

MASK

Nobuyoshi Araki
Mohamed Bourouissa
Michel François
Alberto García-Alix
Petrit Halilaj
Camille Henrot
Cameron Jamie
Bertrand Lavier
Claude Lévêque
Matthew Lutz-Kinoy
Pierre Molinier
Daido Moriyama
Ugo Rondinone

June 28 – July 28, 2018

The group show 'MASK' is accessible from Monday to Saturday, 10:00 am to 6 pm, at 51 Brook Street, Mayfair, London.

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In summer 2018, Kamel Mennour is pleased to present 'MASK', an exhibition in the London gallery, tracing an outline of artists' experimentations with the concept of the mask in photography, sculpture and collage.

The exhibition adopts the format of the cabinet of curiosities to explore the myriad of renditions through which the mask is investigated in the practices of thirteen of the gallery's artists.

The mask is often used as a way of disguising, deceiving and performing notions of identity and selfhood. Artists reference or directly appropriate the "primitive" notion of the mask, constantly evolving it by decontextualizing it and placing it in a present-day context. This process reveals hidden, or rather "masked" truths on the artist's self, or more broadly, society as a whole, touching on notions of gender, class, and power structures.

Ugo Rondinone appropriates the aesthetics of tribal African masks yet adding the wink, a symbol widely found in today's iconography of dialectics. The result is a sculptural object that reminisces on the timelessness of the mask throughout history.

Other works deeply rooted within the duality of the historical and contemporary iconography of the mask are those by French artist Camille Henrot. Her interests go beyond the art-historical and delve into the realms of mythology and anthropology; hence the viewer often encounters the mask as one of the artist's idiosyncratic ways of interpreting the human condition.

Petrit Halilaj's practice is at once autobiographical and grounded in history, particularly that of his country, Kosovo. The sculpture *Do you realise there is a rainbow even if it's night?!* is made of Kilim rugs which his mother stitched so as to transform them into moth-like forms which are both fictional and surreal, reminiscent of Kafkaesque notions of metamorphosis, transformation and concealment, a refuge from the absurdities of contemporary existence.

Claude Lévêque perceives adolescence as the pure version of one's self, later masked by the maturity that comes with adulthood. *Lose Myself*, an appropriation of Eminem's lyrics, touches on this notion of losing one's childhood to adulthood.

For the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the artist's ability to reveal the truth beneath the surface, thus acting as an intermediary between the spectator and reality, forced the artist to carry the burden of constantly wearing a mask.

Michel François investigates contemporary reality and psychology. In *Le monde et les bras* the viewer is confronted with the artist Ann Veronica Janssens dipping her face in a white liquid, resulting in a partial masking of her face.

Pierre Molinier, an artist that has always transcended categorization, chronicled his explorations into his subconscious transgender desires through the medium of photography. Behind a black mask and dressed in stockings, at times becoming the subject of his own art, he was concerned with liberating man's latent eroticism, yet still using the mask to veil his identity.

Sublimating a human-like appearance, Cameron Jamie's seemingly shapeless ceramic sculptures morph into ethereal masks as the viewer approaches the sculpture.

Another L.A. artist, Matthew Lutz-Kinoy confidently sways from painting to theatre to ceramics. For the exhibition, the artist created a series of clay masks that allude to the transient aspects of identity and the body.

Mohamed Bourouissa's *Le Cercle Imaginaire*, from the series 'Péripherique', allows the subject of the photograph to imagine a place beyond the fire, or the periphery to which he is relegated. Here the artist works with an idea of play (the mask) and death (the fire) to escape from the reality of the suburban tragedy, a way of transcending the condition to which an individual is constrained in society.

The photographs of Alberto García-Alix evoke a psychology of emotions. The self-portrait *Gemelos* creates a double identity for his persona by overlapping a mask of sorts over his face, almost as if to suggest another self, hidden beneath the surface.

Daido Moriyama positions his subject in the shadows, concealing his identity from the eyes of the spectator. His oeuvre depicts the breakdown of traditional values in post-war Japan with brutally honest portraits of Tokyo's dark underbelly, usually well hidden beneath the mask of accepted societal norms.

Nobuyoshi Araki proposes yet another side of Japanese society, one that is explicitly erotic. His rendition of the eroticised body in dialogue with florals proposes a still life which masks the psycho-sexual desire of the Japanese people, or even the spectator.

A more ironic approach is that employed by French artist Bertrand Lavier, who uses humour as a form of play, referencing the Duchampian ready-made in order to draw a caricature of himself, high culture and fine arts. The diving mask *Tusa*, specially conceived for the exhibition, stands as a testament to his overall practice, the masking of low culture through artistic devices, in this case the plinth.