤN ANDREW NGUYỄN (FACTORY CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTRE, HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM; CURATED BY ZOE BUTT) "Empty Forest," Nguyễn's expansive presentation at Factory Contemporary Arts Center, was a feast of forms fleshed out in neoritualistic masks and of phantasmic images funneled through cinematic dream machines. Costumes worn in the two films on view became stand-alone sculptures in a gallery space turned spirit forest for a chilling tale of animal killings and the trade in derivative products imbued with magical properties. The second part of a much larger project, Nguyễn's exhibition furthered the artist's ongoing exploration of Asian-subcontinental magical economies around the medicinal and spiritual logic of animal life.



1. Tuấn Andrew Nguyễn, *All of Our Victims Are to Become Our Gods*, 2017, cement, metal, composite with custom pedestal, 78 x 29 1/4 x 30 1/4".
2. Ming Wong, *Bloody Marys—Song of the South Seas*, 2018, still from the 10-minute 35-second color HD-video component of a mixed-media installation additionally comprising photographs, record covers, annotated music scores, and film ephemera. From the "4th Dhaka Art Summit."
3. Mohamed Bourouissa, *Horse Day*, 2015, two-channel HD video, color, sound, 13 minutes 39 seconds. 4. Junior carnival masqueraders, St. James, Trinidad and Tobago, February 4, 2018. Photo: Sean Drakes/Alamy.

2

4TH DHAKA ART SUMMIT (BANGLADESH SHILPAKALA ACADEMY, DHAKA; CURATED BY DIANA CAMPBELL BETANCOURT) Unabashed in its ambition—and, at times, ruefully messy and ruthlessly heady—the Dhaka Art Summit was bound to satisfy to excess, with a dense program of talks, workshops, and performances foregrounded by seven individually curated exhibitions. Among those, Devika Singh's Buckminster Fuller-inspired "Planetary Planning" resonated most, with its retrospective and prospective outlook on "worlding" in and from South Asia. Many works stood out for their minutiae—including sculptures and models (Novera Ahmed, Muzharul Islam), works on paper (Desmond Lazarro), and serial presentations of photographs (Ayesha Sultana, Hera Büyüktaşçıyan)—yet the overall success of the presentation depended on the sophisticated coherence imparted by the central position and circular disposition of Zarina Hashmi's *The Ten Thousand Things III*, 2016.

4

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CARNIVAL (QUEEN'S PARK SAVANNAH, PORT-OF-SPAIN, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO) Might Peter Minshall's return to the Savannah stage in 2016 after a hiatus of more than a decade have heralded a new golden age of the art of *mas*, the costumed component of the ritual, festival, and art form that is the carnival of the Americas? This year, the veteran mas man, known for his Pop-inflected imaginary and tongue-in-cheek savvy, presented a hobby-horse Pegasus whose butterfly-like wings floated Queen B (Beyoncé) in all her rapturous—and decidedly carnival-ready—majesty. Elsewhere at carnival, mini mas bands born of teeming mas camps (combination workshops, rehearsal studios, and informal art schools) held their ground in the face of the made-in-China costumes of the so-called bikini-and-beads megabands. With Che Lovelace's Mud and 3canal's Jouvé bands, mas bands such as Robert Young's Vulgar Fraction, Alan Vaughan's Moko Somokov (a holdover from Touch D Sky), and Etienne Charles's We the People, as well as the annual presentation by Tony Hall's Lordstreet Theatre (all captured by the roving eyes of photographers Maria Nunes, Abigail Hadeed, and Sean Drakes), carnival takes pride of place as the Greatest Show on Earth.



3

MOHAMED BOUROUISSA (MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS; CURATED BY ODILE BURLURAUX AND JESSICA CASTEX) Bourouissa's 2017 exhibition at Philadelphia's Barnes Foundation, "Urban Riders," was a homecoming of sorts, following his engagement, a few years earlier, with a community of horseback riders in the city. In 2014, as the culmination of a nearly yearlong self-organized residency in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Strawberry Mansion, the French Algerian artist staged an all-day "horse-tuning" event, modeled on that other local pastime of car racing—taking "horsepower" literally in the process. For his first solo exhibition in Paris, Bourouissa presented a selection of mutant sculptures derived from this event, all geared toward the show's centerpiece, the twenty-two-minute film *Horse Day*, 2015. A powerful exploration of the conflicting enactments of black masculinity against the signifyin'-savvy filmic performance/mash-up of horseback riding and car racing, it also took on—or rather, down—pop-culture representations of (black) cowboys.



FORT GANSEVOORT



5. Alex Gustrom, *Mossville* (work-in-progress), HD video, color, sound, running time TBD. From "Fossil Free Fest." 6. Rodrigue Crawford constructing a Solitary Garden, Andy Street, Los Angeles. 7. Okwui Okpokwasili, *Sitting on a Man's Head*, 2018. Performance view, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, June 5, 2018. Photo: Timo Ohler. 8. Avot Ertzku, *Make America Panther Again*, 2018, billboard design for For Freedoms. 9. View of "PÔTOPRENS: The Urban Artists of Port-au-Prince," 2018, Pioneer Works, Brooklyn, NY. From top: Jean Claude Saintilus, *Vjeji Mari* (Virgin Mary), 2015; Jean Claude Saintilus, *Lapen dechese* (Skinned Rabbit), 2017. Photo: Dan Bradica. 10. Flooding and landslide damage, Idukki, Kerala, India, August 9, 2019. Photo: Xinhua/Alamy.

