

JANNIS VARELAS **»BROWN BOX AND THE BROKEN THEATER«**

OPENING: WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 7 PM

EXHIBITION DURATION: FEBRUARY 8 – MARCH 9, 2012

Brazenly unbound by medium Jannis Varelas' practice effortlessly leaps from large scale multimedia drawings to sculptures, to videos and video props such as set design objects and video backgrounds along with installations which flirt with materialistic lowness. Prioritizing the fragmented over a systematic whole he proposes novel pictorial possibilities through a constant negation of stylistic coherence. His figures and other imitations of the human form have a symbolic value while anatomy (eyes, vulvas, feet, phalluses) acts as an anagram of infinite permutations. Throughout his works, a blunt presentation of desire, horror, mess and perversity can be approached as a committed effort to unmask and demystify signifiers, symbols and archetypes. All the while he keeps throwing in nagging questions about human nature with an emphasis on highlighting identity's constructed and manufactured quality.

Varelas' new body of work underlines the inherently theatrical nature of his practice and offers an occasion to untangle his stylistic and referential nets. Late 70's and 80's TV-shows made for kids, "The Theatre of the Absurd" and Jean Genet's play *The Maids* (a story of suppressed violence and ceremonial murder written in 1945 and first staged in 1947) appear to be the vortex from which his current works emerge and create the dialectical relation between the uncanny and the recollection of a known experience.

The notorious French novelist-poet-thief argued that we're all controlled by the fear of poverty and his controversial plays are depictions of ritual struggles between the dispossessed and their oppressors. In a world where the majority feels cheated by the distance between expectations and reality, Genet's prose is undoubtedly relevant; but beyond the typology of the master and servant archetypes, the codes of representation and the codes of behavior become entangled in Varelas' approach.

In his video installation *Solange's Dream*, Varelas exploits the durational nature of the medium and the traditional structure of beginning, middle and end by breaking down the story and reordering the expected sequences of the play. Like recovered memories, these temporal distortions generate an ambivalent state of dream and fantasy in which realities are replaced by absurd reflections and offer a greater fluidity of meaning.

At the same time his handmade marionette-protagonist like in many contemporary art-works acts as a surrogate - similar to what Thomas Ligotti characterizes in *The Conspiracy Against The Human Race* as the 'malignantly useless' nature of the world, luring out the sculptural and performative opportunities that puppetry provides.

For the main part of this show Varelas found in *The Maids* the perfect double entendre, 'the crudest metaphor' available to represent his interest in the consequences of human pretensions, the implications of abnormal behavior (in Foucault's sense of the term) and the contrast between appearance and reality. By adapting such a play and using it not as allegory or manifesto but as a story, he creates a 'drama of signs', a riddle wrapped in an enigma. A clever strategy and apparently the essential 'Règle du Jeu' so that the game might go on; thus, Varelas attests that there is no synthesis, just perpetual dialectics: antithesis-thesis-antithesis-thesis...

In the show, the viewer can also see *Brown Box*, a room installation containing "puppet drawings", made as a starting point for the artist's new project, an imaginary TV-show, "The Blind Man". A three-episode video work taking its title from the New York Dada journal *The Blind Man*, published by New York Dadaists in 1917. The installation is a glimpse on Varelas' new fractional video piece, which will be made out of three parts, combining the theatrical plot of Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* with the neurotic narrative structure of live TV-shows, featuring games for under aged kids. The piece aims to create an absurd existentialist tragicomedy.

Special thanks to: Xenia Kalpaktsoglou

Part of the text us taken from the catalogue of the DESTE prize of 2011, where Jannis Varelas was a nominee and was written by Xenia Kalpaktsoglou (Co-curator of the Athens Biennial).