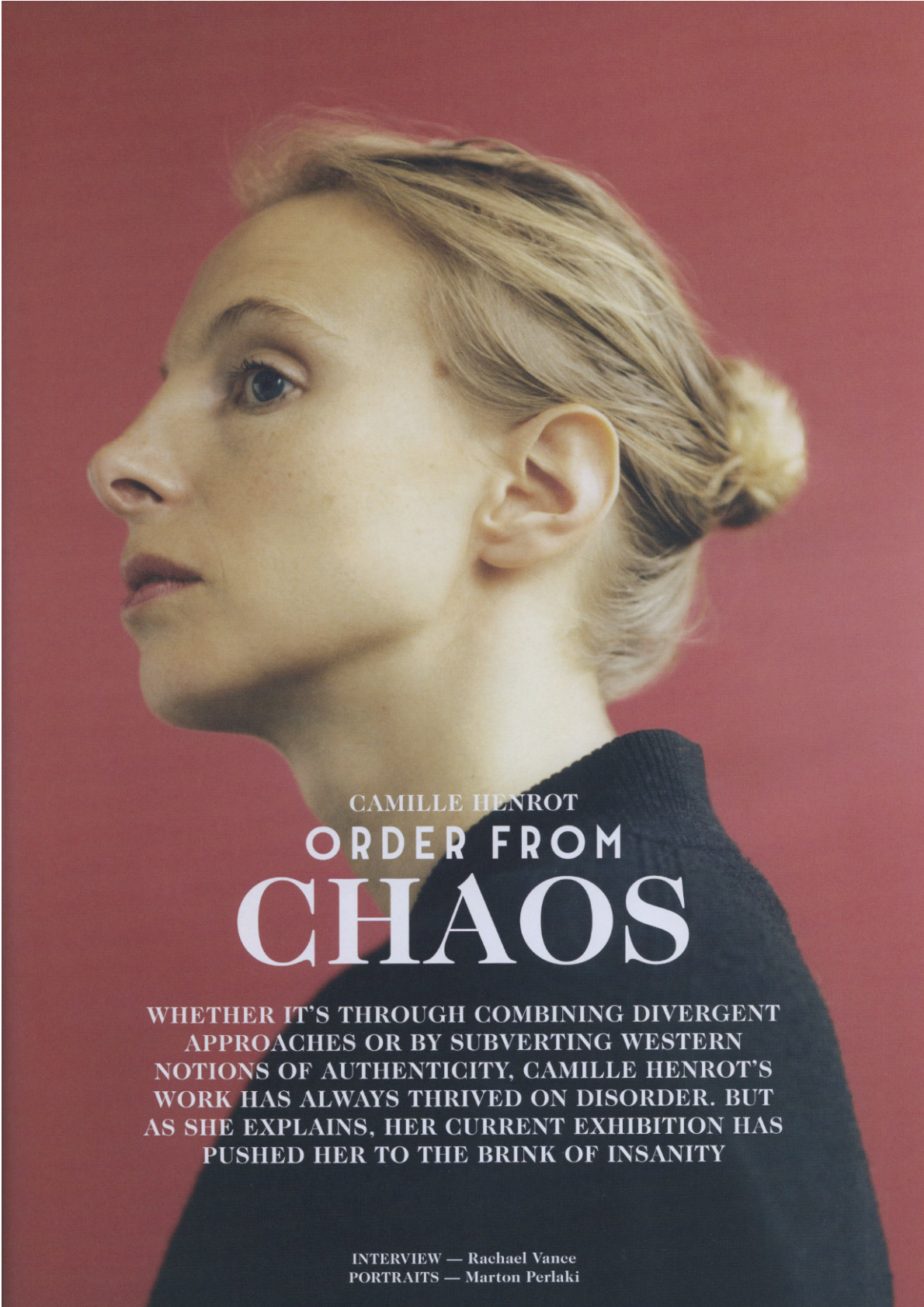


METRO PICTURES

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CAMILLE HENROT

ORDER FROM
CHAOS

WHETHER IT'S THROUGH COMBINING DIVERGENT APPROACHES OR BY SUBVERTING WESTERN NOTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY, CAMILLE HENROT'S WORK HAS ALWAYS THRIVED ON DISORDER. BUT AS SHE EXPLAINS, HER CURRENT EXHIBITION HAS PUSHED HER TO THE BRINK OF INSANITY

INTERVIEW — Rachael Vance
PORTRAITS — Marton Perlaki







Top
CAMILLE HENROT
Cynopolis, 2007-2009
 Super 8 film and DVDCAM
 10 min
 Copyright ADAGP Camille Henrot
 Courtesy the artist and kamel mennour, Paris

Bottom
The Pale Fox, 2014
 Installation views, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2014
 Copyright ADAGP Camille Henrot
 Photo: Andy Keate
 Courtesy kamel mennour, Paris and Johann König,
 Berlin



Bottom
Grosse Fatigue, 2013

Video
 13 min
 Copyright ADAGP Camille Henrot
 Courtesy the artist, Silex Films and kamel
 mennour, Paris



Earning a reputation for taking on projects with big ambitions, artist Camille Henrot is best known for her 2013 film “Grosse Fatigue”. This striking snapshot of civilisation won the Silver Lion at the 55th Venice Biennale, captivating the international art world. As a storyteller, Henrot’s fascination for investigating the human condition motivates her poignant reflections.

