

## **The Hashish Club, 2009**

Film (black and white, no sound)

6.06 min (loop)

Relics of forgotten or obscure moments in history or culture are the raw material of Joachim Koester's work. Supported by rigorous research, his projects create visual environments that are only suggestive of their content, allowing the viewer to take an active role in piecing the parts together to complete the story. He is fascinated by the 'obscurity of things that take place at the fringe but thrive secretly at the heart of mainstream culture.'

**The Hashish Club**, 2009, draws from the cultural history of hashish (cannabis). It comprises a 16 mm film of an abstract animation of hashish plants; an almost life-size, black and white reproduction of a lush nineteenth century interior; and dimly-lit Moroccan lamps that fill the space with a warm glow. It is based on 'Le Club des Hachichin', a Parisian group of the late 1840s that was centred around a fascination with drug-induced experiences. Its members included key figures of the French intelligentsia, such as Charles Baudelaire, Eugène Delacroix and Théophile Gautier, who wrote about the atmosphere of decadent extravagance nurtured by the club. They convened in the lavish interior of Hôtel de Lauzun, and were served the 'green paste' in oriental, porcelain dishes.

Hashish was supplied to the club by Dr Jacques-Joseph Moreau, a psychologist who compared the effects of the drug to the symptoms of mental illness. Moreau did not use the substance himself, but observed the club's 'volunteers' with the detached interest of a scientist. Not all of the members were users of the drug either, but they all were intrigued by claims of its ability to expand creativity and by its curious affects on people's mental state.

Sofia Karamani (2009)

## **The Place of Dead Roads, 2015**

HD video, (colour, sound)

33:00 min

Shot inside the installation, the film uses codes borrowed from the Western and presents four characters whose expressions and gestures suggest a ritualized duel. As the actors switch from miming attack and defense to tribal gesticulations, the effect is of a state of trance in which the body seems like a suit of armor the protagonists are trying to pierce. The title of this work, **The Place of Dead Roads**, is taken from a novel by William S. Burroughs.

## **Maybe this act, this work, this thing, 2016**

HD video installation (colour, sound)

20 min

**Maybe this act, this work, this thing** conveys the advent of cinema through the bodies of vaudeville performers. Mimicking the apparatus of a new world that threatens their livelihood as stage actors, they simulate shutters of cameras and projectors, quivering electricity and the whirring celluloid. Their movements are amplified by the sounds of their heels hoofing, limbs shuffling and voices muttering with a sense of desperate urgency that echoes the Cultural Revolution that dawned with the film industry.

## **My Frontier is an Endless Wall of Points (after the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux), 2007**

Film (black and white, no sound)

10.24 min (loop)

In the nineteenth century exploration was geographic. Journeys made into impenetrable jungles or the ice deserts of the Arctic in an attempt to map the last “white” spots on the globe. But in the twentieth century this notion of the “unknown” changed. Exploration turned inward. The new realms to be discovered were the molecule (Niels Bohr), the unconscious (Sigmund Freud), language (Gertrude Stein) or the outskirts of the mind (Henri Michaux).

**My Frontier Is an Endless Wall of Points** is a film animation created from the mescaline drawings of Henri Michaux. Of all Michaux’s work, these drawings are most frequently described as “a venture into foreign territory.” They are seen as an exploration of a vast world on the borderline of words. My work is an attempt to literally animate this idea. I examine the traces of this journey in a series of rapidly moving images, making what could be termed a “psychedelic documentary.”

Joachim Koester (2007)

## **Of Spirits and Empty Spaces, 2012**

Film (black and white, silent)

This film examines a scheme undertaken by John Murray Spear, an American spiritualist and activist. In the mid-19th century, Spear tried to obtain the plans of a sewing machine prototype, an alternative to the costly model patented by Elias Howe. During spiritualist séances, participants would enter into a state of trance in order to access the plans, which existed in the immaterial realm of spirits. In this mechanical choreography, each participant would embody a piece of the machine. The knowledge acquired during these séances led to the construction of a prototype, of uncertain operability.