5
FOSSIL FREE FEST (JOAN MITCHELL CENTER AND OTHER VENUES, NEW ORLEANS; ORGANIZED BY IMANI JACQUELINE BROWN WITH MONIQUE VERDIN AND RAQUEL DE ANDA) Initiated at the margins of, and as a counterweight to, the New Orleans Tricentennial, Fossil Free Fest aimed to prefigure a petroleum-free future, beginning with an examination of an arts-funding ecosystem too often polluted by oil money. In storytelling circles, songs, rants, prayers, lectures, and free lunches attended by New Orleans artists such as Jackie Sumell, Quintron and Miss Pussycat, Moose Jackson, and Mondo Bizarro—along with special guests Dread Scott and Not an Alternative, among others—FFF articulated a sense of purpose with remarkable clarity of vision, making demands to which we all must hold ourselves accountable.



6. Rodrigue Crawford constructing a Solitary Garden, Andy Street, Los Angeles.

7
OKWUI OKPOKWASILII, SITTING ON A MAN'S HEAD (LOTH BERLIN BIENNALE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART) Billed as "an unfolding score for a collective utterance," Okpokwasili's *Sitting on a Man's Head* found inspiration in twentieth-century protests carried out by women in pre-independence Nigeria to shame colonial officials. In transposing these demonstrations to the nineteenth-century former factory building of the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, as part of the Tenth Berlin Biennale, Okpokwasili opened a contemplative space for clearing grievances in dance through the motion of the body and mind and the movement of people. She staged the performance in a light makeshift structure (designed by Peter Born) with translucent walls of floating plastic loosely stretched across a delicate wooden frame. This understated display—a metaphor for the ethereal realm of conscience—enacted the idea that a quiet provocation such as "sitting on a man's head" would only release its affective power in such an unearthly place.



6
THE GARRISON Starting with a launch in New York and a maiden voyage to Philadelphia, the Garrison took to the road for a three-month cross-country tour to spread the gospel of prison abolition. A van retrofitted as a pop-up classroom, the Garrison is the latest offspring of, and mobile mouthpiece for, New Orleans-based artist Jackie Sumell's ongoing Solitary Gardens initiative—a multifaceted platform, centered around garden beds the size of solitary-confinement cells, for fostering awareness about, and changes to, that inhumane penal practice. The Garrison delivers a rallying call for an alliance among art, activism, and intersecting social-justice causes, ultimately designed to face the founding American sin of slavery at the root of it all.



8
FOR FREEDOMS Launched by artists Hank Willis Thomas and Eric Gottesman in 2016, the antipartisan super-PAC For Freedoms aims to motivate political engagement and civic dialogue through a nationwide program of exhibitions, lectures, and installations, most notably in the form of billboards. Chris Myers's exhibition "Let the Mermaids Flirt with Me" at Fort Gansevoort, a space adjacent to, and opened concurrently with, the new For Freedoms storefront space in New York's Meatpacking District, underscored the initiative's global ambitions, which reach beyond provincial parties and politics—that is, far beyond the national borders of the campaign maps pinned to the walls of the super-PAC's de facto headquarters—and stretch instead across the international waters sewn into Myers's appliqué fabric. For Freedoms opens onto a larger world history of displacement and dispossession, migration and relocation, and invites its audience to deepen their historical understanding of what it may actually mean to be American.



9
"PÔTOPRENS: THE URBAN ARTISTS OF PORT-AU-PRINCE" (PIONEER WORKS, NEW YORK; CURATED BY LEAH GORDON AND EDOUARD DUVAL-CARRIÉ) Grand-Rue and its assemblage artists, Rivière-Froide and its sculptors, Bel Air and its vodou flag artists, Pacot and its photographers: At Pioneer Works, artists from the distinctive neighborhoods of Haiti's capital find a space to translate their work and, in cocurators Gordon and Duval-Carié, ideal messengers for their multiple talents and multifarious visions. As the creole title "PÔTOPRENS" suggests, the exhibition strives to speak in the artistic vernacular of Port-au-Prince, down to the re-creation of one of the city's iconic barbershops. The complexity and indecipherability of the artists' works—including photographs of gingerbread houses by Roberto Stephenson, Myriam Constant's sequined flags, and the sculptural combines by André Eugène and Frantz Jacques (aka Guyodo)—may simultaneously appeal to, and serve as protection from, an uninitiated audience.

10
KOCHI-MUZIRIS BIENNALE: "POSSIBILITIES FOR A NON-ALIENATED LIFE" (VARIOUS VENUES, KOCHI, INDIA; CURATED BY ANITA DUBE) I look forward to visiting "Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life," curated by artist Dube and opening this month. Proposing a "politics of friendship" to counteract the alienation spawned by networked culture, the biennial is already delivering on its promise. In the aftermath of the devastating floods in Kerala last August, the Kochi Biennale Foundation created the relief fund Art Rises for Kerala (ARK). In a world of dematerialized life and abstract discourse, Dube's words ring true and her actions speak volumes. □

