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ALEX DA CORTE

World Leader Pretend

Opening: Tuesday, 9 April 2024; 6pm-9pm

Gió Marconi, Via Tadino 15, Milano

From Wednesday, 10 April until Saturday, 1 June 2024:

Tuesday-Saturday: 11am-6pm

From Monday, 3 June 3 until Friday, 19 July 2024:

Monday - Friday: 11am-6pm

World Leader Pretend is an exhibition of new painting, sculpture and installation by Venezuelan-American artist Alex Da Corte. It is Da Corte's first exhibition in Milan since Devil Town at Gió Marconi in 2015, and his first exhibition in Italy since the 2019 Biennale di Venezia. The artist has been the subject of recent survey exhibitions at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan. Da Corte was the 2023 Philip Guston Rome Prize Fellow at the American Academy in Rome.

WORLD LEADER PRETEND

In the early morning hours of May 5th, 1821, Louis-Joseph-Narcisse Marchand, the longtime companion and valet of Napoleon, sat beside his feeble charge, holding his hand. In order to keep his companion's mind occupied, he asked him some questions. Here are Napoleon's answers, as transcribed by Marchand in 1821, published in 1952 in French by Jean Bourguignon and later translated by Proctor Jones and Jean Tulard.

Emperor, Sir, can you picture a desert for me?

I remember a desert, so many deserts. Great expanses of desert, never-ending and dry. Brittle and cracked, like my hands, like my body. Oh but why? Is this body even my own? I look out across my body, and all I see is desert.

No no, Emperor, your body isn't a desert. Please, play this game with me. Let your mind be easy for a time. Now, in this desert, there is a cubic structure, as Plato speaks of. Can you describe this structure for me?

Dear Marchand, a cube? Of rock? I imagine mine is not of the desert, not born of this Earth. I see a cube, and it is reflective, like glass, many rocks ground to a liquid dust, more lustrous than glass, more lustrous even than black. It consists of two facing panes, enough to create a labyrinth . . . I see it clearly, there in the desert, alone. I see everything . . . but you can't see me.

It sounds beautiful, Sir, strong like onyx. Now, please, picture a ladder, here with you in the desert, in your onyx fortress. Can you describe it for me?

A ladder? I do not see a ladder.

Could it be that the ladder is inside with you?

No, no, no. I . . . I . . . see debris, white debris, like snow. Or rather wood, like birch, or, err, I am not so sure, Marchand. There is a pile of birch I see, there in the distance, but I cannot be sure, a pile of white debris . . . I cannot be sure.

Rest your mind, dear Emperor. Let us carry on, let us think of more vital things. Imagine your dear Marengo. Picture him in the desert with you. Describe him for me.

Ah yes! Brave Marengo! My beloved Marengo. Where is he? I see him. I see him resting, or no, no, it is not rest. I hear a winnowing, is it the wind? Is it the wind? Is it Marengo, is it he? He is hurt, come, someone come help, he is hurt, he has been injured. His throat, it has been severed! How could this be? Who has done this? And I see there is blood, there is blood on my hands? Was it I, was it I?

Emperor! Emperor! Calm, calm your mind dear Sir. This is just a simple game, this is just a child's game. Marengo is fine, he is not hurt, he is well, in the stables resting . . . what is it that haunts you? We must think of brighter things. Let us think of Spring, she is nearly upon us. Imagine the flowers.

Ah, ah, okay . . . okay . . . it has fallen dark in my mind dear Marchand. Must we play this child's game any longer?

It is good for you to imagine Spring, imagine flowers, imagine life. It will be good . . .

If I must . . . I see peonies, I see peonies and they are blooming, they are bright, they are hopeful and yet it is night. Was it Josephine who brings them to me? Was it she? Where is she, my Beloved? And there is candlelight? Or is it starlight? I see flowers. I see peonies. I see her.

She is with you Emperor. She is with you, in your heart, you carry her . . . and now there is a storm coming. What will you do, dear Sir, what will you do in the face of the storm?

Napoleon closed his eyes . . .

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