

THE GLEANERS

9.6. – 28.8.2023

EN

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi, Bastien Aubry, David Hammons,
Sophie Jung, Hannah Külling, Sveta Mordovskaya,
Selma Selman, Ser Serpas, Jiajia Zhang
Text by Estelle Hoy

Poor Form: No Shame, Just Worries
Documentary: 700856 hours 1 minute
35-mm hypercolor film
Lifelong Productions Pty Ltd
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[Act 1, Scene 1]

[ceramic cat enters stage left]

Agnès Varda strolls past in the distance, toes bare and deep in lovely ears of corn, whistling to herself the tune of a new wave at sneaky low tide where it's completely untrustworthy. One heart-shaped potato sits on a plate she'll eat for dinner and lunch, with demi-sel beurre she gleaned from her neighbor upstairs. Her neighbor collects porcelain cats in frozen ecstatic purrs, has bleeding goldfish, bleeding gums, and takes six-packs of Blue Moon in Tuesday dumpster dives. Varda steals the throw-aways from her neighbor for lack of economic restitutions from making films, saving time, and desultory efforts to take and remake. She accepts herself and all her dreary thefts.

Jean-François Millet's *The Gleaners* (1855) hangs low on a 19th-century picture rail in the kitchen of her apartment, with its checkered floors and blushing pink walls. Millet's blurred replication, printed at *Saint Gilles Librairie* with a failing ink jet, depicts hunchbacked gleaners in a field, bonnets askew. Notre Dames in freshly plowed pastures with oversized apron strings, stooped low, backs breaking, scavenging for morsels of throw-aways from landowners. Compositions of the endless detritus of social inequalities, gleaned *bonheur* together with their little time on earth. Their small, unyoked children, long untied from apron strings, are forced to gather scraps and find ways to live. Nothing is wasted. Finish your plate.

Setting: KRONE COURONNE gallery with a thick maroon door. Yellow archways opposite Antiquitäten and Boulangerie. Obergasse, Rue Haute 1.

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2-star Michelin meals fall into the laps of nine artists gathered for KRONE COURONNE's exhibition 'The Gleaners'; if they don't, they'll damn well pick them up from the ground. Selma Selman (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Ser Serpas (USA), David Hammons (USA), Sveta Mordovskaya (Russia), Sophie Jung (Luxembourg), Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi (Afghanistan), Bastien Aubry (Switzerland), Hannah Külling (Switzerland), and Jiajia Zhang (China), join the wheatfields of KRONE COURONNE, to examine the semiology of gleaning. Waste and leftovers become aesthetic.

[Centre stage: nine by-product artists and a stolen Edgar Allen Poe raven]

Gleaning in art, aka plagiarism, is a practice that mediates between the problem of individuation and the complexity of a constituting environment. It confuses the relationship between past and present, phylogeny and ontogeny, sustainability and consumption, and authorship and availability—clocks without hands. Little artist grave robbers are gleaning images, words, ideas, and scores facing the dissolution of ownership, together and alone, in a newly industrialized society. Like the traditional depictions of agrarian gleaners in Jean-François Millet's oeuvre, the artist's pursuit is the same: trying not to starve. We invent a new aesthetic authority out of the bones of desperation, fulfilling the task by making the very transmissibility of art a new value and putting the experience of shock at the center of artistic labor. Romantic or not, it's a genuine work of thought. Nonetheless, nothing is wasted. Finish your plate.

END SCENE

As far as Agnès Varda is concerned, gleaning is not the problem or even a problem. It's a resourceful, astute, socially responsible, necessary form that doesn't simulate other works in hostility but reuses/recalibrates the work and is on its way. However, so far as many are concerned:

1. Gleaning in art is theft, a plagiarist that steals the artistic manoeuvres and ideas of others. *It's not fair to other artists, a sin!* Harked the raven. But why should gleaning in art be held to affect everybody? Is 'one' artist ever really just 'one' in the realm of aesthetics? Unlikely

2. It's a false work, not the real thing. Gleaning is a violent effacement: the gleaner effaces the name, artwork, property, and being of the Other as they trace their illicit program. *Nevermore!* Harked the raven.

Perhaps speculative artistic gleaning is a critique of judgment, and what's interesting about moralism is that it's a byproduct of shame. Gleaners don't have the luxury of shame; there's too much at stake, too many ravens pecking at scarecrows, nibbling on ears of corn and leftover wheat straws. Gleaning is the byproduct of the careless extravagance of capitalism, demonstrates Agnès Varda, and we'd do well to recycle its waste in artistic ambition. Her hairdo doubles as a helmet. And besides, gleaning is an ontological condition and magnificently unavoidable. We all do it. In fact, it's the very condition of language; we are not infinitely-vigilant-selves in language, politics, or art. Every linguistic utterance is always *already* a bricolage of pre-existing materials. Here enters a wide shot of Roland Barthe's slothlike dictum against Millet's hunchbacked gleaners

