

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Gabriel Lester

Shake a Face

23 Nov 2018 – 12 Jan 2019

Opening: Friday 23 Nov, 6–9 pm

Slowly, she had found her way through the seaside village, to eventually end up in the harbour. There she stood. Her red hair blowing fiercely in the wind, her hands deep in her pockets. Her hair was too vibrant to be her natural colour, clearly recently dyed. Below her, the waves crashed into the shore. She looked out over the wild sea that seemed to extend itself endlessly. She felt as thinly spread as the surface of the water, reaching out with no end. Not so long ago everything was different, everything about her was different. Both her outside and her inside felt like a coat that was a size too large, uncomfortable but not unpleasant. At the moment, the coat did its service of protecting her against the strong wind. She realized that nothing is as fickle as humankind. Every kind of nature adapts to their circumstances. The lights of the fishing boats shimmered in the distance.

In *Shake a Face* – Gabriel Lester's 7th solo exhibition at Galerie Fons Welters that also marks his 20th anniversary with the gallery in January 2019 - he shows new sculptural work. Each of these works explores metamorphosis and change as mythological phenomenon and within contemporary society. The three metal sculptures that together form the *Hungry Ghosts* refer to Chinese Buddhist entities who act according to animal instincts. The individual names of the works, *Ooh Dah Dut*, *Wee Shu Vah* and *Skwee Doot*, refer to *scat*, the improvised jazz vocalisation of words without concrete meaning. The *Hungry Ghosts* each display recognisable human or animal features: eyes and a mouth. Light falls through these perforated eyes and mouths, creating a triptych of geometric shapes at the back of the sculptures.

In the *Shape Shifter (Sonic Avatars)* series, Lester plays with the representation of humankind and how this develops and changes. The works show the contours of different faces, of which the side-view consists of a thin metal chain. These works are inspired by toys from the fifties, known as *Shake-a-Face*. Lester replaces the faces by avatars – stylized drawings of faces, popular on social media as user profile – and placing these on speakers that play soft *drum-and-bass* beats. The facial expressions change through the shaking of the box. The avatar, and therefore the corresponding identity of the user, is as such unstable and infinitely variable. A third interpretation of change is reflected in *Pots Trauma (Back on Track aka Resurrection)*. This work consists of five tumbled over houseplants, made of sand and hardened epoxy, that nevertheless seem to have grown towards the sunlight. The composition refers to the phenomenon of 'tropism', in which an organism evolves according to the circumstances in which it must survive. To Lester, the houseplants represent resurrection and reincarnation, themes that were the subject of Lester's solo exhibition *The Return of Lester's Loops*, in the Groninger Museum (Groningen, NL).

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

In addition to these new sculptural series, Lester adds in *Shake a Face* to his existing oeuvre and shows three low resolution LED screens. Two LED screens show montages of video recordings that Lester also showed during his first exhibition in the gallery. These videos were recorded by a camera mounted to an industrial robotic arm, in which the movement – and as such to a certain extent also the montage – was conditioned by the environment. *Holy Mountain* shows on small scale mountain tops and valleys. The mechanical eye reduces the mountains to a reference of size and scale, without ever being able to establish a meaningful connection. *Electric Boogaloo* shows a mechanical dance of people, landscapes and cities. The robotic arm, the mechanical eye, goes about its way and records: the non-inhabited gaze. Simultaneously, the foggy images do explicitly call upon the onlooker's imagination to enable interpretation.

Gabriel Lester (NL, 1972) lives and works in Amsterdam. His work is currently on view at a.o. Sculpture in the City (UK); Busan Biennial (SK). His work was recently shown at a.o. Groninger Museum (NL); 21st Sydney Biennial (AU); Boijmans van Beuningen, (NL); Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (NL); Centre Pompidou, (FR); 5th Marrakech Biennial, (MA); 55th Venice Biennial (IT); Documenta 13 (DE); Wexner Center for the Arts, (USA); Performa 09 (USA); Artists Space (USA); Moderna Museet (ZW); 8th Liverpool Biennial (UK); Stedelijk Museum (NL).