

THE DEATH OF K9 CIGO / THE SKY IS ON FIRE

A diptych by Emmanuel Van der Auwera

HARLAN LEVEY PROJECTS: Opening on 05.09.2019, from 18:00-21:00 - Exhibition runs from 05.09 - 14.12.2019

LE BOTANIQUE: Opening on 04.09.2019, from 18:00-21:00 - Exhibition runs from 05.09 - 3.11.2019

During Brussels Gallery Weekend 2019, Harlan Levey Projects and Le Botanique present two new films by Emmanuel Van der Auwera.

The "The Sky is on Fire" (10 min., 2019) and "The Death of K9 Cigo" (22 min., 2019) are good examples of Van der Auwera's research into how technological developments alter our way of seeing, understanding and interacting with the world. Like many of his works, the point of departure is in the blur of taboo or tragedy and the location is set in the grey zones connecting documentary, reconstruction and fictional genres to map the intersections of physical and digital space. Similar to other recent films including "A Certain Amount of Clarity," "Central Alberta," "Missing Eyes" and "Wake Me Up at 4:20," linear narrative and the notion of a singular story take a backseat to questioning the nature of and need for, stories themselves. In the digital age, they come at us in a sort of onslaught, cascading towards black holes and black boxes. Stories buried within stories, fragments of one becoming fuller pictures of another even when the actual event and actors it speaks of remain out of sight. How do we see what's beyond our scope? How do we stitch together all the fragments we pick up of a story spinning through cyberspace?

While researching the Parkland school shooting in 2018, Van der Auwera constructed an extensive archive of Periscope videos, which were destined for deletion. He also made several trips to Miami to explore the area himself. "The Death of K9 Cigo" begins with a video of a man sitting in his car. The man is clearly troubled. He comforts himself with the idea that nothing will ever be destroyed or lost, because everything is being backed up and technology will save us. It's a transhumanistic position, which may have a point. We are so adept at destroying our own creations, perhaps our immense digital image banks are the pyramids of the future so to speak.

Both films are constructed using a mobile phone. This is the only tool that gives access to the applications that were used to capture (The Death of K-9 Cigo) and create (The Sky is on Fire) images. Each addresses the limits of photography in a different way as images are folded together to construct particular spaces and objects in a way that creates an uncanny non-place. We could say that each film maps a different aspect of this non-place and the peripheral events that shape it. The Sky is on Fire maps a territory by reconstructing it with SCAN3D, the same tool used by Google Earth. The Death of K-9 Cigo maps Miami through a citizen lens over the course of a year following a traumatic event.

A clear motivation behind these two films is to try and make sense of horror that has no sense. Instead of making this horror (or an event that brings it forward), the main subject, the films focus more on how images surrounding such an event, move, transform, and enter a mediatized mise en abyme. As a viewer, it's this projected loop we enter; a disturbing conversation about guns and violence, where an actual fire arm never appears.

Emmanuel Van der Auwera (b. 1982, Belgium) lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. Through filmmaking, video sculpture, theatre, printmaking, and other media, Van der Auwera sets up encounters with found images that provoke a questioning of our visual literacy: How do images of contemporary mass media operate on various publics, and to what end? With the formal rigor of a logician, the artist dissects how images are engineered, mastering specialized industry techniques and intervening on their protocol. In so doing, Van der Auwera brings us no closer to a monolithic truth, but constructs new paradigms for reading images and understanding our relationships with them.

Van der Auwera is a 2015 Laureate of the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK) post-academic course in Ghent and a 2015 Langui Award recipient of the Young Belgian Art Prize. His work has recently been featured in exhibitions at WIELS (Brussels, Belgium), The Centre Pompidou (Paris, France), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, France), Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci (Prato, Italy), Ars Electronica (Linz, Austria), Casino Luxembourg - Forum d'art contemporain (Luxembourg City, Luxembourg), and Mu.ZEE (Ostend, Belgium), among others. His work was recently acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art (Dallas, TX, USA), KANAL Centre - Pompidou (Brussels, Belgium), Mu.ZEE (Ostend, Belgium) and the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art (Eugene, OR).