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BUDAPEST

YARA FLORES

THURMALFURDO GALLERY

Do we need a metaphysics of simultaneity? There is a version of this question that feels urgent, given the extent to which the mediating technologies of hypercapitalism privilege asynchronous and siloed temporalities. But the question as posed remains paradigmatically a twentieth-century preoccupation: the physicist of simultaneity was Einstein, whose special and general theories of relativity hinged on the problem of establishing the temporal conjunction of spatial events; it was Bergson who wore the metaphysician's hat, since he used the patois of post-positivism to sketch a thinly secularized dilapidation of the old Scholastic canard that God created space in order to give human beings a tiny glimpse of the experience of eternity in the divine mind (since within space humans perceive "simultaneous events," and this amounts to a dimensional reduction of God's perception, wherein everything is absolutely and forever "at once").

Yara Flores's current solo show at the Nachteorg Haam's Gallerie Thurmalfurdo apparently seeks to juxtapose the twentieth- and twenty-first-century versions of this problem, and to do so while holding together the fate of nations, the fate of families, and the fate of individuals. And there is memoir too. And nuclear holocaust. Only from the exaggerated elevation of such ambition is it possible to achieve a genuinely *fatal* belly flop.

Flores's work in the last decade has orbited problems of technology and the spirit, with epicycles into the perennial question of identity. A solo show in Australia in 2016 ("Greebles," Raygun Projects) examined the materialization of virtual/ideal forms, particularly the eponymous figurine-figures known as Greebles that were originally developed as non-face controls in early facial recognition experiments. Her collaborations with the American academic D. Graham Burnett (the "Love Letter for Émile Javal" series, 2015 forward; "Self-Portrait by a Friend," 2018) can be read as attempting to stage theatrical dynamics of desire and self-loss. The debt to Sophie Calle is obvious enough to be distracting in some cases, and Flores's weakest efforts get caught in a no-man's land between Calle-level intimacy and the slickly mannered pose of late first-wave internet art.

In the new installation in Budapest, entitled "August 6th, 1945," Flores delves a fateful conjuncture in her family history: her maternal grandfather, a US fighter pilot during the Second World War, was shot down in a raid over Tokyo at more

or less the same moment that the Enola Gay dropped the “Little Boy” atom bomb on Hiroshima.

We are here in terrain reminiscent of Matthew Day Jackson’s burly “Total Accomplishment” exhibition at ZKM back in 2014 (for which, I note, Burnett wrote a catalog essay). Picture nose-up bits of Pimp-My-Ride warbirds, steel glinting nicely beside stretches of char. Flores has a stronger appetite for the archive than Jackson, however, so the visitor to the Thurmalfurdo spends more time looking at stacks of documents — notionally the fruit of Flores’s efforts to recover the exact circumstances of her grandfather’s incident. But there is no reading to be done: Flores presents these papers in stacks that have been embedded in a wax-like resin, which has hardened these thousands of sheets into stratigraphic pillars. The technique is closely associated with the Queens-based artist Matt Freedman, whose (false?) memoir works in this form have never been publically exhibited, but live in the liminal imaginary of parafictional archive-fever. For Flores, the waxy masses, in juxtaposition with the bits of fuselage (and small towers of dry, nested, half-eggshells — bone white and haunting) are evidently intended to invoke the old avionic shaman-wreck himself, Joseph Beuys, much of whose mystique proceeded from the auto-mythologization of his own wartime crash-landing, to which he returned again and again in his signature conjunction of tallow and felt.

But the grim medium-specificity of Beuys is traduced in Flores’s three-channel video work on display in a black-draped side gallery. One of the films runs silent documentary footage of efforts made by Flores to find the exact location of the crash landing of her grandfather’s P-51 Mustang, which bellied out in a rice field just north of Nagareyama (we never see Flores herself in these scenes, but we follow her train as she makes a set of Helen-Mira-style “rubblings” of the terrain and trajectories being recovered; the dirt-and-grass smudged canvases are hung elsewhere in the gallery). The second film provides a kind of comic relief. It features interviews with a set of basement-dwelling MAGA Reddit trolls who have, quite independently, done their own research on Flores’s grandfather, and surface various conspiracy theories while drawing on their own wartime experiences playing videogames (Flores’s grandfather survived the war in a Japanese prison camp, but the Japanese capture of his aircraft has, it turns out, occasioned some bizarre dark-web speculations over the years). Finally, a third screen plays Resnais’ classic *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959) on loop.

Things happen at the same time. Sometimes. And sometimes it means something. Flores makes lots of things happen at the same time in “August 6th, 1945” in Budapest. But a lot already happened on that date, somewhere else. The meaning of all that? We do not find it at the Gallerie Thurmalfurdo.

—Eigil Zu Tage-Ravn