

LE PREMIER JOUR

performance et exposition de Marc Rossignol à la MEDAA

DE EERSTE DAG

performance en tentoonstelling van Marc Rossignol in het EHA

THE FIRST DAY

performance and exhibition by Marc Rossignol at the EHA

22.05.2018 – 14.09.2018

Marc Rossignol (b. Namur, 1954, lives and works in Brussels) has an artistic practice that is rich and diverse, in terms of the shapes, forms and subjects he activates within his chosen media, which include painting, drawing, sculpture, collage and performance. Much like the art historian Aby Warburg, the artist has an encyclopaedic interest in the cultures of the world. And like Warburg, Rossignol seeks out the intersections, or knots, that can be found between them. Through his artistic practice, the artist magnifies and orchestrates those points of contact, where different cultural practices converge. It is not unusual for him to create a work based on a painting by Watteau and to paint on the title in Japanese script, or to highlight the crossovers between Cezanne and Maghreb culture in a tessellated series of transformations based on that artist's final work.

This artistic practice of cultural convergence resonates strongly with the poet, writer, literary critic and philosopher Edouard Glissant's (b.1928, Sainte-Marie, d. 2011, Paris), philosophic world view of a *Poetics of Relation*, with which he argued for a creolization of identity, which is constructed in the links between various points of cultural difference. As opposed to a universalist world view, which would have all culture adhere to a singular, unifying vision, as was the case in the West and with the three monotheist religions – the philosophy of relation calls for societies to be open to the doubt and hesitation that comes when fixed values unravel. Glissant posits that it is from this state of the unknown that true creativity can emerge.

To mark the opening of the European House of the Authors in Spring 2018, SOFAM invited visual artist Marc Rossignol to carry out his performance *Le Premier Jour* on May 22nd 2018. During this painting-in-action, named after a poem by Edouard Glissant, Rossignol paints 12 kolams, one for each month, with a large brush in each hand, painting symmetrically and in mirror image, whilst at the same time reciting each of the twelve verses of Edouard Glissant's poem. This complex task is aided by the specific shapes of the kolams and the words of the poem which reinforce the artist's memory of each. And so these two cultural artefacts serve in the creation of something entirely new.

Kolams are generally made up of one continuous line that passes over an arrangement of points. These intricate geometric designs originate from matriarchal societies in Southern India. The drawings are, still today, drawn with rice powder on the pavement in front of the home: it is believed the design invites the gods to look on them favourably. By evening, the feet passing over them disperse the drawings. A new kolam is painted the following morning. The closed patterns are also believed to imprison evil spirits, so they are prevented from entering the house.

Marc Rossignol is interested in the kolams' geometry and the application of mathematics - which he calls *Mathématique Pathétique*, since it is mathematics at the service of poetry and sacred rites, rather

than what tends to be its general application in the developed world, for homogenization and profit. Mathematics has its origins in magic. Marc Rossignol acknowledges that he is not capable of believing in the magic of the kolams in the same way as those who first started drawing them did, but for him, the poetry remains. The artist postulates this in his work as an alternative, symbolic currency. Sometimes he does so literally, by designing a bank note features the drawing that the goddess of hell of Vanuatu presents half of to the deceased spirit: she expects them to be able to complete the drawing, if they wish to enter paradise. The artist's bank note, in other words, is a ticket to heaven.

The necklaces and sculptures made from recycled plastic bottle tops, which the artist requests his friends to collect, are present in various works in the exhibition. The notion of recycling is equally present in a diamond shaped painting of arrows – a symbol for recycling. A cluster of arrows facing inwards signals implosion, and when they face outwards it is a visual code for an explosion.

At other points in the entrance hallway at reception there are also a painting of a trefoil and cinquefoil knot, made up of a string of colourful bottle tops that seem to be arranged according to a code. These Gordian knots can only be unravelled by cutting them. These shapes fall under topology, one of the purest branches of mathematics. Objects in topology are often referred to as topological spaces, and their properties are such that even if they are morphed continuously into a different shape, they maintain their essential properties.

In the right wing, *Le Collier de la Reine* paintings (The Queen's Necklace, 1, 2, 3 and 4) feature painted sequences of two intertwined bottle top necklaces, in the Tibetan colours, that are shown to keep their formal properties whilst being progressively extended. The infamous story of the scam and subsequent scandal of a sumptuous diamond necklace, and the (incorrect) rumours spread in its wake regarding Marie-Antoinette, are said to have contributed to her downfall and subsequent beheading. These colourful pointers to the power of rumour gain uncomfortable overtones alongside the phenomenon and impact of fake news on the world order today.

The small, grey Lotus kolams that line the left wing are paintings that the artist executes once a month. Marc Rossignol is marking time, just as On Kawara did in his date paintings using Western script and typography. The contrast between the screen-printed pattern beneath, and the hesitant trait of the lighter line of the performance of painting, are also a subtle homage to Claude Monet's waterlilies. Rossignol was struck by Monet's loose traits in contrast with the graphic line that tended to be used at the time for the depiction of flowers, as inspired by Japonisme. Monet was a fervent collector of Japanese prints, yet the stroke with which he painted the lilies is almost trembling.

The cafeteria features a Kolam painting that is based on a Brahmin design. The dots that mark the key points of its design were applied with a burnt cork attached to a broomstick. The artist performed this painting whilst reciting, from memory, a poem by Pier Paolo Pasolini about the refuse collectors of Rome when they went on strike in 1970. The economic boom Italy experienced during the 1960ies and 70ies had the unexpected side effect that the waste collectors had to deal with unseen quantities of rubbish. Pasolini expresses sympathy for, and draws attention to, the waste collectors' plight. A clustered knot, *Baderne*, made from threaded white bottle tops seals the exhibition.

Kate Christina Mayne for SOFAM

The exhibition was curated by the artist and Kate Mayne
With special thanks to Sylvain Fasy and Annick Houyet

LIST OF WORKS

Reception area, entrance corridor:

NŒUDS 2, 2007
Acrylic on canvas
67 X 84 cm

NŒUDS 3, 2007
Acrylic on canvas
129 X 105 cm

SANS TITRE, 2004
Tinted concrete paint on wood
H 45 X L 76, sides 45 cm

Right wing, from right to left:

COLLIER DE LA REINE 4, 2008

Acrylic on canvas
140 x 109 cm

COLLIER DE LA REINE 3, 2008

Acrylic on canvas
109 X 140 cm

COLLIER DE LA REINE 2, 2008

Acrylic on canvas
140 x 109 cm

COLLIER DE LA REINE 1, 2008

Acrylic on canvas
109 X 140 cm

Left wing, from right to left:

MARS 2018
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 30 cm

FÉVRIER 2018
Acrylic on canvas
30 X 30 cm

JANVIER 2018
Acrylic on canvas
30 X 30 cm

DÉCEMBRE 2017
Acrylic on canvas
30 X 30 cm

Café

Baderne (knot), 2007
25 X 35 X45 cm

Appunti per un romanzo
sull'immondizia, 2015
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
110 X 110 cm