

THE LIMA COLLECTION: CINEMA

September 28, 2016, curated by Sacha Bronwasser.

Art historian, writer and curator Sacha Bronwasser composed tonight's programme THE LIMA COLLECTION: CINEMA. Bronwasser writes, talks and shows art without nonsense. In her book *Zo werken wij*, a compilation of interviews with contemporary Dutch artists, Bronwasser writes in a fresh tone of voice about the artist's practice and the coming into being of an artwork without being mythical about it.

This night, Bronwasser explored the power of storytelling in media art - the use of narrative and plot - qualities originally subscribed to cinema. What happens when cinema and media art meet, and how do they influence each other? Bronwasser explores these questions through the selected works, and she talked with the artists Raul Marroquín and Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács, who were present for a Q&A.

The screening started with the film *Airport '83* (1983) by artist Raul Marroquin. This work is heavily based on montage and made of found footage combined with footage of an airport maquette by the artist himself. It is about an airport and its air traffic controllers that try to communicate with each other as well as the pilots of two warplanes that seem to be in trouble. The voices are dubbed by non-professional actors and the somewhat amateuristic maquette that stitches the story together make for a comic display of the serious men trying to communicate. The film ends with a disastrous crash of a plane... in shaving cream.

Bronwasser asks Marroquín why this film was, and still is, so popular. Marroquin laughs, 'you tell me!' he replied. According to Bronwasser this work from 1983 was not the type of film that was being made, and therefore it stood out. At the time, in Europe, the climate in the field of media art was overall quite serious and the works were more performative: there were events taking place in front of the camera. At the time in the Netherlands this was something that would take place at the de Appel. However, in the Americas Marroquin explains, the use of narrative was much more common. Whether this was because of Hollywood or the Mexican film industry, he does not know. But *Airport '83* stood out from this serious media art climate not only because it contained a narrative, but also because it is humoristic. Of course other makers, like General Idea for example, made work that used humor as well. Maybe that is what made it survive all these years. Marroquín thinks the most important fact was the development of a new media art generation in which the role of the narrative and storytelling becomes more and more important. This aspect of storytelling is something that plays an important role in his work up till today, working with contemporary media like mobile media, streaming media and virtual reality.

The theme of romance also brings along narrative, and is a favourite in (classic Hollywood) cinema. The work *Der Spiegel* (2007) by Keren Cytter was screened. A Shakespearean drama compressed in a short media art work about a woman in her forties who is desperately looking for love. Set in a stripped Berlin apartment, the woman is confronted with the mirror image of her aged self. She is being rejected by her crush and has no eyes for the man who loves her. The six actors speak their lines in an up-tempo and staccato manner. There is unity of time and place but sometimes the actors step out of the story in a Brechtian way: they recite staged directions, refer to the subtitles, or switch language. This meta-commentary on the medium is constantly mixed with the storyline and makes for an interesting form of drama, cinema, media art and the unmasking of these media.

Up next another work with the classic romantic story that is at the heart of cinema; the story of boy meets girl. In this case, the protagonists of the film were the two artists themselves, Persijn Broersen and Margit Lukács. In the film *Crossing the Rainbow Bridge* (2003) they made a split screen media work, one for each character. Both panels have different settings and backgrounds that sometimes connect and sometimes contrast each other. Both the boy and the girl talk to the camera/audience about their dreams and ideas and their relationship. The atmosphere of the film is very romantic, on the edge of kitsch, but they manage to make their feelings tangible.

Thirteen years later Broersen and Lukács are still living and working together. Looking back on this work (and themselves) is a little bit funny, they say. So many things have changed, and so many things have not. Bronwasser asks them how this fairytale came about. Lukács explains that the work was first of all a reaction to the art world at the time. The artists working in video at the time were making work about 'cups of coffee'. When the duo travelled to China to teach young art students, they noticed they were making stories about grand subjects like love. This triggered them the idea to make work that showed emotion and romantic sentiments, but at the same time do it from a distance in order to reflect on it.

Broersen adds that it was a relief to see these Chinese students at work. Things have been changing so quickly there, it seemed Modernism and Postmodernism had not really taken place there, and so there was a lack of the typical Western cynical distance in their work. Also, there was not such a big gap between 'high' culture and 'low' culture which gave them a strong sense of freedom which they enjoyed very much. When they saw a work by the artist Yang Fudong at the Shanghai biennale they were inspired to copy that work - since the Chinese are fond of copying, they did not shy away from copying them - and they did so with *Crossing the Rainbow Bridge* as a result (which, in the end, became totally different).

