

TANYA LEIGHTON

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Aurélien Gamboni

A Wall, A Snake, A Spear, A Tree, A Fan, A Rope

Tanya Leighton Gallery

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Aurélien Gamboni's A Wall, A Snake, A Spear, A Tree, A Fan, A Rope addresses the indisputable necessity, yet inevitable failure, of attempts at narrative globalization. The title refers to the parable of The Blind Men and the Elephant, an ancient Asian tale that has circulated widely in numerous variations – including Jainist, Chinese, Japanese and Persian translations – as well as an adaptation by the 19th-century American poet John Godfrey Saxe. In most of these versions, six blind men are gathered around an elephant and asked to describe what sort of animal they think stands before them. Each of them touches a different part of the animal: the man who touches its stomach claims it to be like a wall, while the one who touches its nose declares it to be like a snake, another interprets the tusk as a spear. Likewise, the leg is pronounced to be a tree, the ear a fan, and the tail a rope. The blind men argue together and start fighting over what they each believe to be the truth.

Gamboni adopts and translates this tale as a conceptual proposition: six elements (a wall, a snake etc) comprise to form an installation where a 'battle of narrative' is staged, and a 'theatricalization' between the various drawings, sculptures, and installation is played out. As in Gamboni's practice more broadly, the act of revisiting, reconnecting and rearticulating ideas, systems, and models from the past is an attempt to approach our present economic, social and political crisis, and the accompanying 'crisis of meaning'.

Through 'combined drawings' and sculptures, Gamboni evokes a collage method that is by necessity dialectic, yet one that can appear misleading, even purposefully deceptive (echoing the kind of deception generated by '*trompe l'oeil*' – formerly a high-brow genre, now considered a rather vulgar effect of illusion). The various subjects alluded to in 'A Wall, A Snake...', such as the work of Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader and the myth surrounding his disappearance at sea, or the crime and conspiracy network drawings of Mark Lombardi and his suspicious suicide, become allegories of narrative rupture. References to breaking, falling and failing, and to the context and interpretation of the 'rupture' remain implicit throughout Gamboni's practice. 'A Wall, A Snake...' reinforces the impossibility of reaching a conclusive meaning or homogeneity, emphasizes the positive effect of maintaining incompleteness and a continuously dynamic interrelation between parts.

Aurélien Gamboni (b. 1979, Lausanne) lives and works in Geneva. His recent exhibitions include: The Big Picture, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin, 2009; Fragile Monuments, curated by Eva Scharrer, Susie Q Projektraum, Zürich, 2009; Swiss Art Awards, Basel, 2007/2008/2009; September Show, Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin, 2008; Aurum, Centre PasquArt, Bienne, Switzerland, 2008; If It's A Bird, Shoot It!, Sculpture Center, New York, 2008.