

CHRISTODOULOS PANAYIOTOU IM3

Review by Valérie Knoll

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“Act I: The Departure,” as this show was titled, brought together four recent works by Cypriot artist Christodoulos Panayiotou under the aegis of the Lausanne art festival *Les Urbaines*. Inspired by anthropology, Panayiotou often casts himself in the role of a scientist doing field studies, in order to shed light on the manifestations and myths of “cultural performances” such as rituals and festivals. In the silent color video *Untitled, 2008*, a palimpsest of shots of various firework displays form an undifferentiated spectacle. Fireworks—a popular allegory for the *theatrum mundi* ever since the Baroque—imply a variety of cultural and historical metaphors and frequently appear in Panayiotou’s oeuvre as a motif. Much like Freud’s model of memory as a “mystic writing pad,” on which traces of previous inscriptions are preserved as illegible impressions, this work captures the visibility of explosions that have long since faded away, revealing a profound melancholy.

Seen together with the work *Guysgocrazy, 2007*, a looped double-channel projection, the fireworks of *Untitled* also refer to the sexual and orgiastic as a form of pop-culture symbolism (one that was used in Hollywood films as a recognized code for sexual climax, in a manner unobjectionable to censors). Appropriately, *Guysgocrazy* is a Czech production company for porno films that specializes in staging huge orgies. Panayiotou filmed the empty set before and after one of these shoots, showing a stage with disco balls and an inflatable pool—and then its postshoot, with countless banana peels and paper cups strewn about. A sound track of men exulting under the shower and a small-format framed photograph of the actors posing mounted beside the projection replace what is absent here—the straightforward manifestations of corporeality in the film.

For the eighty-part slide projection *Wonder Land, 2008*, Panayiotou sifted through archival images of the carnival in Limassol, the second-largest city in Cyprus, discovering that for years now subversive

and traditional masquerades based on costumes taken from Disney films have played a dominant role, completely obscuring the carnival's original character. Taking his cues from Mikhail Bakhtin, who saw in the carnival a temporary transcendence of taboos and a utopian self-assertion in the face of repressive structures, Panayiotou here presents a collection of images that bear witness to the island's problematic psyche, shaped by ancient conflicts over both territory and identity, even as a part of its population anesthetizes itself by means of escapism and role-playing. Their unheard ribald laughter, prompted by the decontextualized fictions of absurd, benign cartoon characters like Pinocchio and the 101 Dalmatians, is (unconsciously) indicative of a more widespread sense of helplessness.

Untitled (Act III: The Glorious Return), 2008, in tandem with the exhibition's title, "Act I: The Departure," served to wryly indicate a dramaturgical narration via only prologue and epilogue, much as in *Guysgocrazy*. This installation, part of a trilogy that is only ever presented one piece at a time, consists of a historical theater set acquired from an archive and shown lying, folded, on the floor. Its motif of a trompe l'oeil theater curtain framing the bow of a ship coming into port is here only visible in an accompanying photograph that shows the stage set installed in a theater. Like Panayiotou's other work, the installation uses its iconology of interstitial space to compel the viewer to engage in dialectical reflection.

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