



Loan Nguyen, *Neige*, 2008, tirage jet d'encre, 120x160 cm, de la série *Météo et phénomènes naturels*, 2007-en cours

## EXTRAVAGANZA

Galerie du Crochetan, Monthey, 29.11.13 – 29.03.14

Curators : Julia Hountou et Ariane Pollet

Exhibition organized by NEAR, on invitation of the Crochetan



## EXTRAVAGANZA – INFORMATION

Theme	The staged body in contemporary photography
Artists	Anoush Abrar (1976, CH) & Aimée Hoving (1978, NL ; lives in CH) Cécile Hesse (1977, FR) & Gaël Romier (1974, FR) Zoé Jobin (1987, CH) Alban Kakulya (1971, CH) Laura Keller (1977, CH) Brigitte Lustenberger (1969, CH) Loan Nguyen (1977, CH, FR) Nicolas Righetti (1967, CH) Thomas Rousset (1984, FR ; lives in CH) Fabian Unternährer (1981, CH)
Curators	Julia Hountou & Ariane Pollet, historians of art
Organization	A proposition by NEAR, swiss association for contemporary photography on invitation of the Crochetan Theater, Monthey
Location	Galerie du Crochetan, rue du Théâtre 6, 1870 Monthey
Dates	Opening on Friday, 29 November, 2013, 7 PM Exhibition from 29 November, 2013 to 29 March, 2014
Opening hours	Open on Monday to Friday, 9 AM – 12 PM, 2 PM – 6 PM,
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Medias	Corinne Currat, contact for medias at NEAR, <a href="mailto:press@near.li">press@near.li</a> , +41 78 639 60 60 Livia Berno, responsible for communication, Théâtre du Crochetan, <a href="mailto:livia.berno@monthey.ch">livia.berno@monthey.ch</a> , +41 24 475 79 14
Catalogue	A catalogue co-edited by NEAR and the Crochetan is published on this occasion.
Partners	The exhibition : Collection of BCV, Lausanne ; Femina ; Laleh June Galerie, Bâle ; NEAR, Lausanne ; PhotoRotation, Geneva ; Théâtre du Crochetan, Monthey. The catalogue : Fondation de Famille Sandoz, Lausanne ; Loterie Romande, Valais ; Service de la culture du Canton du Valais, Sion ; Service culturel de la Ville de Monthey.



## EXTRAVAGANZA

There are many similarities between photography and theatre, in aspects ranging from staging, creating characters and sets to a delight in storytelling. This theatrical dimension can be found across the discipline's various fields and affects fine art, fashion and documentary images alike.

*Extravaganza* alludes to parody and whimsical spectacle, and brings together photographs that create worlds and portray bizarre universes. Everyday life becomes theatre here, gestures are dramatised and bodies staged to give rhythm to the narrative. In the varying degrees to which they prepare their images – representation or recreation – these artists, like the theatre, reveal the fact that reality and imagination are inextricably linked.

In an environment conditioned by social challenges, each relationship forms part of a vast symbolic game, sometimes to the point of becoming an actual performance environment. The photographic image captures these interactions, uses a lens to set them at a distance and invites us to smile at them. Like the theatrical arts, photography plays with its viewers, confronting them with mysteries and uncertainties. The image arranged in this way adds an element of anxiety to aesthetic pleasure by encouraging us to question it: is this real or fake? Was it taken from life or subtly constructed? To put it another way, it prompts us to ask a vital question: where is reality, pretence or even the realm of possibility?

## STAGED REALITY

Here it is not about creating a universe; the photographers capture the social stage, the theatre of everyday life. The timbre underlying these photographs is relevant to “theatre” in every sense of the word. The situations photographed here tend, whether spontaneously or otherwise, to resolve themselves into “scenes” in which the protagonists seem to be searching for their roles and places. Daily life is treated like a production with scenery, actors and an audience.

