

ENGLISH

GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA ROMA SAO PAULO PARIS DUBAI

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SISLEJ XHAFI

BRIDE ON SOIL

from Sunday 18 September to Sunday 14 May 2023

Galleria Continua is pleased to present the third exhibition of Sislej Xhafa at GALLERIA CONTINUA/Les Moulins, celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the gallery.

For his new solo exhibition *bride on soil*, Sislej Xhafa presents an entirely new series of works, engaging into a poetic dialogue with the imposing architectural space of the paper factory where GALLERIA CONTINUA / Les Moulins has been located since 2007.

Sislej Xhafa's works question the place of the individual in the society, shining a light on the strategies of resistance that are put in place as a survival mechanism in our everyday life. The works diffuse a sense of poetry, an irony that pervades the objects put on display suggesting ways to cope with the world and contemporary issues of society. Xhafa plays with irony and utopia, exploring with a minimal language, and through a wide variety of media, themes that range from war to migration, from love to death.

His poetry stems from objects that are recovered from his surroundings and his environment. Born in 1970 in Pejë, Kosovo, Xhafa lived in London and Italy before moving to New York. Although his artistic experience has been marked by important institutional milestones - his work has been presented at the Venice Biennale in 1999, 2005, 2013 and 2017, and at Manifesta in 2000 and 2022 - Sislej Xhafa's practice is marked by daily life, by the streets from which most of his

inspiration comes from, in his nomadic existence as a self-proclaimed stray dog. It is for this reason that every single one of his works bears a clear trace of his passage in the streets of New York, Kosovo, or Italy as a young immigrant in the 1990s.

The show *bride on soil* should similarly be interpreted as a journey, which leads the visitor through the rooms of this ancient factory transformed into an exhibition space. As we enter the building, we are first faced with *under one thumb*, two second-hand shoes, one for men and one for women, a possible metaphor for the two halves of a married couple, connected by guitar strings poetically suggesting harmony in the relationship. The installation resonates with the bridal component introduced by the artist in the title.

Walking around the first wall, we are then confronted with *SISTER VALLEY*, the pivotal installation of the exhibition. An impressive gathering of quiet radiators welcomes us to the main room of the space, inviting us to observe a contemplative silence towards them, a solemn (and rather absurd) respect for these inanimate objects. As we wander around the broken heaters, we become aware of the rust that covers them, scars caused by time. We notice the fresh flowers hidden under each of them, a gentle gesture of remembrance, a hint on the delicacy and fragility of nature.

The imprint of time is also a main aspect in Sislej Xhafa's *Concetto in Exile* series:

huge tarpaulins that once covered the cargo of a truck, traveling for thousands of kilometers under the sun, the wind, the rain. They have since interrupted their journey: framed and hanged on a wall, they are now a monument to displacement as a survival mechanism, a monument sculpted and eroded by the elements.

Leaving *SISTER VALLEY*, the rest of the space presents other works, everyday objects that are assembled creating new unexpected paths. A solitary framed picture stands on a wreath holder: it is the portrait of a nameless priest, recovered by the artist on the streets of New York and titled *AMORE*. The priest has peppers coming out of his mouth, red and hot like a lover's passion; he is turned into an object of veneration, set on a stand used in funerals and focal element of a monthly ritual in which the peppers are removed and replaced. The pepper is at the same time a natural element that connects us to the earth, and serves as a prelude for *IRON QUILT*, where the soil evoked in the title makes itself evident. The work is comprised of a tool linked to farming and agriculture: a horse collar, attached to the animal when it pulls the plough. In the middle of the collar, a mirror reflects the image of the viewer, engaging the visitor and questioning their position, as well as our shared common experience as humans, born from the same land despite the distance that can separate our birthplaces. Man and its conflictual relationship with urban reality is portrayed in *Red*: a canvas covered with cement trying to suffocate an organic, human component, which sprouts regardless in the form of hair from underneath the surface. *Broken dream* plays on the symbolism of the basketball, a quintessential American icon, putting it on display destroyed and unusable, filled with coal.

In *Sugar sky*, an element of childhood is transformed into a dangerous hybrid: a jumping rope where the string has been replaced with barbed wire, introducing images of war and violence into the playfulness of the original object. *BLUE TONGUE* also introduces a peculiar dialogue and assemblage between a military helmet and a pair of women's tights, opening a poetic reflection on love and the humanity of a soldier.

Countervailing the feminine elements shown or alluded to in some of the works in the exhibition, the artist presents

us with *blue shelter*, a long blue hose with a prominent element of masculinity emerging from one end. The artist's irony transpires and spreads from the entirety of his practice. We notice it when we are confronted with works such as *blue shelter* or *Toothpick*, a small toothpick made out of terracotta that lays in the center of an oversized, almost empty pedestal. The aptly named work would seem to be a reminder (not without irony) to appreciate small details of daily life.

Sislej Xhafa has exhibited widely, including recently at Manifesta 14, Prishtina, Kosovo; MOCAM Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland; GAMEC Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Bergamo, Italy (2022); bleta, permanent public work, Tirana, Albania (2021); MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy (2020); Art Basel UNLIMITED, Basel, Switzerland (2019); MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy; National Fine Arts Museum of Havana, Cuba (2018); ZAC, Palermo, Italy (2017); MAXXI Museum, Rome, Italy (2016); François Pinault Foundation, Palazzo Grassi, Venice, Italy; Hardau City Park, Y, Zurich, Switzerland; MADRE Museum of Contemporary Art Donna Regina, Napoli, Italy; The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, Toronto, Canada (2011); PRISM Misericordia, West Hollywood, California, USA; MAXXI Spazio, Rome, Italy; Röda Sten, Göteborg, Sweden (2010), MART Rovereto Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Italy; PAC Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy; DEPO, Istanbul, Turkey; MADRE Museum of Contemporary Art Donna Regina, Napoli, Italy (2009); Havana Biennial, Cuba; Modern Art Oxford, UK; Biennale of Gwangju, South Korea; MOCAD Museum of Contemporary Art of Detroit, USA; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, Germany (2008); Istanbul Museum Of Modern Art, Turkey; Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Sweden; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2007); PERFORMA05, performance biennial, New York, USA (2005); I Bienal de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, Spain; The Renaissance Society, Chicago, USA; Museum of Contemporary Art, St. Louis, USA; Tate Modern, London, UK; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands; North Dakota Museum of Art, Grand Forks, USA; Fundació 'la Caixa' la Sala Montcada, Barcelona, Spain; Haifa Museum of Art, Israel (2004), Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2003), Gwangju Biennial, South Korea (2002); Istanbul Biennial, Turkey; S.M.A.K., Gent, Belgium; PS1, New York, USA (2001); Manifesta III, Ljubljana, Slovenia; S.M.A.K., Gent, Belgium (2000); Fondazione Olivetti, Rome, Italy (2000) and the Venice Biennale (1997, 1999, 2005, 2013, 2017).