

Sultana

Arnaud Maguet

Nostalgia, Comrade

23 february - 30 march 2013

« Le passé est ce dont nous rappelons du passé, et ce souvenir et un mélange de fragments que, maintenant, dans le présent, nous collons et attachons. Ainsi, le passé n'existe pas, n'existe que le présent dans lequel cette composition émulsionne en suivant ses propres règles pour également se faire présent. Mais il y a quelque chose de plus terrible encore : si même le passé n'existe pas, comment peut alors exister le futur ? (...) Dans un désert présent, nous nous mouvons délimités par ces deux mirages, le passé et le futur. »

Augustin Fernandez Mallo in *Nocilla Dream*, 2006

A record player goes around at the front desk of the gallery. The machine stops but does not turn off, ready to restart its insidious music – being two old versions of the average 'chanson française' *J'aime regarder les filles* (I like looking at girls) by Patrick Coutin (his career as brief as it was short), reworked by Bader Motor (Fred Bigot, Vincent Epplay and Arnaud Maguet) and *The Indian* by Gilbert Bécaud (his career was longer, too long). The album cover of the LP is around somewhere, illustrated with two recto/verso images of dark elegance by Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux, master of dark forces and Stéphane Roger lends his voice – which is not necessarily a good sign. Don't believe for a minute that this is the soundtrack of the exhibition by Arnaud Maguet «La Nostalgie, Camarade!» (Nostalgia, Comrade!), it is just the first thing that you see or hear – or will never hear.

Further on, five blocks of explosive are scattered on the floor, equipped for the occasion with Delay pedals, envisaged as detonators ready to explode the neighbourhood. A musical delay spreads the noise of the explosion that has not taken place. In the middle of these explosive decoys, the maquette of an old piece, *L'Ambassadeur* (the ambassador), not to be confused with the famous sign depicting chocolaty rocks distributed under a cloche during evening parties held by the diplomatic corps. Then, on the same wall, just a little further along, four wigs enclosed in a crate, agitated by a nonchalant fan play four boys in the wind (the French title for *A Hard Day's Night*), their gilded legend removed. On the left, or facing you, depending on where you are, planks of wood are covered with posters screen-printed on newspaper recuperated from the local printing workshop of a daily newspaper whose name we won't mention. The images are those of the dispute, recognisable amongst a thousand, yet unidentifiable, graphics from popular struggles, fists and expressions of service, the brain pierced by the great screwdriver of oppression. The titles are those of songs buried in the fog of music history: *La Nostalgie, Camarade* (Nostalgia comrade) by Serge Gainsbourg (1981), *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* by Gil Scott-Heron (1970) and *We Don't Need This Fascist Groove Thang* by Heaven (1981). On the facing wall, the right side depending on where you are, two framed photos hang side by side. One on the left shows a hand and its five fingers capped by three prawn heads and a sea-snail, an image that comes from the Residents' first album in 1974, a parody of the Beatles, giving themselves the stage names of John, George and Paul McCrawfish and Ringo Starfish. On the other photo, we find, the names of the fab four translated into French written in biro on the palm of the right hand, no longer leaving any doubt as to their destitution. Finally on the wall at the back of the gallery (the one we cannot miss except in the case of terrible blindness), a shelf filled with ceramic heads, kneaded and dried in 45 minutes, deformed though nonetheless real, portraits of the forgotten heroes of rock'n'roll, unearthed by Nick Tosches in his eponymous work.

In the floating heart of the space, that which we cannot see is missing, this work on the roots of popular music, its diegetic power made up of errant traditions, improbable legend and truncated stories. The interloping links that Arnaud Maguet weaves together do not only rely upon more or less degraded or deconstructed base narratives. Into this case of smoke and mirrors seeps a temporary aesthetic, of *definitive incompleteness*, produced in the half-light of the garage where, once night has fallen, there only remains the light charge of orphan signs. The vanities lit up by spark plugs.

Eric Mangion