



Video still
from Gabriel
Fritzkortner's
mixed-medium
installation
*Crepusculum
Sculptures*, 2011, in
the Lyon Biennale.

Lyon Biennale

Lyon — various venues

The 12th installment of the Lyon Biennale, titled "Meanwhile . . . Suddenly and Then," is the third and last to address the theme of "transmission." Since 1991, the biennale's artistic director, Thierry Raspail, has guided the event under broad conceptual terms like "global" and "history," each spanning three biennales and each with a different curator. For this year's show, he enlisted Icelandic-born curator and museum director Gunnar B. Kvaran.

In formulating the exhibition, Kvaran connected the theme of transmission to the idea of narrative. While it may seem that everything can tell a tale, for the purposes of a sprawling international show that attempts to reflect the moment as well as propose a future, the idea serves quite well. Roe Ethridge's *Self-portrait with a black eye* (2000-02) appears on the catalogue cover as well as on promotional posters and billboards, conveying one way an artwork can suggest a story. The show features the work of 77 artists displayed in five main venues. It also encompasses a number of satellite exhibition spaces in and around this historic city, including the medieval Saint-Just church in the city's ancient quarter, where Tom Sachs installed *Barbie Slave*

Ship, an elaborate 12-foot-high sculpture of a ship filled with dolls, guns and bottles of booze.

It must be noted that the biennale happens to coincide with one of the best Venice Biennale presentations in many years, and the younger endeavor pales beside the venerable extravaganza. That said, overall, the Lyon venture feels fresh and strong, and there are some stunning works on view—including a number of pieces commissioned for the occasion.

American artist Dan Colen kicks off the show with a sculptural installation in the first gallery at the Sucrière, the biennale's principal venue, a three-story former warehouse and sugar-processing plant. Here, four large realist figures are scattered around the room, lying on the floor. Three of them depict the cartoon characters Roger Rabbit, Wile E. Coyote and the Kool-Aid Man, while the fourth is a life-size, painted-resin portrait of the artist, nude on his back with legs spread and sporting a semi hard on. (The grouping relates to a performance Colen orchestrated and filmed in Grigny, outside Lyon, a week prior to the biennale's opening.) One of the gallery's plasterboard walls

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has a cutout in the shape of the figures' silhouettes, as if they had just crashed through it.

Among other Sucrière standouts is *Even Pricks*, a video by London-based Ed Atkins, commissioned by the biennale. It's a manic, mesmerizing film addressing the theme of depression. Quickly evolving animation sequences and flashes of invented advertising and promotional sound bites suggest the random channel surfing of someone with a serious case of ADD. Another highlight, by Icelandic artist Gabriela Fridriksdóttir, *Crepusculum Sculpture* (2011), features a large podlike dome with an opening on each side. Abstract video images are projected onto sand piles spilling out from one side of the structure, and a video on a large screen shows the pod in the middle of a wind-blown desert, the centerpiece of some sci-fi fantasy.

Chinese artist Xu Zhen and his MadeIn Company steal the Sucrière show with an intricate installation, also a biennale commission. *The Physique of Consciousness Museum* consists of a gallery filled with vitrines as one might find in a history museum, each containing a display of small photographs in Plexiglas frames. The work explores what Xu defines in a wall text as "culture fitness exercise," symbolic human gestures such as saluting, bowing or making the sign of the cross. A great deal of research obviously went into gathering the images of historic figures—from Hitler to the pope—and reproductions of famous artworks; the photos are often surprising and hilarious.

At the Musée d'art contemporain, the selections seem a bit tighter conceptually. Robert Gober shows the doll-

house sculptures he made in the 1970s and '80s, and Bjarne Melgaard presents a homoerotic and intentionally chaotic installation of mannequins, gaudy found objects and a semi-pornographic video using puppets. One of the most riveting works, *Il était une fois...* (Once Upon a Time, 2013), by French artist Antoine Catala, features five video sculptures in which images are projected onto various materials. For example, an island can be seen on dry-ice fog. The verbal equivalents of the images together compose the installation's title (Île, etc.). U.S.-born, Berlin-based Jason Dodge takes a minimalist approach in his installation of pillows strewn on the floor. The wall captions reveal that the pillows were used by individuals, including the mayor of a small town and a knife-maker. Relying on the notion of absence, as well as the viewer's imagination, Dodge successfully opens up the concept of narrative.

—David Ebony