

Forest On Location

Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács

Curated by Vicky Moufawad-Paul



Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács, *Forest on Location*, 2018, HD Video, Sound, 11'45 minutes. Image Courtesy of AKINCI, Amsterdam.

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A Space Gallery . 401 Richmond Street West . Suite 110

In their video, animation, and graphic works, Persijn Broersen and Margit Lukács consider the intertwined relationships between reality, media, and fiction. Their first solo exhibition in Canada comprises two of their video installations, *Forest on Location* (2018) and *Mastering Bambi* (2010), both of which take nature as their subject matter and work to unhinge hegemonic ways of looking at landscape.

Mastering Bambi (2010) is a remake of the 1942 Disney animated film. The camera pans and settles on tree branches where one would expect to see birds and adorable woodland creatures, yet in the artists' version the forest is empty of figures and the land itself becomes the focus. The soundtrack, in which upbeat choruses give way to frenzied and brooding strings, suggests a dramatic narrative that does not materialize. Instead of a narrative arc, the video draws attention to the fantasy of a pristine wilderness and the related constructed notion of *terra nullius*: land deemed empty and considered free to take and colonize. The video asserts the role of lens-based media in shaping utopian narratives of conquest.

In *Forest on Location* (2018) the animated figure of Iranian opera singer Shahram Yazdani walks through a forest. The forest appears to be uprooted and floats around in darkness. Broersen and Lukács—who are based in Amsterdam—travelled to the Białowieża Forest in Poland and created a three-dimensional digital rendering from multiple photographs. The Białowieża Forest is one of the last parts of the primeval forest that once covered much of Central Europe. Throughout its history, the forest has been viewed as both a cultural and historical construct and as a fought-over economic resource. Despite its status as a UNESCO World Heritage site, its continued existence, until recently, was threatened by extensive logging. Unlike regulated forests in much of Europe, the forest of Białowieża was allowed to remain wild because of the mythology of untamed wilderness that was part of local hunting rituals. The forest is tied to old-Germanic nostalgia and reminiscent of the sinister Brothers Grimm fairy tales.



Persijn Broersen & Margit Lukács, *Mastering Bambi*, 2010, HD Video, Sound, 12'30 minutes. Image Courtesy of AKINCI, Amsterdam.

The avatar of Yazdani sings Nat King Cole's 1948 hit song, "Nature Boy." The song is typically credited to American Eden Ahbez, although the melody has been claimed by Herman Yablokoff, a Yiddish composer from the area of Białowieża Forest. The song, which is about magic, fairytales, and love, has been sung by many, including David Bowie and Lady Gaga. Selecting this song, which has disputed origins and has been translated widely, illustrates how influence is multidirectional. Claims to origin, influence, and credit are complex, as the source of wilderness, inspiration, and magic cannot simply be attributed to one place or time. The socially constructed and highly politicized ways of viewing landscape and nature are complicated. Disney's *Bambi* and the Białowieża Forest hold influential places in our collective imagination, as two sources in the intertextual collage of the fantasy of seeing and understanding our ecosystem. The current moment of climate crisis and COVID-19 pandemic create urgency in finding strategies for interrogating people's fantasies and assumptions around land, nature, origins, and our place in all of it.

-Vicky Moufawad-Paul, Curator

BIOGRAPHIES

Margit Lukács and **Persijn Broersen** are artists based in Amsterdam. In today's visual culture, fiction is usurping the place of reality. Broersen & Lukács respond to this by creating video that present a parallel world of spectacular images that fully absorb the viewer in which 'nature' acts as a mirror for our media-dictated culture. Their films and installations have been shown internationally at a.o. Biennale of Sydney (AU), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (NL), Rencontres Arles (FR), Art Wuzhen (CN), MUHKA (BE), Centre Pompidou (FR) and Casa Encendida (ES).

Upcoming shows are at Rencontres, Le grand Palais (FR), A4Art Museum, (CN), Eres Foundation (DE), HeK (CH), Auckland Art Gallery (NZ). Recently their publication 'All, or Nothing at All' was released with texts by Juliana Engberg, Nat Muller and Alena Alexandrova.

Vicky Moufawad-Paul is a Toronto based curator and writer. She is the Director/Curator at A Space Gallery. She has curated exhibitions across Canada and published texts on a variety of art practices.

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