

Passages

Sophie Calle, Hamza Halloubi, Stéphanie Saadé & Imogen Stidworthy



Stéphanie Saadé, Re-Enactment LB/ Chandelier with Plum Blossom Energy Saving Lamp, 2012, old chandelier, plum blossom energy saving lamp.

A passage implies transition. It involves a movement, a displacement from one point to another, from one state to another. It also implies time; a present point towards a past event. However, the past is not the point of focus, being incorporated into a movement towards the present and even hinting out to something beyond.

While considering the implications of *Passages* in the exhibition, we remember Walter Benjamin's unfinished *Passagenwerk*, written between 1927 and 1940, in which he describes the covered arcades of 19th Century Paris. Benjamin's work was a collection of reflections. What is an arcade? In its classic sense, the term denotes a pedestrian passage or gallery, open at both ends and roofed in glass and iron, typically linking two parallel streets and consisting of two facing rows of shops and other commercial establishments - restaurants, cafés, hairdressers, etc. In pondering the *passages*, Benjamin sought at the same time to detect the past, understand the present and find a bridge to the future.

Passages brings together works by Sophie Calle, Hamza Halloubi, Stéphanie Saadé and Imogen Stidworthy, which focus on different moments at the two ends of the arcade, as well as the elapsing time between. Different forms of passage are linked, more concrete ones relating to places, situations and narratives, and abstract ones such as the passage of time, which in turn leaves tangible marks. The exhibition focuses on the moment when change happens. *Passages* is about de-composing this flow, as the artist lays bare its mechanism, or finds anchor points in it, to fix a moment. Perhaps these are attempts to resist the elapsing of time, or to constitute a different past.

Sophie Calle's (France, 1953) work touches the presence of a narrative by the absence of a protagonist. Since the late 1970's Sophie Calle has been active as a photographer, combining text, image and conceptual installations. Her work amounts to a systematic laying bare of reality, whether it be her own or other people's, with a limited portion left to chance. Absence of others is a central theme in her work. However Calle's own existence plays an important role in her works. The documentary manner in which she presents her work suggests a high degree of factualness. In 'Passages' three works from the series *Last Seen (1991)*, *The Blind (1986)* and *The Hotel*, will be shown. For the series *The Hotel (Hotel # 24, 1981)*, Calle posed as a chambermaid in a Venice pension to investigate the lives of strangers through their possessions and habits. In the guests' absence, she photographed opened luggage, laundry, contents of bathrooms, waste-paper baskets, diaries, letters, and so on. Noting details gleaned from these objects, she reconstitutes their owners' lives by adding her own story to them.

Hamza Halloubi's (Morocco, 1982) poetic video works manoeuvre between documentary and fiction. Guided by the artist-author's voice, all of his works maintain a philosophical aspect that refers both to theoretical knowledge and to personal memories. In *Letter From Tangier (2013)* Hamza Halloubi explores with his camera the dusty remains of the once famous Gran Teatro Cervantes of Tangier. It is a film about the journey of images, the difficulty of working, and the boundary between fiction and documentary. *Letter From Tangier* analyses the failure of creating a fiction film when reality is more complex, to be reduced to a documentary work.

Stéphanie Saadé's (Lebanon, 1983) works take as a departure point the moment when one becomes *estranged* from his surroundings. This estrangement allows to perceive objects which in the past would have blended in. In the series *Re-Enactment* she reproduces objects fabricated by others, appropriating a *foreign* logic, and establishing a physical archive of disregarded objects. Created for practical purposes, they would disappear if the artist wouldn't reproduce them. By this act, these ephemeral manifestations of logic are given a form of eternity. In Stéphanie Saadé's *Re-Enactment LB / Chandelier with Plum Blossom Energy Saving Lamp*, an arrangement seen by the artist in a traditional Lebanese house, is reproduced. The work consists of an old Murano glass chandelier, now broken and serving merely as a support for another lamp. The second lamp, cheap and economic, provides the light now. Its electric cable lies along a branch of the old chandelier, marking its obsolescence and the passing of time. A conflicting relationship is established between the lights as each element pushes in a different direction. The chandelier pushes towards a past splendour which it mimics, while the cheap bulb lights the perspective of a dark future.

Imogen Stidworthy's (UK, 1963) work *Soon Deok (2012-14)* reconfigures elements from the larger installation *Speaking in the Voices of Different Gods (Busan Biennale 2012)*, and centres on a story in which formative moments in personal and historical events are intertwined. The installation includes a shamanic straw doll, used to cure diseases, and a 3D laser-scan navigation of the object. The technological mapping of the object appears to reveal its hidden interior, yet what we see is the only the skin of the object, viewed from a virtual inside. This scan echoes the situation in Korea where shamanism and other ancient beliefs are a powerful reference alongside the more contemporary belief-systems of hyper-capitalism and technological progress. Shamans act as mediums, channelling the voices of different gods to speak through them directly to advise their clients. In a video sequence the shaman *Soon Deok* remembers traumatic events related to her involvement in pro-democracy protests during the military dictatorship of the 1980's, which led to her losing her voice. The shock of this temporary muteness during her political awakening, prompted an intense reassessment of her personal and spiritual formation.