Sleek spoke to the French art luminary while she was on residency in Rome to discuss her career’s beginnings, highlights and current trajectory. Offering an insight into the mind of this cultural interpreter, Henrot shared her musings on notions of order and authenticity and revealed the anxieties that underpin her work.

SLEEK: What are you doing in Rome?

CAMILLE HENROT: I’m working on a lot of traditional techniques, making a lot of drawings, learning about painting frescoes and dealing with large scale bronzes. The Fondazione Memmo invited me to the city. They have recently established a contemporary art programme where I will be holding an exhibition next year. Rome is very beautiful and inspiring. But right now I have to say, it’s mostly play rather than work.

As someone who blends an array of critical and aesthetic approaches, do you identify as simply an artist?

I don’t think about artists in terms of the way they work and the kind of fields they touch. For a long time I was very uncomfortable with being labelled an artist, but recently I’ve relaxed about it. This started happening when I began

reading more writing by artists. I was recently reading Gauguin’s diary – the one he wrote when he was very old in La Maison du Jouis. It was referred to as the house of pleasure but he was all alone with his legs completely damaged and he had no one to care for him. He wasn’t selling anything and was super-grumpy. He was



writing about his perception of drawing, the pain he had in his legs, not having money and his wife who had left. I identified with him very much and now I relate myself more to the label of artist when I think about daily life and my relationship to the world.

Your work encourages slippages between Western and non-Western thought. For example, in your current touring exhibition “The Pale Fox”, West African Dogon people are juxtaposed with everyday materials from Western society. What is the motivation behind this blending?

I think the first time I started dealing with this theme was with my

work in Egypt called “Cynopolis” from 2009. I was interested in the way the origins of art history often start with Egyptian art and how Western culture appropriates moments considered to be important and rejects others. I felt like the whole story of how culture develops is derived from misunderstanding. In this process of appropriating

tion, there is misunderstanding, there is reinterpretation, and this interpretation gives birth to a new movement. But these new movements are often initially perceived negatively.

As in inauthentic?

Exactly, but everything becomes authentic in time. And although we tend to relate the concept of authenticity to the notion of time, it’s also an ethnocentric idea that was created out of a Western construct of art from the 19th century. So with Cynopolis I was trying to explore the awareness of this phenomenon by adapting the same idea to the way African and Asian culture has been appropriated in

Western art and how guilt had become integrated into the aesthetic of works produced during colonialism. You can definitely see this phenomenon in Cubism and Surrealism and the way those movements appropriated African and Polynesian culture while lots of people were being tortured, pillaged and dispossessed. The French Surrealist Michel Leiris’s description of how he stole a sacred sculpture in “L’Afrique fantôme” is a good example of such ambivalence towards the realities of exploitation.

I guess this comes from a deeper curiosity in finding something familiar in something foreign.

I think we are only able to perceive the exotic through the familiar. The creation of the exotic is a familiar process. The exotic is the way ‘otherness’ is transformed into something familiar, and so the exotic cliché becomes more familiar than the actual reality. In fact, these clichés really belong to Western culture, and the real ‘other’ and experience of ‘otherness’ can only be accessed once you have accepted the idea of delusion and disappointment. You know human beings are still like kids, we take pleasure in hearing the stories we have been told before.

Mythology is an important theme in your work. But what’s its role in contemporary society?

It’s true. I’m fascinated by mythology because it represents the history of culture while also determining how we conceive culture too. Here in Rome, I’m in contact with mythology everyday, like the Baroque depictions of the story of Apollo and Daphne. I love that

The Pale Fox, 2014

Installation view, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2014
 Copyright ADAGP Camille Henrot
 Photo: Andy Keate
 Courtesy kamel mennour, Paris and
 Johann König, Berlin

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style because it's so excessive and I can see a strong connection between it and the swell of culture in our digital age today. In my opinion, mythology is re-entering humanity's consciousness through our relationship with the internet. The whole idea of what is true and what is not is being challenged by the accumulation of information. The experience of the internet is the experience of excess and it is also an experience of envy and jealousy. The least loveable and noble tendencies of man can be found online. The online perspective is not a very admirable or controlled image of human desire.

