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*Villa Massimo, Roma, October 2012*

Dear Paolo,

as discussed I would like to break down the idea of „The Art of Conversation“ as follows.

At the beginning stands, as I see it, our own conversation, the long run, from a while back. When we started exchanging ideas and views, on your work as well as on that of other artists, from before we even started to think about this project. This relationship is the backbone of our exhibition. But then there are several other conversations that run through this project not like one but several red threads.

First there is a somewhat serendipitous starting point - a classical east-west dialogue, on, admittedly oversimplified, myth and ratio, in the famous transcript of the conversation of Albert Einstein and Rabindranath Tagore, when Tagore visited Einstein in his summer house in Caputh. Tagore, the first Non-European to be awarded a Nobel prize in literature in 1913, wasn't only a poet (and author of the national anthems of both Bangladesh and India) but also a playwright, essayist and in his later years also an influential visual artist. Much of his eclectic range of work deals with the contradictory experiences of both, ancient culture and its mysticism as well as the ideas of a modern world. Given the times and that both shared a moderate leaning towards the left, the transcript of this conversation appears to have lead them nowhere specific, as they humbly refrained from criticizing one another, finally settling on the somewhat commonplace statement, that the beauty of a piece of music was beyond analysis. However it may have been exactly this particular deficit in their communication that left both to reflect their meeting afterwards, inspiring Einstein for example to write his essay „Mein Weltbild“, an attempt to bring his own cultural and family roots in accordance to his scientific theories.

Along this line, the idea of conversation we reflect here does not necessarily strive to argument finalities, but rather feeds on potentiality. It is about a somewhat speculative interplay of suggestions, that stays within the parameters of a given formal framework. Here the form is twofold, consisting of the exhibition painting and the framework of its presentation in the gallery.

The painting features a rendition of an imaginary exhibition that takes place in an invented annex of the Jatiya Sangsag Bhaban in Dhaka, the brutalist concrete complex housing Bangladesh's national parliament. It is not only one of the largest parliament buildings in the world and of great symbolic value in the country - with its characteristic use of basic geometry, circles, squares and triangles, it is arguably the most prominent building by legendary Estonian-born American architect Louis Khan. The design of the annex however is based on the interior of the sitting room of Einstein's summerhouse, the best known example of work by German architect Konrad Wachsmann, who would later go on to develop prefabricated houses in the US with Walther Gropius. His interest in prefabricated materials is already visible in his innovative use of industrial wooden paneling for the interior.

Inside two works adorn the walls: a painting by René Magritte and a small photograph by Louise Lawler. In her work Lawler negotiates a topic that is also central to our conversation: the way possible readings of artworks are contained by their immediate surroundings and the context of any presentation. Titled „Gray“ it refers to the iconic Irish designer Eileen Gray, showing her trademark rectangular designs on wooden panelling, illuminated by the soft light, apparently dispersed by an alabaster lamp in the shape of an ancient vase. As documentation of contradictory formal languages the photograph presents a display of an eclectic and insensitive display of a bourgeois notion of „good taste“.

The second work is another forerunner to the ideas presented here and responsible for the title of the exhibition. „L'Art de la Conversation“ a painting by René Magritte from 1950, is the first of a series of variations on the title. Two figures regard a huge constructivist structure made of rectangular stones, a kind of super-stonehenge built on the word „rève“ (dream). It appears as if the conversation had either buried the dream, or was an abstract structure built upon it. Or as Michel Foucault put it, as if „things could in their silence and sleep compose a word – a permanent word no one could efface; yet this word now designates the most fleeting of images.“ (Michel Foucault: This is not a pipe, Chapter 4. Burrowing Words, University of California Press, Berkeley, p.37).