Bronwasser asks the duo how they came to make the decision to be in the film themselves. Lukács explains a work with such great sentiments needs to be authentic, something had to be at risk, and showing themselves this vulnerable was the only way. At the premiere they were so embarrassed they would hide from the audience. However, Broersen continues, they did construct something like a fictional character for themselves; they would take aspects of their lives and from each other and swap them (for example, the story about him always doing the groceries in a certain way, is in real life the other way around).

The duo continued to work on numerous projects that played with cinematic conventions and they went to Hollywood - the mecca of storytelling - to work there. What is it that they are looking for? Lukács says they want to deconstruct the storytelling mechanisms, and are looking for the 'ornament' of the story. When you repeat or reenact a romantic scene over and over again, like they did in the work they made in Hollywood, it becomes like a pattern or a structure and the plot becomes unnecessary. This is also how they experience life and media. Broersen explains they focus much more on the background of the film; looking back this already was the case in *Crossing the Rainbow Bridge*, but this focus became even more prominent in their work later on. This abstract way of looking unveils the pattern of the narrative. Actually, when focussing on the background there is also a narrative going on. It just evolves much slower.

The evening continued with two films by Nicolas Provost, *Induction* (2006) and *The Invader and the Origin of the World* (2011). Provost moves freely between genres, from autonomous artworks to a recently acclaimed feature film. Storytelling and drama is at the heart of all Provost's works, and even in his most abstract works you will find a notion of a narrative arch. In the first film, *Induction*, we see a family drama, which could as well be a nightmare, switching from the supernatural to the real. After this the first scene (the prologue) of the feature film *The Invader* was screened. In this single scene the entire story is captured; the arrival of a stranger in paradise, the promise of sex, two worlds colliding. The scene has been quite controversial and was criticised for many different things; being too dramatic, too immoral, too racist, too visionary.. The public is left to decide for itself.

After the Provost films Ră di Martino's *Petite Histoire des plateaux abandonnés* (2012) was screened. The Italian artist is interested in the influence of cinema on our personal lives. In this work Di Martino researches this by visiting abandoned film sets in Morocco. We see images of desert landscapes with the ruins of these commercial enterprises, forgotten and deserted. These abandoned film sets curiously still echo their stories and trigger the imagination to continue the story. Young, local people 'perform' in these sets; a young guy is breakdancing, a child recites a scene from the original film while a man is playing the flute. In a way it is a film in a film: the original inscribed in our collective memory and the second one is a new story on the ruins of the old.

To finish the evening, Bronwasser showed two films that ask a classic storytelling question 'How to turn failure into fiction or how to turn failure into success?' When looking at Oscar winning films they are in the end all about this story of success, Bronwasser argues. The work by the German artist Jeanne Faust, *Interview* (2002) was shown, which is a work not from the LIMA collection. The film could be said to be a failed interview with the famous actor Lou Castel (known for his role in *Beware of a Holy Whore* (1971), directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder). The interview is absurd in all its ways; the two are disliking each other, she is asking weird questions, he is not answering them or is asking questions in return. The dynamic between the two is so weird it becomes painful and funny at the same time.

As the cherry on the cake the work by Kaweh Modiri, *Mijn Inbreker en Ik* (2011) was screened. This young filmmaker recently released his first feature film and due to his success he could not be present for a Q&A, Bronwasser explains. The film was the artist's graduation work from the Rietveld Academy. The storyline of the film is half fiction, half documentary- or actually what suits the concept better would be something like 'directed reality'. Modiri himself is the protagonist of his own film and he tells the story though a voice-over. It is the story of a burglary in his house and his laptop gets stolen. He retrieves it but all his documents are erased, except for some film footage of his burglar who apparently had been filming himself, in a very narcissistic (but funny) way. Modiri decides his burglar, who is a young Moroccan guy, will become the protagonist of his film. A series of scenes follow where he finds his burglar and he sets him up to be part of scenes that he thinks are real life situations, but Modiri is carefully directing them. The burglar does not know he is the leading 'actor' in Modiri's film which makes for humorous scenes/situations. The creative and clever use of reality by Modiri for his initial fiction film makes a great example of a failure turned into a success.

Report by Hilde van den Dobbelsteen