Your love for excess and its relation to obsolescence and uselessness is intriguing. In *The Pale Fox* there's a sculpture of a celotape dispenser, which seems to typify the banal and the redundant. You often seem to combine elements of high and low culture.

I spend a lot of time looking at the objects on my desk. Also, when I go to the doctor I am fascinated by what they have in their waiting rooms, on their desks, and the way these things are placed. The objects are supposed to represent power but they are also ridiculous. More often than not, the doctor will have one of those huge tape dispensers, which just look so silly. Every time I see them, I always think:

'Why would you have a tape holder that takes up all this room? Wouldn't it be more elegant to have a small tape in your drawer? And wouldn't it be even more elegant to just do everything on your iPad?' One day perhaps things like that won't exist anymore, who knows. Most of the bronzes in *The Pale Fox* were conceived out of this process in which we try to introduce rationality to something that is fundamentally irrational.

You create installations that appear to simulate the enveloping experience and flow of film.

Before I became an artist I wanted to be a feature film director like Steven Spielberg. I envy how music and cinema are able to engage the viewer. I like it when I feel completely immersed when experiencing art. Today, however, it is very difficult to concentrate on the experience of looking at art because there is always something there to distract us. I think that we have lost those intense, physical experiences art used to invoke because we are constantly interrupted and distracted. With regard to creating experiences, I have a utopian vision, which is something I tried to achieve with *The Pale Fox*. There is something ridiculous about attempting to immerse the viewer, and my aim is to create a situation that you will never find in another context. As an artist it is interesting to try to create a

space where people's minds feel more open to ideas.

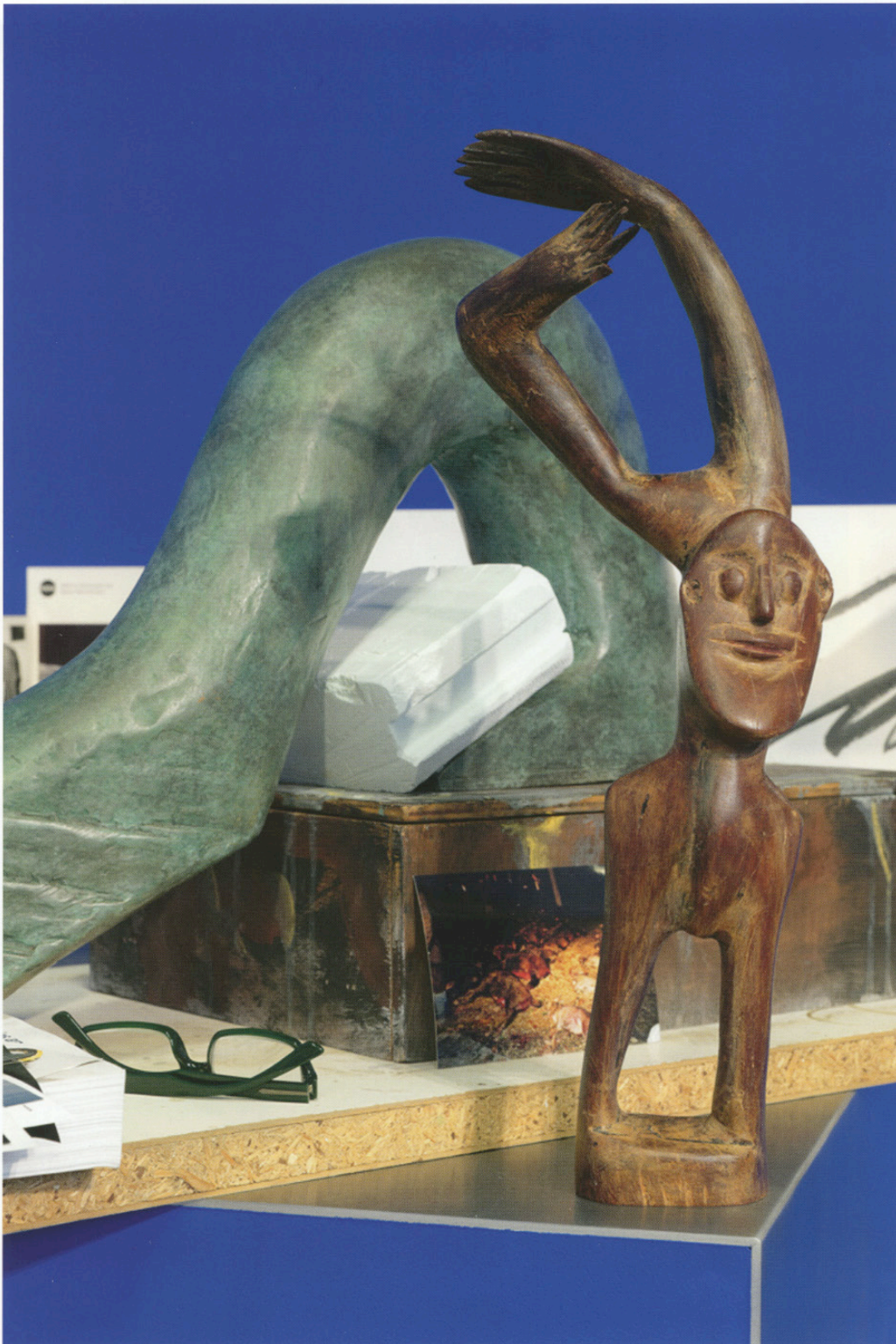
How do you order the disparate objects and materials you use in your installations?

