

Neil Beloufa

Tectonic Plates, or the Jurisdiction of Shapes

Chung King Project, Los Angeles

9 September – 24 October

Neil Beloufa's Chung King Project exhibition features two videos embedded in a group of jarring sculptural installations. One video projects a hinged, kinetic object made of plywood lifting itself up off the floor and slamming down with a bang. An audio speaker sends a physical tremor from behind the screen, and though the object itself is not really present, it makes its physical presence known through technological effect. The other video, *Kempinski* (2007), is viewed in an awkward plywood box, where speakers vibrate the seat with the soundtrack. Other sculptural elements inhabit the exhibition – the walls are full of angles, sheets of glass, jutting boards, electric fans and noise.

Kempinski, shot in Mali, is the exhibition's centrepiece. It is completely unscripted and full of odd dialogue and images. A Malian man, for instance, utters that a "motorcycle speaks just a like a man speaks", suggesting that an object has an inner life just like a human. His voice emerges from intense darkness, punctuated at times by blinding radio-tower lights, a typical sight all over the world but present in video as an unsettling influence. Though baffling, the film is not a fiction, but rather a strange truth, the truth that people around the world still live with an embedded, spiritually-based relationship to objects, which is often difficult to understand in circles committed to secularism and doubtful of such worldviews.

In an honest way, Beloufa does not buy into the story that these worldviews are on the decline, but rather shows them existing alongside secularism in a robust and engaged manner. *Kempinski* reveals animist, ancient ways of thinking coexisting in a modern world, and this truth registers as quite difficult to understand. How incredibly vast, for instance, is the distance between the Malian man who says, "When me and my wife make

love, I think of her and she thinks of me", and the disconnected man Gore Vidal writes about in his essay 'On Pornography' (1966), the Westerner who needs pornography and erotic images, who requires fantasies and displaced desires, to successfully achieve climax? Beloufa's video is a simple assertion of differences, of the differences between an old world becoming less and less familiar and a new world growing ever more confusing.

Technology, in this spiritual way of viewing the world, at once enables, questions and inhibits vision, and this effect is fully present in the exhibition. The installations, accented with flat green house paint, are all activated by sounds and wind, but the animation is accompanied by division or misdirection, a split or blockage between cause and effect. A fan blows, but does not disturb a plant right in front of it because its breezes are blocked by glass. The technology works the space and works the viewer, and result in the suggestion that simple visions and assertions of cause necessarily lead to doubt, that even the clearest ideals can be challenged and changed by progress and critical thinking. The effect brings *Kempinski* front and centre, its view of the world growing more and more distant, couched and hidden and changed by new realities. *Ed Schad*



Tectonic Plates, or the Jurisdiction of Shapes, 2009 (installation view).
Courtesy Chung King Project, Los Angeles