

By Simone Krug
Spring 2016

and misalign while walking around the piece reminds of driving past a graveyard, headstones rolling through stages of order and disorder as you zoom by. Here, the grid reveals a simple human impulse to create order where there is none; or, perhaps in this case, to create new life out of death.

Placed dramatically center stage amongst all of these dead trees and spent batteries is *Plants and Lamps* (2015): a cluster of sculpted houseplants that sit with dejected pride amidst two “lamps.” Though *Lamp* was graced with functioning, glowing bulbs, these “lamps” hover above the “plants” devoid of any utility. While the plant’s texture is appealing, and taken as a whole Holloway’s grouping of sculptures contains a certain gravitas, it’s hard to take these houseplants to seriously.

Since Kordansky opened in its new location a year and a half ago, there have been at least three exhibitions using similar tropical houseplants as a central motif. Houseplants were prominently featured in Jonas Wood’s self-titled exhibition (2015), and Andrew Dadson’s *Painting’ (Organic)* (2015). The gallery’s opening was christened by perhaps the most memorable of these examples: Rashid Johnson’s behemoth *Plateaus* (2014), a pyramid of steel and potted plants that seemed to advertise the gallery’s freshly-sandblasted cross beams as its height stretched towards the ceiling. Though, Dadson’s work *Painted Plants* (2015) is perhaps the most analogous to Holloway’s recent

foray into tropical foliage. Dadson’s plants are real ones that have been monochromatically painted in a charcoal black. Two grow lights were positioned in front of the group, casting an orange glow and with it a smattering of shadows on the wall behind. Holloway’s *Plants and Lamps* snaps into view as a potential critique of his cohorts who have flocked to this familiar and easy subject matter. Yet, in replicating the thing which we mean to critique, are we not just duplicating the thing itself?

By distorting his sculptures’ embedded functionality, Holloway is perhaps leading the fray of the “analog counterrevolution.”¹ What is more accessible to a general audience than the familiarities of home? Yet, what becomes of the Möbius strip sculpture after the Nag Champa stick has burned away? Does it then—separated from its utility—become a more pure version of itself? Stripped of function and interaction, does *Benzoin* lay as a classical object to be quietly pondered? Does it violently skew away from the accessible, and into the shiny, white arena of Art? These subversions—along with a rich and vivid material exploration—surely enhance the ideals embedded in Holloway’s revolution. Although, what is a true revolution if not innovation? Mimicry then—in the revolution that is—is a weak form of protest. In attempting commentary of current artworld tropes by mirroring them, Holloway’s uprising loses a bit of its gusto.

Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue at The Mistake Room

**January 9–
March 26, 2016**

Within contemporary art and discourse, the symptoms of globalization, Westernization, and post-colonial history are enigmatic, at once an afterthought and a cast shadow. The first exhibition of the ongoing multi-year curatorial project *Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue* at The Mistake Room diagnoses—and boldly confronts—these broad, dense issues through a series of screenings, talks, and exhibitions. In the first chapters of the *A Prologue* section, young artists presented video and projection in the gallery space and scholars took part in a lecture series. Interstices between the Millennial Generation and international perspectives materialized, as each artist in the exhibition was born after or around 1980, and all hail from wide-ranging geographic locale.

In the video works, individual artist’s memories—watched on TV, read in a book, recounted, or experienced firsthand—assume equal significance. Retention (and with it, forgetting) is examined. The exhibition collapses space, joining

1. “What the artist describes as an “analog counterrevolution” is also a one-man paean to the belief that stand alone sculpture can, in and of

itself, be both conceptually complex and intuitively accessible to a general audience.” —Evan Holloway Press Release, David Kordansky Gallery.

Simone Krug

historical narratives from around the globe in ways that obscure the boundaries between subjective experiences. Shuffling through these memories, a strange and speculative portrait of the Millennial Generation's globalized world emerges.

Recent collective memories of public spaces inform Aleksandra Domanovic's haunting video *Turbo Sculpture* (2010-2013). In this provocative work, the artist explores a trend in bizarre monuments that were erected during or after the ethnic Yugoslav Wars in the 1990s. The video appears as a computer slideshow, where images pile on top of one another like a stack of real snapshots (a dated flip effect popular in the '90s). A narrator recounts the regional history and its monument-culture in the monotonous tone of an educational documentary. She explains that pop-culture icons, stars, fictional characters, and Western politicians/celebrities have come to fill the empty pedestals in public art sites of the Balkan region. As Batman, Johnny Depp, Bill Clinton, and Tupac Shakur inhabit these plinths, one wonders whose identity and history is forgotten—or worse, erased? This glorification of fictional and foreign characters conceals real historical figures (regional political leaders, heroes, or fallen martyrs), instead honoring ersatz icons of Western visual culture. For Domanovic, these monuments are documents of active erasure.

In Larry Achiampong and David Blandy's

compelling video *Finding Fanon Part Two* (2015), the artists construct a narrative of history based on the lost theatrical scripts of post-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon. Rendered in Machinima-style graphics of video game and computer animation, the work places two men dressed in suits in the surreal and simulated environment of *Grand Theft Auto 5*. They fall from the sky onto the streets of downtown Los Angeles, perambulating through the urban terrain of industrial train tracks, grassy knolls, and loading docks. A narrator invokes Fanon's writing on power and oppression, revolution and complacency, colonialism and immigration. She recites his thoughts on reality and fantasy in relation to history. The prescience of Fanon's writing reverberates, particularly in light of contemporary crises like the Black Lives Matter movement, the European migrant crisis, and the surge in wealth inequality.

Kemang Wa Lehelere's video, *A Homeless Song (Sleep is for the Gifted)* (2013), activates stories of the apartheid era in South Africa through choreography. White and black dancers scuttle around a stage, moving bones or (more chillingly) digging graves. These gestures become an elegy for the fallen in both South Africa and other global conflict zones. Basel Abbas & Ruanne Abou-Rahme's video *Collapse* (2009) collages footage of movement and displacement in a somber rumination on the Palestinian condition. The

blurry, aged footage and shaky camera invoke war and loss; the calamities recounted are markers of painful recent history.

Histories of A Vanishing Present: A Prologue is itself a study in recollection, mining the recent political events that shape our present moment. But whose memories do these videos recount if many of these events precede the Millennial Generation? The exhibition activates the notion of *postmemory*, wherein one generation bears the memories of another. The stories these artists tell are both their own and tangled with that of older generations. Further, the voices of this exhibition are highly individualized and personal, which at times counteract the assumption that globalization creates one narrative or perspective. Each work in this show divulges a particular history rooted in the intersections of globalization. The themes that emerge bleed into one another. Disparate histories become shared collective memories. Here, the question of who writes history is as important as the question of who remembers it.