

REVIEWS

NEW YORK

Hannah Whitaker

Thierry Goldberg Gallery // April 29–June 3

PLATO ONCE DESCRIBED a subterranean world in which chained inhabitants gazed at shadows projected on a cave wall before them. Allegories of illusion and enlightenment, the philosopher's characters came to realize the falsity of their situation only when dragged to the surface and bathed in the rays of truth.

It is fitting, then, that of the several locales in Hannah Whitaker's latest solo show, "The Use of Noise," a handful are of caves, albeit Hawaiian ones. Her aims, far from perpetuating the expectations of photography, seek instead to shake up its foundations. Whereas Plato saw reason as a means to revelation, Whitaker's photographs reach to chance and its manifestations to do so.

In *Napoleon's Tomb* and *Untitled (Landscape)*, both 2011, the cloudy tints of cotton-candy pinks and lapis hues obscuring the images are less aesthetic adornments than traces of photographic rebellion. Allowing for haphazard light leakage and lens-flare in her compositions, Whitaker's process employs chance as a creative force. Such an approach echoes Vilém Flusser's call to undermine the automation of photography through acts of subversion and play.



Play imbues Whitaker's images. In *Cave Drawing 1*, 2012, scribbles of green light traverse an image of a cave's interior, the same effect repeated in the black-and-white *Cave Drawing 2*, 2012. In both, the blind application of light over an extended period produces images of sinuous whimsy, where strands and tendrils of illumination literally undercut photographic claims to accurate representation.

Just as importantly, this sense of play is not confined to the presence of chance within the images. Destabilizing the expected information-based narrative surrounding the medium, Whitaker intersperses her altered images with seemingly unrelated straight photographs, such as a detail of encrusted magma, *Lava*, 2012, or an iridescent headshot, *Blue Beauty*, 2011. Chance, in this case, is not found in the capture of light, but rather within the labyrinthine excesses of imaginative associations.

For Plato's cave dweller, the discovery of forced illusion was life-altering, if not shattering. The path Whitaker sets before us may be equally revelatory. As musician David Lee Roth once quipped, "The light you see at the end of the tunnel is the front of an oncoming train." —Joseph Akel

FROM LEFT:
**Hannah
Whitaker**
*Napoleon's
Tomb*, 2011.
Archival
pigment print,
40 x 50 in.

**Joachim
Koester**
Tarantism, 2007.
16 mm black-
and-white film,
6 min. 31 sec.



BOSTON

Joachim Koester

MIT List Visual Arts Center // May 10–July 8

KOESTER is the great undertaker of weird history, a polished necromancer whose reanimations look far better dead than they ever did living. Such elegant corpses make for suspicious products and handsome shows, and "To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown..." is no exception. Gathering some of the artist's recent work along with his more familiar series of photographs *The Kant Walks*, 2005 (contemporary documents of the philosopher's promenade routes through his native Königsberg), and *Day for Night, Christiania*, 1996 (lush, painterly chromatics of the anarchist neighborhood in Copenhagen), the show is thoroughly compelling not only for its rich presentation of Koester's own trajectory but for its exemplifying, nestled amid a world capital of technological innovation, the unique position of contemporary practice. Put more simply, Koester's work is an especially fine example of what art can do that nothing else can. Even if the superior craftsmanship on display in the photo and video works leaves you entirely cold (though such a response is difficult to conceive), the history on offer would be more than enough to compensate. And should this again be found wanting, the conceptual brio of the curating would remain.

This last is embodied in a decision to offset a bench in the viewing area for a two-track video documenting the Sicilian lair of Aleister Crowley, wherein the drugged-out pseudo-pagan perv had once managed to make orgies

seem like a chore. Sitting on the bench, one can either stare directly ahead at the salvaged wood used to construct the viewing room, or turn ever so slightly to the left in order to watch the video. It's a subtle gesture, but one that rehearses entirely Koester's project of producing high-gloss prettiness alongside and within the abandoned and neglected detritus of history. In the next room, more such wood is used to block the light from the window, enabling us to see the films projected therein. If the effect is less phenomenologically impressive than it was, one imagines, when the artist first deployed it against the incomparable glass of Sweden's Malmö Konsthalle in 1994, the meaning is no less legible: The past forgotten darkens also the present.

Of the aforementioned films, *Tarantism*, 2007, is the most compelling. Here, professional dancers re-create the almost epileptic movements that served as a cure for a tarantula bite in Southern Italy and which evolved into the style of folk dancing known as the tarantella. In the screening room, a docent with a flashlight points out the cords taped to the ground as well as the film reel spinning precariously in the dark. This concern for safety is emblematic of Koester's appeal. We feel his work pulling the past away from us precisely for its too-deft provisioning of it, and we are left all alone, far away, and pleasantly reoriented toward an uncertain future.

—Stephen Squibb

FROM LEFT: THIERRY GOLDBERG GALLERY, NEW YORK; JOACHIM KOESTER AND GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK

TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: TOM GIDLEY AND PARADISE ROW, LONDON; ARTURO HERRERA AND THOMAS DANE GALLERY, LONDON; NOAH SHERWOOD, ALEXIS TEPLIN, AND HOTEL, LONDON; MARC DOMAGE AND AIR DE PARIS, B. HUETZTUTTI AND GALERIE DANIEL TEMPLON, PARIS; GB AGENCY, PARIS; LARISSA GOLDSTON GALLERY, NEW YORK; FREIGHT + VOLUME, NEW YORK; ADAM DEICH AND UNTITLED, NEW YORK