

H ART MAGAZINE

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- Philippe Hunt

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## (A)Mnesia

Lucile Bertrand's work is one of those that require that we look at them, listen to them, read them, think them. That we see them again... think them again. And then that we make something of it, in the field of art, writing, reading, thinking, acting. Since she decided to be a visual artist (she had a stint in theatre), Lucile Bertrand never stopped working on the questions of the other, the negation of the other, with all the forms of real and symbolic violence that it implies, and also the question of the denial of this negation of the other: I don't know, I didn't do anything, I don't hate x (instead of x, everyone can put one's favourite object of hate). In short, questions that come from far away, and more precisely from the 1930s and 1940s of the 20th century, but also, above all, questions from today, here and everywhere else.

Lucile Bertrand was born in France in 1960, but she settled in Brussels long ago after a few years in New York. In addition to group exhibitions [...], she has exhibited in solo and duo in Brussels, but also elsewhere, in France, the United States and Japan. I'm selecting one, if only for its title: *Travelers and Strangers*, in Brooklyn last year. Numerous readings, poems, stories and essays feed her art. The cultures of the world.

'amnesia' is one of these combat works. It is a video, or a film, and it is a whole universe. With, next to it, a table, and on this table, some of the books that fed the work, that will feed you, books that have been written in a dozen languages, from Russian to Afrikaans, from Japanese to Italian – and a list of books' titles to take away. The «device» of the video, in twelve parts, is each time, roughly, in the left part of the screen, a narrator seen from behind who reads a text, facing a series of landscapes, a voice that answers «No» to the question «Do you remember?», a dancer who, in the right half of the screen, falls, struck down by this «No».

### Seen from the back

Let us be more precise. The narrator is seen from behind: this makes it possible to avoid face-to-face gaze (identification) and the intervention of anecdotal details... but let us not forget that, according to Levinas, the neck is also the face.

Landscapes that are not illustrative, but evocative, and that are (strangely, paradoxically) beautiful – photos taken, for the most part, by Lucile Bertrand. These photos are not illustrative: the Russian forest for instance is actually our Belgian Forest of Soignes (we think of an artwork by Daniel Locu – 'Landscape'). A text, the text that you can read in English at the bottom of the image, but that is almost always read, said in the 'original' language, in Greek, Khmer, Armenian, English... often by other artists. A text that, in a poetic, intense way, sometimes with humour (yes, it is possible), evokes this or that event, or series of events, which shows in a particularly strong way what is happening to human inhumanity, in wars and genocides, and beyond wars and genocides. As in Syria today. Then a question arises: «Do you remember?», the question of memory, and oblivion, conscious or not, wanted or not. Then a voice says «no», with all the nuances of this denial, and on the right someone, a dancer who was moving in the space or was simply sitting on a chair, falls, knocked down, struck down by this «no», but each time she falls in a different way, just like the «no» are different. Then the text continues, another text, another voice, which explains what should never have been forgotten, neglected, and sometimes the dancer gets up again.

Each part is autonomous, but the twelve parts constitute, not a continuous narrative in twelve episodes, a «living being» with a head, a body and a tail, but the montage of twelve aspects, twelve exemplary examples of this treatment, of this abuse of the other. There could be many more of them, alas, but Lucile has decided that there will be twelve. Don't think of it as a symbolic number. These twelve sequences, all unique, all exemplary, Lucile Bertrand proposes them for our reflection. It is not a question of denouncing: if we must remember, it is to act differently. Against all this inhumanity, to make with Lucile, with all the authors she quotes (don't forget to take this list with you!), with many witnesses and survivors, the bet for a possible future. «But the questions remain the same/for earthworms as for men,» says Hugo Claus in his play 'Thyestes'.

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Lucile Bertrand: Video amnesia (curated by Pascale Viscardy)  
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