

Frieze: 'Come, Come, Come of Age' : Tarik Kiswanson', by Violaine Boutet De Monvel, 3rd April 2018

Reviews /

'Come, Come, Come of Age': Tarik Kiswanson



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3 APR 2018

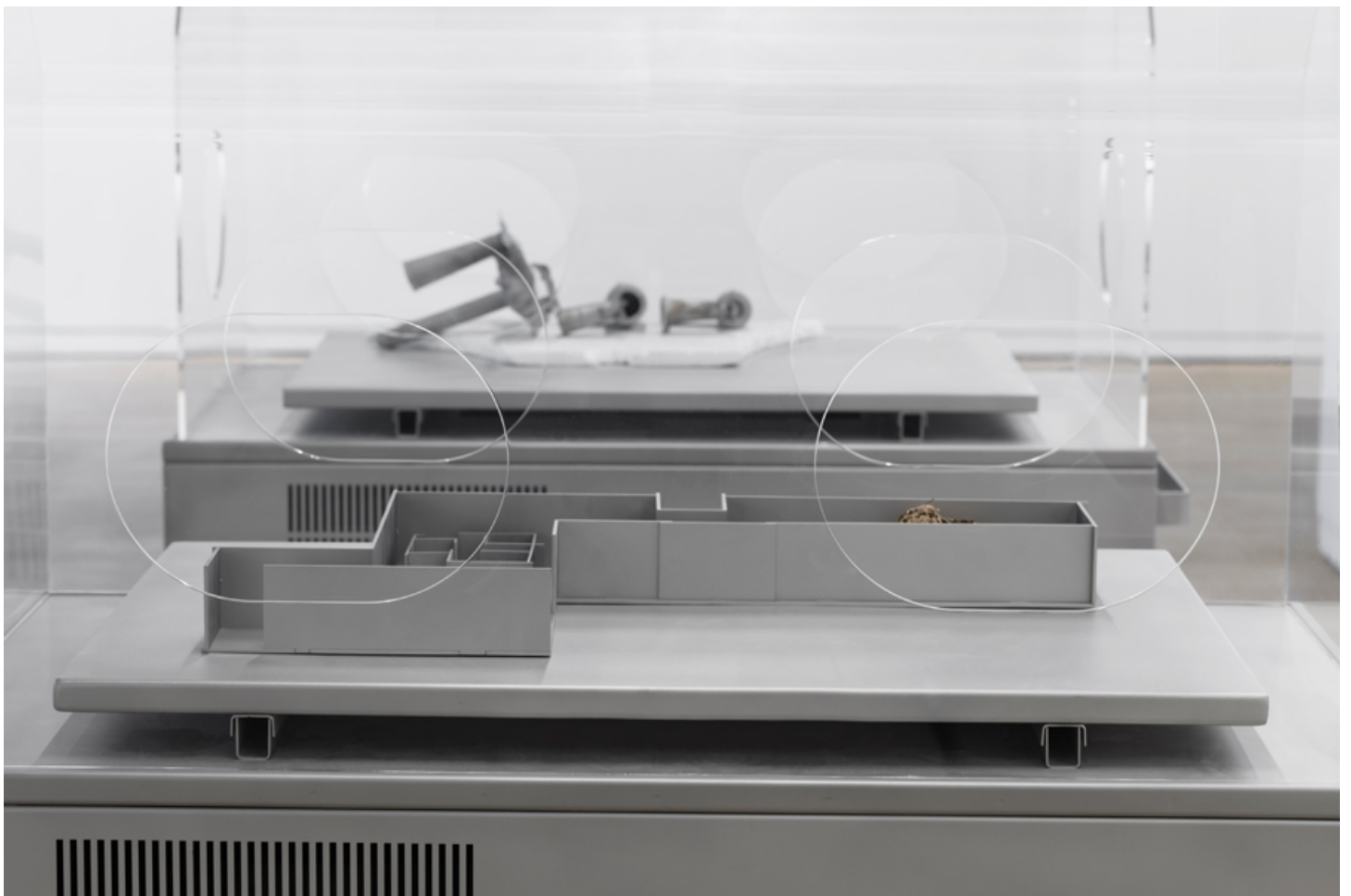
At Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris, the artist's dialogue with an 11-year-old forms the basis for a work exploring exile and migration



'It flushed you out against your will and projected you on bright screens,' I heard a resounding child's voice recite upon entering Tarik Kiswanson's exhibition 'Come, Come, Come of Age' at the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard. Conceived as a sonic-sculptural installation, this show grew out of an unexpected collaboration. While casting children for an upcoming performance at Lafayette Anticipations, the Swedish-Palestinian artist and writer, who lives between Paris and Amman, met Vadim, an 11-year-old Romanian, French and American boy. Because they both shared a conflicting sense of self due to their multiple linguistic and cultural affiliations, Kiswanson decided

to capture what he refers to as his and Vadim's 'hybrid voices'. Numerous recording sessions resulted in the sound installation *Vadim* (all works 2018).

