



Interview

with

Amie

Siegel /

Lo

Schermo

dell'Arte,

Firenze



12 NOVEMBRE 2014

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PROVENANCE BY AMIE SIEGEL, 2013, IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SIMON PRESTON GALLERY, NEW YORK

Today in Florence opens the festival **Lo schermo dell'Arte**. For this occasion, ATPdiary interviewed the artist **Amie Siegel**, who will show “**Provenance**”.

Here is the interview with festival director Silvia Lucchesi [👉](#)

Here is the interview with Leonardo Bigazzi, curator of the section “VISIO. European Workshop on Artists' Moving Images” [👉](#)

Program  Day by Day

Sunday November 16th

CINEMA D'ARTISTA

Provenance by Amie Siegel, USA, 2013, sound, 40'

to follow: ***Lot 248*** by Amie Siegel, USA, 2013, sonoro, 6'

This last work by the American artist Amie Siegel explores a Modernist symbol – objects in great demand on the market: furniture and decorations designed in the 1950s by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for the Indian city of Chandigarh. Sofas, chairs, armchairs and tables produced according to democratic and rationalist principles are now prominent features in the houses of rich collectors. The film re-traces the provenance of these artifacts, back to the place for which they were originally intended. Attached to the film is the short Lot 248, which documents, with controversial evidence, the auction sale for the film Provenance itself.

ATP: In order to develop Provenance, which is the reflection starting point?

Amie Siegel: I first conceived of Provenance while I was checking up on a chair featured in my 2008 film DDR/DDR. It was an East German molded plastic chair that the film follows as it travels from its original home in a former socialist Plattenbau, or prefab apartment block, through various sites until it eventually ended up in a high-end store in Tribeca, all to the soundtrack of the the (east) German version of The Internationale. I found that the chair was for sale at auction, and within the same auction catalogue, came upon a spread of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret chairs from Chandigarh. It made me think back to photographs a friend had shown me of Chandigarh, images of furniture piled up in seemingly random places, and I began to piece together the vast system of trafficking in the Chandigarh furniture under way.

I was immediately interested in tracing the furniture in Provenance backwards, replicating the trajectory of the objects themselves in reverse, creating a kind of provenance, the record of an artwork's previous owners and histories. I decided very early on that I would put one edition of the film up for auction, and film the auction of my film. That gesture completed the loop between the film and the flow of objects and capital that lends the film its subject.

ATP: The video highlights how today's globalization has, in many ways, distorted past ideas, principles and 'utopias'. In particular, 'Provenance' underline how Le Corbusier's the furniture, designed with special features (even ideological) today are seen more as 'sculptures' or classical models of design. What has fascinated or irritated you by this inevitable transformation?

Amie Siegel: I am interested not only in trajectories of circulation, but also in layers of circulation. One of the fascinating aspects of the trafficking of Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret Chandigarh furniture is that it is Western design being reclaimed by the West as such, filtered through the "exotic" patina of the East. It almost becomes a kind of reverse colonialism. I think that this leads to some disturbing elements in Provenance, such as the furniture "restoration" scene, in which we see how cultural differences in the determination of value and also in the fabrication of value play out upon these objects. I am also interested in how moments like that feed into the film's participation in the production of desire around the furniture.

ATP: Which is the relationship between 'Provenance' and other your movie productions?

Amie Siegel: Over several years, I made a group of cinematic works which I called ciné-constellations, films including *The Sleepers*(1999), *Empathy* (2003), *DDR/DDR* (2008), which mirror shared concerns in an essayistic, associative mode that allow for montage both within and between works, like constellations. Since 2009, my works for exhibition, often stretching across multi-channel installations and photo-based works, began to become more layered, combining multiple elements that can be exhibited independently, but add meaning to each other when exhibited together, as if in an act of montage. *Provenance* is similarly a project with multiple elements, but its elements have also unfolded forward in time– from the completion of the film, to the auctioning of the film, to the making of *Lot 248*, the film of the auction of the film. Now that *Lot 248* is completed, *Provenance* is always exhibited together with *Lot 248* and a lucite piece embedded with the Proof of the auction catalogue spread, as an ensemble.

Provenance also shares formal gestures and themes with several of my previous works. *DDR/DDR* includes a portrayal of economic changeover and a mini-history of a design chair, as well as my parallel tracking shots. In my 2003 film *Empathy*, there is a section devoted to the Charles & Ray Eames lounge chair as the quintessential psychoanalyst's chair. I have also always been concerned with cinematic tropes such as establishing shots, remakes, tracking shots, mimesis. In this vein, *Provenance* functions as one long reveal, moving backwards in time across parallel tracking shots.

ATP: The film points the finger at the phenomenon of speculation in art and design. What's your opinion about these topics?

Amie Siegel: The speculation that *Provenance* itself depicts, enacts and is then subjected to can be quite startling. There is a surface work at play in which the aesthetic of the shelter magazine, the Architectural Digest-like presentation of collectors' homes in Paris, London, the Hamptons, is mirrored in the aesthetic of the film itself. The film is deliberately rendered as an object of beauty, interested in participating in the very production of desire that the film depicts. This creates a layered sense of complicity, as we watch the objects of desire move from one value context to another. This production of desire is transferred to the viewer, but I am also complicit as the artist, both in making the film and in the decision to auction the film.

When I first arranged for one from the edition of five to be sold in Christie's Post-War and Contemporary sale, I did not know what would happen at auction. The gesture itself was speculative and reflexive, and allowed for the work to enter the market circuit it depicts. But there are also elements in *Provenance* that circle back upon themselves and upon my previous works, such as the overhead shot of the cargo ship, a stock image that has appeared in several films of mine, an emblem of commercial transit, which travels through my own projects as well as throughout the world.

ATP: Briefly, are you working on any new project?

Amie Siegel: Yes, I am currently finishing a new piece called *The Architects*, commissioned by Storefront for Art and Architecture as part of OfficeUS, the project for the U.S. Pavilion at the 2014 International Architecture Biennale. The film will be installed in the Arsenale, in Venice, during the final week of the Architecture Biennale, from November 18 – 23, 2014.



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