

TORRI

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GARETH LONG *LITERARY ASSES*

Exhibition : 18.10.12 – 24.11.12, TORRI, Paris

Conference : 23.10.12, 19h00, Fondation d'entreprise Ricard

Gareth Long, a Canadian artist born in 1979, is interested in the notions of copying, translating and imitating: moments of error that can provoke creation. For Gareth Long, the potential of a story or work of art is located in the gap between the original and the failed replica. But how can you make sense of that gap if you don't even know the copy's source? Such is the case with the story found most famously in *The Golden Ass*. Though Apuleius' version is the best-known, there are other versions of this tale, and these versions have raised questions concerning which version came first, who copied whom, is one story just an epitome of another, and, ultimately, whose story is the 'original.' Understandable, then, that this confusion would interest the artist.

Gareth Long is currently writing a play in the style of ancient Greek comedy, revolving around this confusion. His new solo exhibition at TORRI is the transposition of that unfinished play. In the space, a series of ten drawings of donkeys sourced from literature introduce the characters, followed by five works corresponding to the five sections standard to Old Comedy in his play. They are to be viewed (read) from left to right, from the prologue to the exodus.

If that order is necessary to understand the plot, it's no longer the case when it comes to exegesis. Let's begin with the penultimate act of this type of dramaturgy: the parabasis. Here, the comedic action is temporarily suspended while the leader of the chorus addresses the audience, sometimes in order to glorify the comedy's author. This exercise isn't without certain similarities to the press release; so let's try to do justice to this fortuitous ancestor.

Etymologically, parabasis means to take a step to the side, to digress, even to transgress. The work that embodies this moment doesn't serve to forward the plot, but does, however, shed light on Gareth Long's work. And transgressions, or at least detours, recur throughout. For example, the artist likes to quote Flaubert in order to reflect on the copy or the questioning of certitudes.

In Greek Old Comedy, the agon is the central debate during the course of which judgment is handed down; here symbolized by a mobile. And yet a mobile, although balanced, is always in potential movement. It would never be able to relate a firm decision. Furthermore, if in Gareth Long's comedy one of the three authors is to be celebrated as the best writer of asses' tales, no conclusion can be drawn from the final work: a screen. It's a *prop* not an *ending* that is offered by this sculpture in the exhibition's final act. We'll never know who copied whom. This lack of interest in authorship is already emphasized by the work corresponding to the entrance of the chorus. Gareth Long commissioned the artist Kate O'Connor to interpret the description of a lost canvas representing Aesop surrounded by his personified fables. He leaves another artist, but also to the viewer, to map their own course and, in that, to construct their own mental images.

While acknowledging the end of modernity's grand narratives as announced by Lyotard, Gareth Long offers open-ended narrations, both humorous and erudite. Could this absence of denouement come out of poststructuralist and postcolonial thoughts, known for questioning underlying structures linking knowledge and power? Opposing reasoning that would make progress and finality king, Gareth Long's work situates itself in a tradition, alongside that of Gustave Flaubert, Liam Gillick or Pierre Huyghe, where profoundly reflexive modes of thinking wouldn't blush at being qualified as political.

Charlotte Cosson

Tuesday, October 23, 7 pm, at the Fondation d'entreprise Ricard, a lecture by Gareth Long followed by a conversation between the artist, Martha Kirszenbaum, and Charlotte Cosson.

Friday, October 12, publication by Triple Canopy of the prologue of Gareth Long's comedy *Literary Asses*.