Taking the loose form of a rather sibylline interview in English, *Vadim* poetically touches upon a number of existential questions: how does it feel to be born, to breath, to see, to move? And implied within them all, what can it possibly mean to come of age for someone whose identity is forever splintered by a history of exile and migration? As a first-generation immigrant whose parents fled Jerusalem before he was born, Kiswanson openly talks about the crushing sensation of belonging nowhere. 'What can the individual do when he feels filiation with neither one culture nor the other, in my case Arabic and European: he sits down, thinks about those worlds, and starts making a world of his own,' he told me.



Tarik Kiswanson, 'Come, Come, Come of Age', 2018, installation view, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

The artist's poetic dialogue with a child runs on a 25-minute-long loop from four speakers that are embedded within the walls. Constantly moving from one wall to another across the entire exhibition space, their haunting and sometimes overlapping voices pull the viewer in different directions. This sense of disorientation and discordance finds a solid echo in five stainless steel sculptures, titled 'Mother Forms'. They represent hyperrealistic, yet non-functional incubators. Three of the sculptures are paired with empty or soldered-shut filing cabinets. Together, they

evoke clinical and bureaucratic definitions of life: from the moment we are born, we start generating a trail of administrative papers that follows us until we die. The neonatal units aren't large enough to contain, let alone nurture, the imposing metallic filing cabinets. The tense spectacle of an impossible fusion unfolds from one piece to the next, each displaying a different configuration. For example, two of the filing cabinets precariously lie on top and over the edge of their respective incubators – one threatening to fall heavily on the floor, the other to break the apparatus' fragile, transparent lid.



Tarik Kiswanson, 'Come, Come, Come of Age', 2018, installation view, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris

Édouard Glissant's concept of identity as constructed in relation rather than isolation, put forth in his 1990 *Poetics of Relation*, is crucial to understanding Kiswanson's work. Like his own

personhood, the artist's aesthetic relies on cultural encounters, interferences and, at times, violent clashes. His world is one of juxtaposition rather than fusion. 'It's multiplying, becoming something more,' we hear Kiswanson say in the sound installation. In this light, the puzzling view of filing cabinets seemingly forcing themselves into various incubators offers a powerful metaphor for how building identity through numerous dislocations may be experienced.

Standing alone in the back of the gallery, another sculpture further illustrates the artist's notion of hybridity. Birth represents a life-sized young boy. It is modelled after an old wooden mannequin, which the artist found in a flea market in London. After bringing the mannequin back to Paris, he dismantled it, sent the parts to different foundries to be cast in bronze, and re-assembled it. While the resulting figure looks like it could have come out of Kiswanson's incubators, it finally gives a composite body to his and Vadim's hybrid voices.

Tarik Kiswanson, 'Come, Come, Come of Age' <<https://www.fondation-entreprise-ricard.com/en>> runs at Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris until 21 April.

Main image: Tarik Kiswanson, 'Come, Come, Come of Age', 2018, installation view, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris. Courtesy: the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, Paris.

everybody else. It's about living with the sensation of belonging nowhere—a rootless identity that constantly travels between different conditions and contexts. It is an identity that is born outside the idea of land and nation, and for me it's not just about the political but also about how the world has transformed. Through the great flux of immigration and globalization that we have been experiencing since the 1980s, this has become the story of many. We are merging, surpassing physical borders to become something different. Being from many different cultures is very rich, but it can also be very violent, and very hard. There's a longing, a longing to belong, that is behind my work. I believe a lot of people can relate to that.



Come, Come, Come of Age, 2018, Fondation Ricard. Photo by Aurélien Mole

You were initially a writer; what led to your transition to visual art?

I simply wanted to use another language. Transitioning from word to form is for me going from one language to another, using other signs and communicating through other means. The core of my work lies in the connections between things, one informs the other. It has always been hard for me to imagine things as separated entities when developing my work, in my opinion there is only one way of existing: in communion and connection.