Highly topically, Nicolas Righetti (1967, CH) hunts down megalomania in its most spectacular forms. *Love Me Turkmenistan* invites us to plunge into the delirious power of a dictator \* who plays with his people as if they were figurines.

The hazards of travel forced Alban Kakulya (1971, CH) to spend some time using a compact camera. As a result, the grain and lighting in his photos of the *Super Cholitas* wrestling competitions in La Paz endow this folk tradition and tourist attraction with a heroic, mythic air.

In the series *Pour une lutte, avec toi* [To Wrestle With You], Laura Keller (1977, CH) turned her attention to Swiss traditions: two young men face to face, bare-handed, engaged in close combat wrestling. The post-production retouches are intended to take the scenes out of the competition context and move them towards a more dreamlike world.

Zoe Jobin (1987, CH) sets off *In Pursuit of Marilyn / A la poursuite de Marilyn*. This quest for a myth puts her in touch with people and places haunted by the Hollywood legend.

\* Saparmurat Niyozov, President for Life of Turkmenistan, died in December 2006 leaving behind him evidence of his omnipresence. The despot's paternalistic madness seems to have been permanently imprinted on the memory of this central Asian country.

## STAGED GESTURES (IMMOBILE)

Here, the productions are staged for the image. They consist of working out subtle performance environments in the course of shooting with just a few accessories and mannerist lighting. Bodies, in their posture, movements and appearances, are part of the composition of these staged spaces/images. Composed as tableaux, these photographs are as evocative as paintings.

Like a tableau vivant, *Was bisher geschah* [Previously On...] by the artist Brigitte Lustenberger (1969, CH) plays with both its images and the actors invited into a series on the family. Interlinked by minute details – a gesture, a look, a simple juxtaposition – the characters seem to have been allocated an age-determined role. As in a combinatorial game, however, there is an infinite number of possible associations. Could that be his son, or a nephew? Or maybe it's a neighbour? The questions mount up but we never find answers.

In *Météo* [Weather], Loan Nguyen (1977, CH, FR) runs the gamut of meteorological phenomena poetically and humorously. As tableaux, her compositions are arranged around all kinds of objects, which are brought alive by a gesture.

Cécile Hesse (1977, FR) and Gaël Romier (1974, FR) enquire into our relationship with the things we idolise or abandon, and are not afraid to hijack them; in doing so, they reveal to us an off-beat everyday life. They create minutely detailed, elaborate domestic settings which overturn our habits and subvert conventions.

## THE FABRIC OF THE HUMAN BODY

These photographs are intended as performance spaces, populated with dreamlike figures and comical settings. They immerse us in strange worlds, close to being a sham, an artifice. The visible finish is an integral part of the procedure. Made-up, metamorphosed, the body becomes the ideal "location" for the show.

Fabian Unternährer (1981, CH) makes light of gaps and shifts by repeating derisory gestures. He enjoys misrepresenting the protagonists of his scenes, creating joyously outlandish or faux-naïve atmospheres. If his burlesque photographs are reminiscent of the antics of the famous Mr Bean, they also inspire us to reflect on our society, its absurdities and distortions.

Thomas Rousset (1984, FR) swings between reality and fantasy; his memories of a rural existence are mingled with phantasms to create disturbingly bizarre worlds (*Uyor, Prabe rians*). Within the agrarian world, he brings a playful yet strange dimension to the natives and their environment; they appear anachronistic, like imaginary characters, sprung from ancient tales.

Anoush Abrar (1976, CH) and Aimée Hoving (1978, NL) tackle the traditional subject of the woman flower in *Royal Blue Vanda*. The sophistication of these voluptuous and unreal creatures is reminiscent of refined and luxurious fashion photography. Aiming to create and play with illusion, they have found an ideal means of expression in the world of dreams and glamour. Their fantastical productions consist more of preparing images, constructing them, than of snatching them in a fortuitous or improvised way. A visible finish is vital to their approach, which asserts itself through an absolute mastery of artifice.

Text: Julia Hountou and Ariane Pollet, September 2013.