

#8.0 Always Bite the Hand That Feeds You

Eli Cortiñas
08.02 – 31.03 2019

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Convent presents *Always Bite the Hand That Feeds You*, a solo exhibition by the Spanish artist Eli Cortiñas (°1979, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria), who lives and works in Berlin. In her video work Cortiñas looks at the way history is interpreted in today's society. Generally she uses found video footage which she interweaves with fragments of her own making. This is also the case for one of her last films *The Most Given of Givens* (2016), which together with *Delete, Topple, Delete again* is the focal point of this exhibition.

In *The Most Given of Givens*, which is projected with three projectors, Eli Cortiñas examines the well-known story about Tarzan, a boy who is adopted and raised by apes, after his parents death in a jungle on the West Coast of Africa. The fictional character first appeared in the novel *Tarzan of the Apes* in 1912 by American author Edgar Rice Burroughs. The instant success meant the start of a whole series of books and a large number of different movies on the subject over the years, such as *Tarzan the Ape Man* (1932), *Tarzan's Secret Treasure* (1941) and *Tarzan and the Amazons* (1945). In *The Most Given of Givens* Cortiñas combines excerpts from these Hollywood movies with footage from the French cinema such as *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1953) by Chris Marker, Alain Resnais and Ghislain Cloquet, cult classics such as the American horror movie *They Live* (1988), some African films such as *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980), the Walt Disney animated film *Tarzan* (1999) and own image material. With the Tarzan film saga as a starting point, in which the controversial Tarzan figure embodies the Western white man, Cortiñas addresses both the patriarchal and racist story lines alongside the one-sided representation of the African continent in the different movies. In this way she questions the ethnocentric look in Western cinema, and Hollywood productions in particular. By alternating existing

film material from the Western film world with image fragments of West African filmmakers such as Moustapha Alassane and Ousmane Sembène, Cortiñas not only shows her extensive knowledge of film history, but she also tries to historically correct it. During the French rule it was after all prohibited for the colonies to make their own movies. Only ten years after the release of *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* North and West African filmmakers could use their camera again to revise the colonial representation of their home country. By also including more recent films, such as the Disney movie *Tarzan or Avatar* (2009) (which is largely based on the Tarzan story) Cortiñas shows us that the racist Tarzan archetype is still being used in contemporary popular culture.¹

It is no coincidence that *The Most Given of Givens* commences with a shot of the severed head of a statue of Lenin that is lifted by a construction crane. The scene refers to the historic frenzy of the early 1990's to tear down Soviet monuments in Central and Eastern Europe. Based on her postcolonial and feminist research Cortiñas claims that film and cinema should indeed be perceived as public monuments because of the similar impact they have on our perception of the world and on the formation of our opinions. In a world in which passive image consumption prevails, Cortiñas points out the danger and stresses the importance of staying aware of this.

In *Delete, Topple, Delete again*, a site specific installation specially created for Convent, the artist delves into the ecology of objects and their appearance in order to juxtapose fragile artifacts to socio-political events. The mise-en-scène of objects remains simple, the movements settled as if the artist would be evoking their animist power, looking for what's embedded in them. The installation also features a screen with video footage of monuments being dismantled all around the world. Among these

images are scenes from the former Soviet Union where Stalin statues are being torn down from their pedestals, but also U.S. Marines toppling a huge statue of Saddam Hussein in the heart of Baghdad and students of South Africa's University of Cape Town celebrating the removal of the statue of British colonialist Cecil Rhodes. By displaying a reel of documents accessible to anybody through the internet, Cortiñas delves into our visual past, testing both cultural and audiovisual memory itself. The installation as such can be considered as a

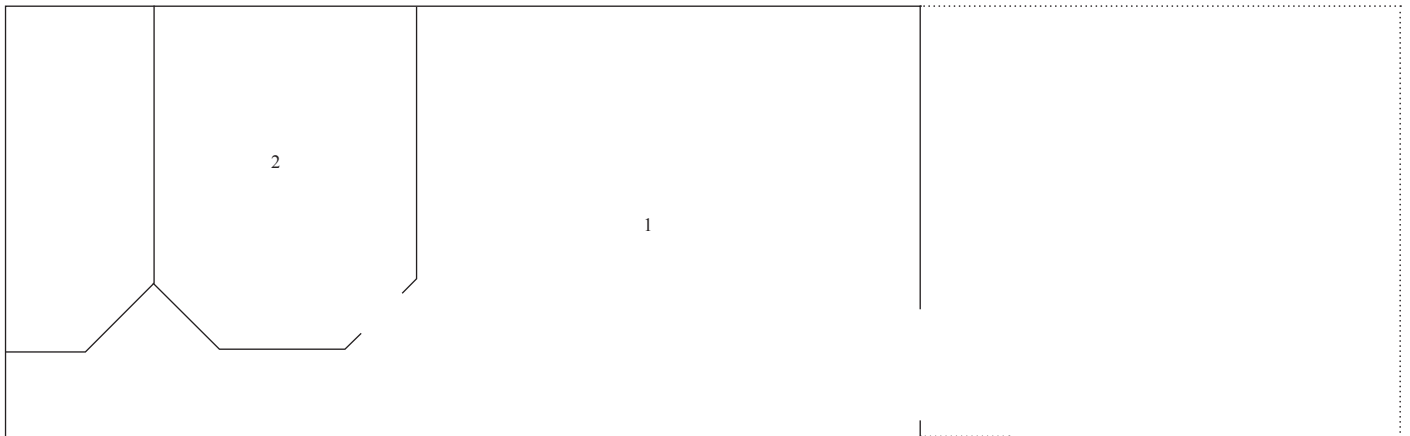
hybrid multimedia collage where the artist mixes her source materials with footage she recently made and is currently working with. By bringing together images of small, fragile objects and colossal statues in one work, Cortiñas places them on the same level and informs us that every object, regardless of its scale or placement, can be loaded with problematic connotations.

- 1) Miralda, Àngels, "(Re)visiting cinema as public space on Eli Cortiñas' *Remixers Never Die.*", A*Desk, 2 januari 2019

On the agenda: On Thursday 7 March 2019 Eli Cortiñas will give a lecture performance in Cirque (Campus Bijloke), in collaboration with KASKlezingen. The talk starts at 8 pm and is free to attend. The official language is Dutch. More info can be found on: <https://schoolofartsgent.be/nl/agenda-nieuws/agenda/kasklezing-eli-cortinas>.

Many thanks to the artist, Waldburger Walters (Brussels/Basel), Woningbouw Merckaert, Ramai Das Nota, Bram Vandeviere & Pauline Scharmman.

With the generous support of the city of Ghent and Duvel Moortgat. If you would like to support Convent, please do not hesitate to contact us via info@conventartspace.be.



- 1) *The Most Given of Givens*, 2016
3 channel video, HD/found footage, 9'
Courtesy the artist and Waldburger
Wouters, Brussel

- 2) *Delete, Topple, Delete again*
Mixed media, variable dimensions