

MANIF D'ART 11

THE QUEBEC CITY BIENNIAL

The Strength of Sleep

The Cohabitations of All the Living

Manif d'art 11 – The Quebec City Biennial draws its inspiration from the Canadian winter and the sleeping earth to focus on human sleep and the multiple nuances of the process of waking. Both sleep and the cold season are times of latency, transition, and pause, of suspended productivity, and of resistance against the exploitation of bodies and resources. These daily or seasonal alterations, where different species and their environments interconnect, provide the living with the opportunity for regeneration, as well as for listening, attention to self-knowledge, and interaction with other life forms. By liberating inner, uncontrolled, and sometimes crucial strengths, and by altering our reflexes and shifting our perceptions, sleep can change how we perceive the world.

Biological rhythms of activity and rest have a social and political history. Indeed, both the duration and structure of sleep have been governed by a succession of norms. In the industrial era, sleep, which imposes idleness, has been a hot political issue, as evidenced by capitalism's efforts to enforce the reign of profit over "24/7". Modernity wants the body to be "recycled" overnight. The contemporary world cultivates and exploits the ideology of sleep disorders. Meanwhile, the most dispossessed among us, in metropolises the world over, sleep outside.

The Biennial is organized into different exhibitions—moments of awakening meant to engage multiple levels of attention. The artistic processes involved can provoke astonishment, unforeseen experiences that trigger a rearrangement of our perceptions, our certainties, and the hierarchies that govern us. As visitors move through the exhibitions, they encounter spaces of fertile retreat: projection rooms, bedrooms and beds where we abandon and find ourselves, houses and burrows where we take shelter and unite with others, hideaways and refuges where resistance and observations are born. Other matters for consideration include navigating the deep cold and the plant world's extraordinary survival strategies.

Vigils, meditations, daydreams—these are forms of half-slumber that nourish our days and give us time to experience out-of-sync perceptions, discordant thoughts, and suspended judgments. The artists remind us that these moments are made of forces that allow us to grow into our ways of living and cohabiting on a planet of which we are not the owners and where we are not the only subjects.

Marie Muracciole, Guest Curator

Artists: Francis Alÿs, Yto Barrada and Rodney Graham

This exhibition is presented in collaboration with Manif d'art – The Quebec City Biennial.

MANIF D'ART II - THE QUEBEC CITY BIENNIAL

The Strength of Sleep

The Cohabitations of All the Living

1. RODNEY GRAHAM

Abbotsford, Canada, 1949 - Vancouver, Canada, 2022

Halcion Sleep, 1994

Single-channel video (black and white, silent), 26 min

Courtesy of the Estate of Rodney Graham and 303 Gallery NYC

Halcion Sleep is a single-shot, black and white video that documents a performative action in much the same way the medium was first used to record performances during the 1960s. Graham, dressed in pyjamas and fast asleep, is seen lying on the backseat of a car as it drives through the city at night. The sight of traffic lights streaming past the back window provides the impression of a second screen, like the Hollywood film technique of rear projection. The absence of sound suggests a hallucination, while Graham's deep slumber evokes another type of projection that is inaccessible to us: his dreams.

Halcion is the name of a fast-acting sedative that was once popular but is rarely prescribed today. Rodney Graham took 5mg of the drug in a motel room on the outskirts of Vancouver. Once the sedative had taken effect, his brother and a friend drove him back home in the city. Exhibiting himself in a completely vulnerable state, Graham simultaneously subverts the typical narrative of film noir and the myth of the artist as demiurge.

This video was Graham's first moving image piece. It launched several other works in which he features himself—in his 16mm films and lightbox photographs—while evoking the history of cinema and performance with caustic humour.

2. YTO BARRADA

Paris, France, 1971

Beau Geste, 2009

[Beautiful Gesture]

16 mm film transferred to digital, sound, 8 min

Property of the artist

The owner of an abandoned lot in Drabeb, a neighborhood on the edge of Tangier decided to destroy a *Phoenix canariensis* palm tree that dominated his space. Since the presence of trees rendered the property unbuildable, hence unsellable, the man cut into its trunk to fill it with poison. With three friends, Barrada mounted a botanical commando raid inspired by the Diggers in San Francisco in the 1960s. Her film depicts this action, the modest parameters of which are underlined by its title, which comes from a Hollywood epic (1939) starring Gary Cooper.

The expression “beau geste,” of French origin, refers to an act characterized by its gratuity, which is to say futility: “for the beauty of the gesture.” This gesture, filmed in 16mm, is in fact part of the general strategy of resistance the artist has developed to confront ordinary violence. The rescue takes the side of the local vegetation against the wild and destructive urbanism that has been imposed on Tangier for many years.

3. FRANCIS ALÿS

Anvers, Belgique, 1959

***Nightwatch*, 2004**

Video, color, silent, 6 min 17 s

Property of the artist

In collaboration with Rafael Ortega and Artangel

Made in London, where Alÿs was living at the time, this recording of a performance seems like the opposite of those of the artist's wanderings through the streets of Mexico at the beginning of his career, and that made him famous. The two cities are antipodes of one another. And in *Nightwatch*, it is the space of the National Portrait that we look at through the eyes of surveillance cameras.

The intruder who appears in these images is not human. Uncharacteristically, Alÿs has created a *huis-clos*, sending a fox into the museum's rooms after closing hours to trace its route via CCTV footage. When *Nightwatch* is shown on a monitor, as here, the viewer is put in the position of a surveilling officer. The animal inspects the ground and walks around until it finds a place to install itself, haunches up, back against the wall, on the lookout. Then it goes to sleep.

Animality does not have a place in a traditional museum, much less in the National Portrait Gallery, where the collection consists entirely of portraits of distinguished personages. The intrusion of a beast considered "savage" in a cultural space relates to the opposition between the built-up urban space and the living world, though in reality, foxes are quite numerous in London these days. Alÿs uses the excessive importance of video surveillance in the city, a surveillance intended for humans, to show the limits of spaces of control.

FLOOR PLAN

2nd floor

Salle Harnois

