

Sislej Xhafa

shadow of curls

11 November — 23 December 2017

Private View: Friday 10 November, 6-9pm

Artist Talk: Saturday 11 November, 4pm

Straightforward is Nothing., Sislej Xhafa in conversation with Daniel Schreiber, art critic and author

Blain|Southern

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin



shouting in the wind, 2017, Courtesy the artist and Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern presents *shadow of curls*, Sislej Xhafa's first exhibition in Berlin.

At the core of Xhafa's practice are the identity politics that surround the legal status of his country of origin, Kosovo, as well as broader ideas of power, politics, immigration and social and economic mobility. Many of these themes are explored in his pavilion this year at the 57th Venice Biennale, representing the Republic of Kosovo.

In *shadow of curls*, Xhafa works with a variety of materials associated with different types of migration, as well as a range of quotidian objects that have been re-appropriated, altered or rendered useless. Employing a conceptual mode, he draws upon the history of the readymade to ironic, humorous and subversive effect.

At first glance, an olive tree next to the entrance looks out of place amid artworks. Yet attached to its trunk, a tag reads 'dont touch me', drawing on ideas of ownership and privacy, while alluding to the history of the olive tree as a symbol of peace, or the tree as witness to history.

In the corner of the space sits a large checked plastic bag, an object so common that it is almost synonymous with human movement. The open bag partially reveals a crystal chandelier, hinting at the hope of a new life, or perhaps a sense of suffocation.

Hanging alongside one another, slightly away from the wall, are large canvases painted uniformly white and each partially covered in clear polythene. Closer inspection reveals barbed wire on the wall, a menacing barrier to another space mostly concealed by the pristine paintings. For Xhafa, the clean, perfect surface masks a darker, grim reality.

In contrast, a monochromatic black painting hangs opposite. The matt surface subtly broken by the word 'Chicago' painted in black gloss onto the canvas, which has been tipped on its side. This almost illegible reference is an example of the visual poetry common in Xhafa's work. Avoiding direct metaphor, the work references multi-layered definitions of violence.

Xhafa's readymades are household objects, a garden hose, a refrigerator, garbage bags, mattress and a sun shade; his use of concrete has equally domestic connotations of home building, permanence and belonging, yet paradoxically of entrapment and brutal economics.

shadow of curls creates a space where familiar objects are transformed into charged, ambiguous artworks, inviting visitors to participate in conversations about specific moments in history or current affairs, or universal questions about human freedom.

lost and found, the artist's pavilion representing the Republic of Kosovo at the Venice Biennale, is on view until 26 November 2017.

Notes to Editors

About the artist

Sislej Xhafa (b.1970 Peja, Kosovo) is known for works that could be described as 'actions' or conceptual strategies which challenge cultural stereotypes, preconceived prejudices and institutional structures. Often exploring the modes through which contemporary society functions, he investigates social, economic and political realities to ultimately critique consumerism and its driving mechanisms.

In 1997, before Albania was officially represented with a pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Sislej presented himself as the 'Clandestine Pavilion' at the Venice Biennale. He wandered around the gardens of the Biennale kicking a football, dressed as a member of the national Albanian team, carrying a small Albanian flag and a recorder that broadcast an Italy-Albania football match. One critic described how: 'It's a politics of interruption, upsetting the configuration of forces determining what is visible and what is not, what forms of speech are understood as discourse and which are only perceptible as noise, who is designated as a speaking subject and who is merely spoken to'. He went on to officially represent Albania at the Venice Biennale in the 2005 Albanian Pavilion.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Infermeria*, ZAC (Zona Arti Contemporanee), Zisa, Palermo, IT (2017); *Fireworks in My Closet*, Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, IT (2016); *BENVENUTO! SISLEJ XHAFI*, MAXXI Museum, Rome, IT (2016); *asymmetric desir*, Blain|Southern London, UK (2013); *Unpoetic Bride*, Galleria Continua, Le Moulin, FR (2012); *Still Untitled*, MADRE Museum of Contemporary Art Donna Regina, Napoli, IT (2011).

Recent group shows include: *From Me to Us: The City without Borders*, Rome, Palazzo Quirinale, (2017), The Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary, HU (2016); *Par tibi, Roma, nihil*, Nomas Foundation, Rome, IT (2016); *Creating Common Good*, Kunst Haus Wien, Vienna, AT (2015); *LA SOTTILE LINEA DEL TEMPO*, Fondazione Museo Miniscalchi-Erizzo, Verona, IT (2015); *Borderline: Collection Exhibition II*, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art Kanazawa, Kanazawa, JP (2013); *Vice Versa*, Italian Pavilion of the 55th Venice Biennale, curated by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, IT (2013); *Sconfinamenti*, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, Rocca Albornoz, Spoleto Festival of 2 Worlds, Spoleto, IT (2013); *Tell Me Whom You Haunt: Marcel Duchamp and the Contemporary Readymade*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2013); *The World Belongs to You*, François Pinault Foundation, Palazzo Grassi, IT (2011).

About Blain|Southern

Blain|Southern is a contemporary art gallery based in London and Berlin. The gallery represents an international roster of contemporary artists and is the world-wide representative of The Estate of Lynn Chadwick. The gallery's recent exhibitions include Jake & Dinos Chapman, Michael Simpson, Bernar Venet, Mat Collishaw, Jonas Burgert, Amy Feldman, Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Nasan Tur, Chiharu Shiota and the critically acclaimed group show, *Revolt of the Sage*.

Blain|Southern
Potsdamer Straße 77-87 (Mercator Höfe)
10785 Berlin

Tuesday to Saturday: 11am - 6pm

+49 (0)30 6449 31510
blainsouthern.com

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Julia Niebuhr at Blain|Southern Berlin or Laura Callendar at Blain|Southern London

T: +49 (0)30 64493 1510
M: +49 (0)15 22264 5959
E: julia@blainsouthern.com

T: +44 (0)20 7493 4492
M: +44 (0)79 3904 9731
E: laura@blainsouthern.com