

SĪMURĠ

Hope Atherton
Nicolas Baier
Frank Dufour
Gonzalo Lebrija
Anne Lindberg

an exhibition curated by Muriel Quancard

November 23 - January 4, 2020

*A new life flow towards them from that bright
Celestial and ever-living light -
Their souls rose free of all they had been before;
The past and all its actions were no more.
There in the Simorgh 's radiant face they saw
Themselves, the Simorgh of the world - with awe
They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
They were the Simorgh and at the journey's end.
- The Conference of the Birds, Farīd-ud-Dīn Attār¹*

Can a 12th century Sufi poem coexist with a group of contemporary artworks and heighten the perception of Western art forms? The experiment attempted here is an overlay of literary references, traditional techniques, various media and technologies. