ALMINE RECH

Roma Amor
Biennale of Bonifacio #2

May 10 — Nov 2, 2024 | Bonifacio, Corsica, France

Ali Cherri is part of *Roma Amor*, Biennale of Bonifacio #2 at Bonifacio, Corsica, France.

De Renava – The Bonifacio Biennale presents its second edition from May 10 to November 2, 2024, celebrating contemporary art in the heart of an ancient city and one of the most beautiful natural reserves in the Mediterranean. The event continues its exploration of contemporary questions, practices and technologies, bringing together monumental works alongside conceptual proposals in a spirit of engagement, curiosity and innovation. De Renava takes place throughout the citadel with the former Montlaur barracks as its epicenter, an exceptional space of 5,000 m2 previously unused for more than 30 years.

Entitled *Roma Amor*, the exhibition of this second edition looks to the Mediterranean past to grasp the mysterious prophecy at work in the mechanism of the fall of empires. It particularly highlights the dialectical interplay between decadence and emancipation, vandalism and heroism, ruin and foundation. The stages that always accompany the inevitable questioning of each civilization.

The works are chosen for their equivocal beauty, as well as for their commitment, not limited to a historical reading of the theme, but which rather approaches “the empire” as an entity of political, moral or cultural domination to be re-examined. The exhibition invites to travel through time in the heart of Bonifacio’s heritage. A city which was the target of numerous powers (Pisan, Genoese, Aragonese, etc.) and even the temporary home of an emperor: Napoleon Bonaparte.

Roma Amor tells of the nostalgia for lost paradises, the emancipation of thought, the slow conquest of freedom and the cyclical nature of the construction of an ideal which already carries within it the seeds of its destruction.

For this second edition, the Biennale De Renava invites 18 international artists to work alongside emerging island creators: SHIRIN NESHAT, LAURENT GRASSO, SOPHIA AL MARIA, ALI CHERRI, ALEXANDRE BAVARD, BLANCA LI, ENERI, JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT, SALOMÉ CHATRIOT, YOUSSEF NABIL, VALÉRIE GIOVANNI, HIWA K, ESMERALDA KOSMATOPOULOS, SERGIO ROGER, KEHINDE WILEY MADGALENA JETELOVÀ, AES+F, BILL VIOLA.

THE FALL OF EMPIRES

Everything that rises must fall, everything that blooms must wither. The cyclical theory of history holds that a fall is an inevitable stage in the existence of an empire, according to the pattern: foundation - apogee - decline - fall - new foundation. Borrowing from the Roman Empire (27 BC - 476 AD), arguably the most emblematic and commented upon example of collapse in Western history, the exhibition retraces the political and ideological debacles that have punctuated our common imagination.

Re-examining the cyclical and fatalistic nature of the process of imperial decline, Roma Amor draws on ancient mythologies, the past and the contemporary world to reveal the paradoxical nature of History's fateful march. Whatever the often innumerable factors of weakening, the causes and consequences accepted in the birth and death of empires are nourished by an infinite and reciprocal interplay, bearing witness to the complexity and relativity of events. In its title - Roma Amor - and in its form - a reversible itinerary that can be followed in either direction - the exhibition embodies the ambivalence of history, combining destruction and creation.

Inevitably, whether we're talking about political empire or the empire of morals, these are bound to degenerate as they pass through the same stigmas. These characteristics highlight the incessant changes and struggles, while underlining the ultimate permanence of structures of power, domination and inequality. Chaos, a source of little apparent but necessary profit, upsets established power, but always leads to a return to order. In this way, each of the three parts of the exhibition seeks to explore in greater depth the dialectics arising from the various inseparable stages in the fall of empires: decadence - emancipation; vandalism - heroism; and ruin - foundation.

This «mirror» or «palindrome» tour (a word that can be read indifferently from left to right or right to left) aims to reflect this ambiguous reading of history, right down to the visitor's experience. The chosen works, most of whose creators have achieved international renown, testify to the plurality of contemporary media: multimedia installation, painting, video, sculpture, photography, dance, etc.; while the various heritage buildings hosting the pavilions, specially renovated and «reactivated» for the Biennale, reawaken Bonifacio's imperial past.

The long agony of the Western Roman Empire, which survived less than a century after its division from the Eastern Roman Empire (395 AD), ended under the blows of barbarian invasions (sacks of Rome in 410 and 455 AD), profound economic decline, internal rivalries, bad government and the deposition of Emperor Romulus Augustus (476 AD). The dislocation of Eternal Rome, the resounding echo of which traditionally begins the Middle Ages, provides us with a remarkable empirical framework in that it summons up a myriad of factors in imperial decline, which we then find again through numerous historical examples, right up to the present day.

Based on the model of the fall of the Roman Empire, this «palindrome» exhibition offers visitors a choice of two routes, both ultimately leading to the same conclusion: programmed collapse. The first route looks at the fall «from the inside», observing an imperial decline that begins with the decadence or moral emancipation of society, and ends, thanks to the action of rebellious or resistant figures, in a state of ruin conducive to rebirth. Going in the opposite direction, the second course deals with the fall «from without», leading from ruin, the original chaos, to liberating decadence through the encounter with new forms of society and culture.