ALMINE RECH

Ali Cherri in 'Corps et âmes'

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With around a hundred works from the Pinault Collection, the Bourse de Commerce is presenting the exhibition ‘Corps et âmes’, an exploration of the representation of the body in contemporary art. From Auguste Rodin to Duane Hanson, Georg Baselitz to Ana Mendieta, David Hammons to Marlene Dumas, Arthur Jafa to Ali Cherri, some forty artists explore the links between body and mind through painting, sculpture, photography, video and drawing.

"In the matrix-like curves of the Bourse de Commerce, echoing the round of bodies inhabiting the vast painted panorama encircling the building's glass dome, the exhibition 'Corps et âmes / Bodies and Souls' explores the importance of the body in contemporary thought through works by around forty artists from the Pinault Collection. Freed from any mimetic straitjacket, the body, whether photographed, drawn, sculpted, filmed or painted, never ceases to reinvent itself, giving art an essential organicity that enables it, like an umbilical cord, to take the pulse of the human body and soul. Art seizes on the energies and vital flows of thought and inner life, inviting us to engage in a humanist experience of otherness. Forms are metamorphosed, returning to figuration or freeing themselves from it in order to grasp, retain and allow the soul and consciousness to emerge. The aim is no longer to embody forms, but to capture forces and make visible what is buried and invisible, to illuminate the shadows. In the Rotonde, Artur Jafa's *Love is the Message, the Message is Death* transforms the space into a sounding board for the music and commitment of African-American icons Martin Luther King Jr, Jimi Hendrix, Barack Obama and Beyoncé, giving them universal appeal. His films, which oscillate between life and death, violence and transcendence, unfold in a visual melody inspired by gospel, jazz and black music, forming a flow of images and sounds that give rhythm to the entire exhibition, in a choreography in which the figurative bodies bear witness to the links that art maintains with life. In keeping with the exhibition, a rich musical programme makes 'Corps et âmes' a polyphonic event.
— Emma Lavigne, General Director of the Collection, General Curator

"The Passage de la Bourse de Commerce is home to works by Ali Cherri, a Lebanese artist living in France. In his youth, he was marked by the civil war in Lebanon, and in particular by the spoliations, thefts and trafficking of works of art that wars engender. Using the twenty-four display cases, the museum's most important device for presenting objects, his work is also inspired by cinema and its twenty-four images per second: his sculptures are thought of as ghostly flashes in a liminal space between life and death, between the past and the present, inviting us to reflect on the age-old manipulation of cultural artefacts." Emma Lavigne

"'Then came the cinema to bring bodies back to life', writes Ali Cherri. The history of cinema is a history of the dead surviving in images. Cinema has always been about ghosts, whether for technical reasons (light projection, cross-fading), genealogical reasons (influences of phantasmagoria and the magic lantern), or above all poetic reasons (the characters on the screen die and are resurrected with each projection). By recording and preserving the traces of bodies, cinema thus becomes a means of bringing the dead back to life through the screen, awakening the souls of inert bodies [1]. In his film *Somniculus* (2017) shot in Paris, Ali Cherri seized on this spectral dimension of film by replacing the actors' bodies with works of art and objects filmed in empty museums. Reversing the recurrent analogy between museums and cemeteries, especially in the postcolonial context (*Les statues meurent aussi*, by Alain Resnais, Chris Marker and Ghislain Cloquet, 1953), Ali Cherri prefers to see these objects as temporarily asleep - Latin for light sleep, somniculus - and the museum as a dormitory [2]. Continuing this project, sculptures and artefacts arranged in the manner of miniature *tableaux vivants* slumber or awaken in each of the showcases in the Bourse de Commerce. [...] Combining archaeological finds with his own creations, he creates chimeras. 'The grafts I make in my series of sculptures are a form of solidarity between broken, fragmented and abused bodies, which, by joining together, create a community,' he says. These objects, resurrected or survivors of tumultuous pasts, scraps that museums have not deemed worthy of preserving, bear witness to countless exchanges and peregrinations: eyes torn from Egyptian sarcophagi, counterfeits when they become fashionable in European collections, fake curiosities and copies from Antiquity merge, as distant civilisations cohabit and take root in each other".
— Jean&Marie Gallais

Curated by Jean-Marie Gallais, Curator, Pinault Collection

1 — Project statement by Ali Cherri (August 2024).
2 — This image is also used in Mati Diop's film *Dahomey* (2024), which gives a voice to one of the twenty-six works of art returned by France to Benin. Jean Cocteau, in the voiceover of *Blood of a Poet* (1932), uses the same metaphor in 1930, but is wary of it: "Isn't it crazy to wake up statues from their secular slumber?" (11'25").