Furnishing this ensemble is Oscar Tuazon's 2012 "Scott Burton", a rough concrete and steel sculpture, closely following the design of Scott Burton's 1984 polished granite "Two Part Chair". While Burton's sculptures supposed functionality poke fun at a dogmatic reading of minimalism, they however take over their clear cut aesthetics and material values as reflected in the hard edges and surface quality of the two interlocking pieces of polished granite. Oscar Tuazon translates this form into the supposedly functionalist, yet architectural aesthetics of pure concrete. He wrote: "Burton's work is characterized by invisibility- perversely banal, inconspicuous, ugly, painful on the genitals, masochistic- and a kind of brutal self-recognition, painful realism." To conclude he asks: "Can a sculpture of a chair also be a chair, can a thing have a double identity, be doubled, trans-sexualized, why can't a thing be two things?" (<http://www.fondazionegiuliani.org/category/exhibitions/?lang=en&lang=en>)

This question also applies to Riccardo Previdi's series of "Tatamis", hybrid structures, that are both: sculptures and projection screens. Divided into parallel vertical stripes, they deconstruct the projected video, as well as challenge the exhibition space, as if it was scanned by the escaping stripes of projected image. His "Tatami (Oscar Tuazon/Max Bill)" (2012) has been designed particularly for this exhibition and takes its visual cues from the contemporary American artist and the classic Zürich-school modernist, famous for his use of primary colors and ingenious variations on simple geometric forms. Projected onto Previdi's Tatami is the most recent video by Bangladesh artist and filmmaker Naeem Mohaiemen. Since 2006, Mohaiemen has been exploring the histories of the 1970ies ultra-left, through essays, photography and film. In particular, he is interested in the idea of left forces as "accidental trojan horses" that, in moments of failure, usher in rightist forces. Earlier chapters of the project can be seen here: <http://shobak.org>. His recent video "United Red Army" will see its European premiere at the 25th International Documentary Film festival in Amsterdam in November. (<http://www.idfa.nl/industry/tags/project.aspx?id=c55e4f5a-cf8e-414e-8b28-9447274066de>)

All of these works are featured within the ideal setting of the painting, but not as a sentimental "dream within a dream" (E.A. Poe) reaching into the past, and even less as paintings in the painting, or l'art pour l'art. Much rather I believe it makes sense to regard this as a form of expansion of the notion of what painting could be in visual art today. It aims at formulating an idea of a painterly practice that neither negates nor reaffirms the idea of the artist as a singular, reclusive author, and instead opens up the concept of painting to a more contemporary format and the idea of conversation and exchange, bringing it back to become a forum for the articulation of ideas. This notion is manifested also in the presentation of this exhibition painting. In the gallery it is set in an exhibition design by Matthew Antezzo, that brings back one of the starting points of the conversation, the architecture of Louis Khan.

Referring in particular to the use of water, that surrounds the Jatiya Sangsag Bhaban, it also pays homage to another of his landmark buildings, The Salk Institute of Biology in La Jolla, California, where a single stream of water runs through the complex. But Antezzo considers his work also a reference to another great architect, Italian-born Brazilian Lina Bo Bardi, and her much less static use of water in her indoor river inside her SESC Pompéja. Creating his own spin on this imagined dialogue of the two great architects, he relates their work to his own recent explorations of fountain elements and large scale monumental concrete sculpture, in particular his "Monumento Bicentenario" (2011) in Monterrey, Mexico.

His perspective on the exhibition and his active involvement in the presentation of our construction challenges our vision and expands it into the concise location of Sabine's exhibition space, and beyond. I see his effort in accordance with your painting, in plucking the ideas out of the thin air of our imagination, setting them quite squarely into the reality here today.

Best regards,

Andreas

## **THE ART OF CONVERSATION**

curated by PAOLO CHIASERA and ANDREAS SCHLAEGEL

with an exhibition design by MATTHEW ANTEZZO

Featuring works by **Louis Kahn, Louise Lawler, René Magritte, Naeem Mohaiemen, Riccardo Previdi, Oscar Tuazon, Konrad Wachsmann**

Opening	November 1st, 2012, 6-10pm
Duration	November 2nd – December 15th, 2012
Opening hours	Tue – Sat   12-6pm