

General Rehearsal

The exhibition is on until September at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA)

General Rehearsal gathers around 300 artworks coming from three different collections: the V-A-C Foundation, Kadist Foundation and MMOMA. Showcasing artworks across all media including: videos, installations, sculptures, paintings, drawings and photographs, the exhibition has been envisaged as a performance broken up into three moments and unfolding in three different spaces. An introduction on the first floor, the backstage on the second and the stage, where *Seagull* by Anton Chekhov is played, on the ground floor.

“We wanted to create a conversation between the visual arts and the theatre, music and design and put different art practices in a partnership built around a simple idea: let’s pretend that these works of art can be actors”- explained Francesco Manacorda, the Artistic Director of V-A-C, at the press conference. As the visitors to the exhibition, we magically become *voyeurs* allowed to sneak in and surprise the “actors” backstage. Breathing the atmosphere of a “general rehearsal” with its anticipation and excitement for the opening night, ironically indefinitely postponed, wandering in the corridors as witnesses of the last arrangements participating in the “getting ready” adrenaline and finally, everyone at their own pace, getting on the stage, partly audience and partly actors, together with the artworks.

Mike Nelson’s *Again, more things (a table ruin)* is the prelude piece. Created in 2014 for the V-A-C debut collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery, this installation features the main themes of *General Rehearsal*. The renunciation of reverence towards art objects and therefore the denial of any form of distance between who is looking and what is looked at. The backstage atmosphere, be it an artist’s studio or the sides behind the stage; the energy of art. On wood boards manually slotted in by the artist and his collaborators, Constantin Brâncuși’s *Le premier cri* (1917), *Femme debout* (1957) by Alberto Giacometti, a torso by Willem de Kooning, Paweł Althamer’s *Camp-fire* (2012) and one of the *Piccolo Cavaliere* (1946) by Marino Marini, amongst others. Masterpieces that are shown as “things” (as opposed to fetishised art) with their own past of hours, months, and years in a studio, absorbing light and darkness, the seasonal changes of temperatures, the distracted gaze of the artist, or a studio assistant, or sometimes a collector. Each work wrapped in its own past, carrying the memory of its journey on an itinerant, improvised stage before arriving at the *General Rehearsal* to enact a silent dialogue about figurative art.



Mike Nelson’s *Again, more things (a table ruin)* (2014). Installation shot. Photo: MMOMA

Instrumental to creating a sense of the backstage is the setting of the place. Designed by Koenraad Dedobbeleer, the partitions, the screens in light green and the wrought iron furnishing, create a contrast with the curatorial choice to amass the artworks in spaces that look like dressing rooms where the works resemble pushy actors anxious and excited about their great moment under the spotlight.



Koenraad Dedobbeleer's partitions. Photo: MMOMA

Each "dressing room" has a name and a theme. In "Mise en Abyme" (a reference to the *Seagull* perhaps) Liz Deschenes' *Shit/Rise no 32* (2010) consists of 4 photograms where you can see your blurred reflection emerging from the photograms silvery surface and negotiate between the multiple vantage points inadvertently creating your own work within the work. "I am trying to give viewers agency" says the artist. In "Fluid Objects" Marcel Broodthaers' *Portmanteau* (1956) is like a stage furniture piece. The worn out, stained raincoat, the old trumpet under a flow of lime, closed by a sort of lid made of egg shells dried out, a wire and beret's frames. What story do all these objects tell? The story behind *Portmanteau*, but also something else: a man and his art?: Chekhov?



Marcel Broodthaers' *Portmanteau* (1956). Photo: MMOMA

Further down, along the corridor in “Fictions” on one of the screens is the caption for *My room is another fish bowl*, (2016) by Philippe Parreno. It is a coup de théâtre. The work is definitely not there, and it takes a while to realise that this absence - like others that become apparent - are those of the works that are busy acting Chekhov’s play in other rooms. From “Witnesses” is Alighiero Boetti’s *Costume di Anako* (1989) to be missing together with Francis Alÿs’ *The Night Watch* (2004). From “Persistent Images” *Untitled* by Cindy Sherman is there just as a ghost presence. From “Angry Things” is Yinka Shonibare’s *Un ballo in maschera* (2004). Seeing them all busy in the phantasy performance downstairs gives the sense of having finally arrived at the theatre. Maybe a little bit late, just on time for the applause.



Philippe Parreno’s *My room is another fish bowl* (2016). Photo: MMOMA

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