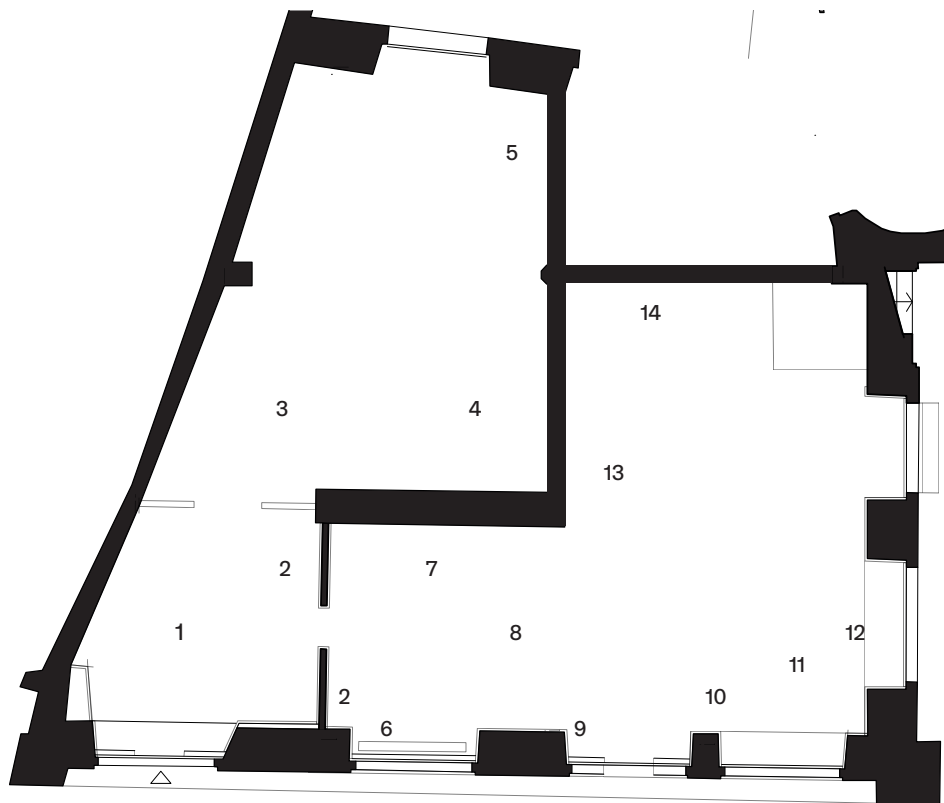
in their field, bonnets askew: *'The quotations from which a text is constructed are anonymous, irrecoverable and yet already read: they are quotations without quotation marks'* (Barthes 1989).

Is it so difficult to be original that it is impossible?

Varda never demonized nor affirmed plagiarism; she merely highlighted the matter of economic competition through sleek, bleak stills of those who matter, that glean, or gleaned, or will glean once more. Hard-won lives, the wheat pickers, the peasant artists, scrambling to use the crumbs of time, and resources they have, dutifully, unethically, taking back agency from an unfavorable constituting environment. Then curating the fuck out of it. As such, the poor form of gleaning vitiates every putative individuality and, *a fortiori*, every such individuality's powers of decision-making. They are making their own strokes of luck. Bad artists borrow, good artists steal outright. Has a gleaner done any work? The most of all, actually.

Let's try not to starve, harked the raven. Nevermore.

FADE OUT



1.
Sveta Mordovskaya
Kristina, 2023
Dimension variable
Courtesy the artist
2.
Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi
Male extinction 1, Male extinction 3
Mixed media and shirts, 75 x 55 cm
Courtesy Galerie Maria Bernheim
3.
Hannah Külling
Die Braut entblösst den Junggesellen und betrachtet seine Form, sogar, 2005
Courtesy the artist
4.
Ser Serpas
Conjoining fabricated excesses literal end to a mean, 2021
Found objects assembled, wood, textiles
Courtesy Collection Lafayette Anticipations – Fonds de dotation Famille Moulin, Paris
5.
David Hammons
Phat Free, 1995-1999
Video transferred to DVD, 5"20"
Courtesy Collection S.M.A.K., Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent
6.
Bastien Aubry
Hot Chair 1, 2, 3, 5, 8
Chairs, pizza boxes, wood
Courtesy the artist
7.
Selma Selman
Painting on metal, 2019-2020
acrylic on scrap metal
136 x 143 x 27 cm
Courtesy the artist; acb Galeria Budapest
8.
Selma Selman
Painting on metal, 2022
acrylic on scrap metal
43 x 32 x 32 cm
Courtesy the artist; acb Galeria Budapest
9.
Selma Selman
Mercedes Matrix, 2022
Video work
Courtesy the artist
10.
Sophie Jung
Get in Loser, 2023
Fish toy, marble, Neptune balls, crab, mechanical dog, rearview mirror, c-print photograph
Courtesy the artist
11.
Sophie Jung
Gut strings a corner a coroner
Has concluded:
Intest in test interesimated equal to cabi net balls have
Crossed the line.
Love is a lack of score. Armless banter on the tell leave the tubes out of it.
There is no screen there is no scream in love.
Sand courted him over the rail linger
To see him cross the rail track suit bottoms up I g'ated his guts a gated communion.
A trinity gritty af fair game. Love. Lost.
2023
Personal photograph, baby mannequin hand, cathode-ray tube tv cabinet, trolley gates, tennis racket
Courtesy the artist
12.
Sophie Jung
Phatty (seal dribble) 2023
Fat and mould covered plastic bucket, porcelain seal, Monobloc throne
Courtesy the artist
13.
Jiajia Zhang
Between the Acts, 2022
HD Video, 38'33", 16:9, color, sound
Courtesy the artist
14.
Hannah Külling
Beziehungssystem I-IV, 1993
Courtesy the artist
15.
Sveta Mordovskaya
Shells are Spines, 2019-2023
Installation of 5 sculptures of various sizes
Clay, papier-mâché, latex, lack, wood, paint, nail polish, hair, tape, found objects
Courtesy the artist; Weiss Falk Gallery Basel/Zurich

