

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOÃO PENALVA



15 JANUARY – 29 FEBRUARY 2020
OPENING: TUESDAY 14 JANUARY, 6 – 8 PM
SIMON LEE GALLERY, NEW YORK

Simon Lee Gallery is proud to announce a solo exhibition by the London-based Portuguese artist, João Penalva. For his first solo exhibition in New York since 2002, Penalva presents two new series of work based on photographs taken at the São Carlos National Theater, in Lisbon, Portugal, that explore the physical mechanics of theatrical fictions and illusions.

Following a career in dance, João Penalva began his second career as an artist in 1976, working initially as a painter. Today, Penalva is known for making large-scale installations in various media, as well as more intimate works that combine painting, photography, video and found objects, image, text and sound; addressing narrative modes and the relationships between each medium. His storytelling is often fractured, presenting juxtaposed narrative elements, allowing the viewer a latitude of freedom in their interpretation.

In the gallery space, two seemingly disparate series of photographic works are presented side by side, in juxtaposition, as if conceived as two superimposed exhibitions. Presented along one wall of the gallery, the curious installation of alternating works, oscillating in scale, process and form, creates a rhythmic installation that explores the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction, and the tenuous line that separates the two.

The larger series of color images are archival pigment prints on paper depicting close-up photographs of various scenic backdrops. In a theatrical context, mediated by distance, the lights, the atmosphere, the characters, the music, and the voices, the painted backdrop is a key mechanism employed to create illusion and spectacle. In Penalva's works, and within the framework of the exhibition, the backdrops take on a revised physical presence. The tightly cropped works create a new sense of illusion and intimacy; fictions that celebrate the materiality of the fabric and that stimulate our imaginations. The brushstrokes that are, when viewed from afar, small gestures of a larger painted surface, here, using the apparatus of the gallery, gain the authority to define ambiguous, painterly compositions.

Interspersed between each of these works are smaller, silver gelatin prints that document objects found by the artist in the theater's scenic prop store. From milk churns to a leather armchair, electrified candlesticks, a bird-hunter's cage, some wings, a vase with a shelf on top and a bronze urn on its side, these props, when removed from their theatrical context, become enigmatic objects that are undefined by time and belong only to the space of their photographic representation.

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In this exhibition, as so often in Penalva's practice, text is used to form the narrative framework of his works. Here, technical descriptions are used to title each work, yet they do not reveal the play, opera or ballet that these backdrops or props belong to. In doing so, Penalva constructs an equivocal relationship between factual and visual information, a strategy that lies at the heart of theatrical production, as well as the artist's own practice.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About João Penalva

João Penalva was born in Lisbon, Portugal in 1949 and has lived and worked in London, UK, since 1976. He represented Portugal in the XXIII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo in 1996 and in the XLIX Biennale di Venezia in 2001. He exhibited at the Berlin Biennale 2, 2001, and the Biennale of Sydney, 2003. He was awarded the DAAD Berlin Artist's Residency in 2003-2004. Recent solo museum exhibitions include Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg (2018); Culturgest, Porto, Portugal (2018); Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Trondheim, Norway (2014); Kunsthallen Brandts, Odense, Denmark (2012); Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon, Portugal (2011); Lunds Konsthall, Lund, Sweden (2010); Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal (2005); Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art, Budapest, Hungary (2005); Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö, Sweden (2002); Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland, UK (2000) and Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (2000). Major group exhibitions include South London Gallery, London (2019); Wellcome Collection, London, UK (2017); The Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, SA (2017); Tate Modern, London, UK (2014) which travelled to Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany (2015) and Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Germany (2015); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (2014); Hayward Gallery, London, UK, (2010) which travelled to Haus der Kunst, Munich (2011), and National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Republic of Korea (2012). His work is represented in major institutions and private collections worldwide, including Arts Council England, London, UK; Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Berardo Museum, Lisbon, Portugal; Frac Occitane, Frac Champagne-Ardenne, and Frac Bretagne, France; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland; Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary; Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Finland; Mudam – Musée d'Art Moderne, Luxembourg.

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme. In 2014, Simon Lee Gallery opened an office and private viewing space in New York. In 2017, this space was re-launched with a year-round programme of exhibitions and events, showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in dynamic group and solo exhibitions.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @SimonLeeGallery

www.simonleegallery.com

Image:

João Penalva,

Scenic flat being repaired.

Cave scene.

Water-based and synthetic dyes on seized canvas, water-based glue and newspapers.

2019

Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag 308 g, museum board, Plexiglass, oak frame

117.6 x 97.6 cm (46 1/4 x 38 3/8 in.)

Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery.

With special thanks to OPART/Teatro Nacional de São Carlos, Lisbon, Portugal.

For further press information, images and requests please contact Haniya Bhatti: haniya@simonleegallery.com / +44 (0) 207 491 0100.