It comes from a combination of a lot of things. It's a process that's related to madness but it's also about perfection. Nowadays, there seems to be this idea that everything has to make sense, and that if there's even one aspect of a work that doesn't make sense, then the entire thing has no meaning. It's like this anxiety that everything needs a place and if just one part of a work doesn't have one place then it means order collapses. But this isn't true, it's just a superstition.

Do you think this anxiety comes out of fear?

Yes, it's completely connected with fear, with the fear of death and the fear of disappearance. It's the same fear that brought about the origin





of the museum, or the same fear felt by the obsessive-compulsive person who accumulates newspapers. In my forthcoming book "Elephant Child" I outline one way of addressing this anxiety, which is by transforming systems into schemas, and by trying to connect everything, as my previous works

have done. Before I came up with this idea, I drew a diagram with the ages of man and different moments in the story of the universe highlighted by different colours and branches. This chart then became a map where I distributed the different categories between the four cardinal points of north,

south, east and west. What I wanted to do was explore how the symbolic network of the compass points could be combined with the initial diagram I had made in order to create new associations between the ages of man, geometric shapes, parts of the body, stages in the history of the universe and different

biological groups. The square is important because it represents an image of totality or exhaustion. This is something that Gilles Deleuze described very well in "The Exhausted", a text I read after finishing *The Pale Fox* and its predecessor *Grosse Fatigue* from 2013.



Compared to the rest of your material in *The Pale Fox*, your sculptures stand alone as very substantial yet quiet pieces. Do they represent some sort of therapy for you?

It's true that they have a very different energy from the rest of my work. When I think about the

exhibition I think that energy came from a sense of anxiety. However, the sculptures came from a more playful and distant part of myself. When I start making a sculpture and stop having fun, I stop making the sculpture and move onto another one. In a way, there is this part of my work that is very

disciplined and almost masochistic. The whole process of buying five hundred items on eBay and doing these charts and maps and studying them is a little mad. Just making the list for the exhibition was a headache. It was the same with *Grosse Fatigue*, writing the voice-over was such a long process. Editing the images was a nightmare and my assistant and I became really sick. There was a super-long list of different footage lines because there were more than 25

four times previously at the Chisenhale Gallery in London, the Kunsthal Charlottenborg in Copenhagen, the Bétonsalon Centre for Art and Research in Paris and the Westfälischer Kunstverein in Münster, it is less heavy to install. I am never happy with exhibitions because I always feel things could be done better, or I regret a choice I have made. So having the chance to reinstall a show several times, especially with a show that has more than 100 elements, has given

THERE IS SOMETHING RIDICULOUS ABOUT ATTEMPTING TO IMMERSE THE VIEWER

CAMILLE HENROT

images running simultaneously. It was really crazy, but I guess I'm driven by this idea of going to the brink of madness by trying to produce the impossible object.

How would you describe your aesthetic?

The word that comes to mind is messy. You can only work with chaos if you find an order in chaos. When I started working people were telling me, 'You are putting far too much in your exhibition, there are too many things, if you want to be elegant and be appreciated by critics just put one thing here and one thing over there.' I never did that, I always wanted everything to be in the same exhibition and put all my ideas in the same film. My aim was to create something that was extremely dense, which is probably a good way to describe my practice, too.

What are your upcoming projects?

I have a show in Berlin that will be the last iteration of *The Pale Fox*. Because I have installed it

me the opportunity to refine this question of choice. Maybe I am the only one who will notice, but I feel I have finally found the perfect place for each of the objects.

What is the perfect place?

There is a place that I consider satisfying for my mind and eye but it's not an easy place to find.

CAMILLE HENROT WILL EXHIBIT "THE PALE FOX" AT JOHANN KÖNIG, BERLIN IN SEPTEMBER 2015
WWW.JOHANNOENIG.DE

All images
The Pale Fox, 2014

Installation views, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2014
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Production (for Marton Perlaki portrait shoot):
FRANK SEIDLITZ