Bastien Aubry (1974, St-Imier, lives in Zürich) uses everyday objects as the starting point for adaptations and abstractions. He mixes up primitive craftsmanship, design and pop culture with a playfully ironic regard. His creations celebrate the poetry of failure and the beauty of the less than perfect, an accident by design. The artist stages reality in his own world, exposing everyday absurdities and toying with the boundaries set by traditional artistic practices.

Sitara Abuzar Ghaznawi (1995, Afghanistan, lives in Zürich) transgress forms and space through her assemblages, revealing a questioning of institutional structures and ideas of craft and taste. In her sculptural transformations, she insists on maintaining the visibility of the lowly beginnings of her materials, forming a strong and shameless visual language.

David Hammons (1943, Springfield, USA; lives in New York) is one of the most important Afro-American artists of our time. Hammons developed his own vocabulary using symbols from everyday life – often rubbish and banal objects – that he associates with the urbanised Afro-American life. In his installations, videos, drawings, paintings and performances he mixes this personal vocabulary with references to Western art history, which affords many of his works an ironic charge. In 'Phat Free' a man walks in the dark through the streets of a city, kicking a metal bucket in front of him. The video is based on a performance Hammons gave in the street (possibly in New York) in 1995. 'Phat Free' is an allusion to 'Fat Free', used to refer to healthy food. In the dialect of the Afro-American community during the Eighties and Nineties 'phat' also meant 'cool', 'sexy' or 'great'. The word regularly crops up in the powerful bass lines and drum beats of hip-hop. Hammons appears to refer to the rhythmic sounds in this video. Due to the lack of imagery in the first section and the vague connotations of the word 'phat', it is not easy to interpret this work unambiguously. This obstinacy is not coincidental: Hammons admits that he prefers to work for random passers-by on the street than for an elite art audience.

Sophie Jung (lives in Basel and Rome) works across text, sculpture and performance, navigating the politics of representation and challenging the selective silencing that happens by concluding. She employs humour, shame, the absurd, raw anger, rhythm and rhyme, slapstick, hardship, friendship and a constant stream of slippages. Sabotaging readings of assumed and assigned norms, she highlights the structural powers and catechizes the mechanism around the making of meaning as such.

Hannah Külling (1964, Biel/Bienne) works autobiographically and performatively through installations, photography and sculptures. In her work, she relates her own experiences to historical, political and social events of the present. She deals with themes that go beyond personal experiences and the world of thought, touching on universal experiences such as the relationship to the father, feminism or sexual liberation.

Sveta Mordovskaya (1989, Russia, lives in Zürich)'s sculptural work deals with how architecture and everyday objects manipulating the mechanisms of seeing. She seeks to confront herself with everyday objects as well as with the physical and familiar relationships she creates with them. Subtle discrepancies between the status of things and the symbolism they convey open up a space of poetry and humour. The result is often the joyful archaeology of an absent society.

Selma Selman (1991, Bosnia-Herzegovina, lives in Amsterdam) is artist and activist. Her artistic practice is multidisciplinary, including painting, installations and performance. Her works alternate between sensitive, harsh and ironic gestures that reveal identity attributes, role expectations and stereotypes. By repeatedly using the motif of scrap metal (both collecting and recycling), Selman questions the ways that society assigns value to material objects, labour and how we relate to them both.

Ser Serpas (1995, USA, lives in Paris) was born in the Los Angeles neighbourhood of Boyle Heights, an area with a history of radical leftist (i.e., socialist and communist) activism. Serpas adopted a practice primarily invested in critiquing and celebrating the value (or lack thereof) of material objects. Whether made from discarded detritus found on the street or from hoarded fabric gifted to Serpas by her friends, these reworked objets d'art exist in and out of value, troubling our attachment to what would otherwise be garbage.

Jiajia Zhang (1981, China, lives in Zürich) makes collages of videos, film clips, and other forms of moving image, which she extracts from the internet's endless sea, private family archives, or her own day-to-day image production. The work *Between the Acts* is a treasure trove of found footage, which Zhang compellingly weaves into a loose but striking narrative, consisting of affects and emotional triggers. An eclectic synthesis of various fragments of reality, it paints a picture of an unsettled present in which mellow humor seems to be the only possible response to overwhelming crises.

The exhibition is supported by:
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