A lot of my writing in the beginning was about memory and memory loss. Some of my first works were sculptures that I produced under the title What We Remembered. These were abstract works, held together with melted silver. When my family left Jerusalem, they took everything with them, from the cabinets and chairs to the tables and the silverware. These objects followed my family's trajectory through exile—from Jerusalem to North Africa to Jordan and finally Sweden where Kiswani became Kiswanson in a brand new immigration office. I have used that same silverware to assemble my metal works for many years. The history of my family is in the seams of my works. It is often in the seams that interesting things happen—a space of tension where things connect, overlap, merge and fertilize.



Come, Come, Come of Age, 2018, Fondation Ricard. Photo by Aurélien Mole

How autobiographical is your work?

Using my family's silverware is a very personal thing, but I think that it's something that everyone can really relate to, almost using the past to create a future—but

a future that is quite shaky and unstable. My sculptures from that period were very thin, very precarious, they shivered when you walked next to them. This idea of instability has run through a lot of my works, even thinking about ways of seeing. Many of my artworks consider vision, and my poetry speaks about ideas of perception, and whether you can believe what you see, and seeing differently with other eyes.

“Throughout my life I have explored the question of the hybrid identity and being “in-between” through writing and sculpture”

I believe any body of work is autobiographical, it is impossible not to be. From the moment we decide to create we undoubtedly enter a space of personal questioning, and we want to give a form to the ideas we develop. But making and presenting art is also about reaching out, exteriorizing the internal and taking a position. Throughout my life I have explored the question of the hybrid identity and being “in-between” through writing and sculpture. I believe these are subjects many can relate to. For me, it has always been about that—using myself and my own trajectory to speak about something much larger and vaster than myself.



The Other Side of the Lip, 2018, Palais de Tokyo / Asia Culture Center.
Photo by Kim Zinho

What has been your experience of beginning to work with performers, and particularly with young performers, of directing them and collaborating together?

It's been important to have performers who enable me to return to the age that was so significant for me—eleven was an age of self-revelation for me—and it's an interesting age to work with as they are in a period when they are constantly observing everything around them and questioning what they see and experience in their lives. It's completely extroverted, which is ideal to understand how they see the world, and their optimism and energy. Their closeness and openness with each other is also something that I found highly fascinating. Working with eleven-years-olds in Paris at Lafayette Foundation, I very quickly noticed how at ease they were with each other, fearless of body contact and closeness. Much of these things we lose as we get older.

I intentionally work with kids who have never done this before, regular school kids but with a drive to explore. Most of them come from multiple, hybrid cultural backgrounds. My writing is something that is often developed in their presence and through the dialogues we have. I've been in Gwangju for almost a month working with twin eleven-year-old boys, and we produced the costumes here.



As Deep As I Could Remember, As Far As I Could See, 2018, Lafayette Anticipations. Photo by Martin Argyroglo

What have you learned while working in Asia for this period leading up to the Gwangju Biennale? How has it changed or influenced the work that you've produced?

It's been an intense period, but I have enjoyed it very much. English is very rarely spoken. When working on my new performance piece "The other side of the lip" here in Gwangju with the twin boys Seyong and Guyong, I wanted to be confronted with just that: how do you develop a new work with local children without speaking their language? It ended up being a highly intimate collaboration where instead of talking we would use our bodies to communicate. Though we had a translator at times, most things were expressed through movement, which meant that I had to be more physically active in the way that I was rehearsing with them.

I'm also showing a bronze sculpture "Departed" (2018) that I produced at a remote foundry two hours from Seoul in the middle of the jungle. The sculpture has a hybrid body, the head of a French boy mannequin from the early 1950s attached to the body of a child "Made in Korea" window display mannequin. It was very challenging as the foundry is quite rural, but the human contact I had was rich in emotion and kindness. My one-and-a-half-month period here is also full of funny anecdotes!

That feeling of constantly being at the edge of total incomprehension is interesting. I sometimes had the impression I had lost my capacity to speak, which in return meant I wrote immensely during the hours we weren't rehearsing. The best thing about the experience is taking the risk and not knowing if it will work out. New works can be produced anywhere, it doesn't have to be shipped. These works encompass many invisible stories of my time here. They are made and rooted in the region in which they are shown, which is what I like the most about this whole experience.