## **Body Electric, 2014**

Film, (black and white, silent)

3'06"

**Body Electric** is a silent film comprised of close up shots of a 16mm projector and its various parts. The film's title and its editing are indicative of Koester's interest in the resemblances between the body, sewing machines, and the cinematic apparatus. The camera lingers in an almost fetishistic manner over the contours of a machine.

## **Praying Mantis, 2015**

39.8 x 51.5 cm

**Praying Mantis** is a series of photographs, and we show some of them without their accompanying film. An insect that is said to be able to connect with the spirit of the person who watches it, the mantis connects many of the thematic threads of Koester's body of work. With its "performative" mimetic faculties, its ability to blend in with the environment and its "alien" physical features and movements, the mantis echoes the motion of both the machines and the human figures that are present in Beirut Art Center show.

## **Tarantism (2007)**

Film (black and white)

6.31 min in loop

**Tarantism** is a condition resulting from the bite of the wolf spider, originally known as the tarantula. The bite causes numerous symptoms in the victim: nausea, difficulties in speech, delirium, heightened excitability and restlessness. The bodies of the bitten are seized by convulsions that previously could only be cured by a sort of frenzied dancing. Even the Bishop of Polignano, who in the seventeenth century allowed himself to be bitten to disprove the cure, felt compelled to dance to relieve his symptoms.

This "dancing-cure" called the Tarantella emerged during the Middle Ages as a local phenomenon in and around the city of Galatina, in southern Italy, and was widespread in the region up until the middle of the twentieth century. Since then, the Tarantella has evolved from a form of uncoordinated movement – where people would "quiver and hurl their heads, shake their knees, grind their teeth and make the actions of madmen" – into a highly stylized dance for couples.

My interest in tarantism is tied to its original form: a dance of uncontrolled and compulsive movements, spasms and convulsions. In the film I have utilized this idea to generate the movements of the dancers. In six individually choreographed parts, the dancers attempt to explore a type of grey zone: the fringes of the body or what might be called the body's terra incognita.

Joachim Koester 2007

## **Insect silver noir, 2017**

Sound piece

15 min

Text: Joachim Koester, Sound: Stefan A. Pedersen, Voice: Charles Parker

**Insect Silver Noir** is a trippy tour through various transformations. "You will shed your skin many times during the meditation, and turn into an insect." It is one of the two-guided meditations Joachim Koester and Stefan A. Pedersen have developed in collaboration. Let yourself be guided into unknown territories by a soundtrack of white noise and hypnotic voices.

## **Boarded House, 2009-2013**

190 x 240 cm

80 x 64 cm

This is one photograph of a series entitled *Some Boarded Up Houses*, created in 2009–10, in which Joachim Koester borrows the visual vocabulary of documentary photography. He thus seems to carry on the legacy of his predecessors, such as Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as, further back, Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. The documentary style is evidenced in Koester's deployment of the frontal shot in black and white, a blank sky devoid of narrativity, and uniform lighting, which allows him to infuse the representation of urban landscapes with objectivity. He focuses on residential houses, which, throughout the series, are brought together by identical figurative markers: their openings, doors and windows, are shuttered with pressboard. Thus, while seemingly deriving this composition from the documentary style, reprised by conceptual art, and which consists in systematic frontal representation of architectural façades, of houses that, in their vernacular dimension, are inscribed within a territory and within a history, he in fact registers a moment in American history. Indeed, these houses are boarded-up as a consequence of the subprime mortgage crisis. And so the artist records a certain social and economic landscape, the aftermath of bankruptcies of individuals who were forced to abandon their homes, attempt to put them on the market, and leave them in a state of desolation. Behind the rigorous, systematic description of these architectural façades, the artist hints at a human and social landscape.

Pascal Beausse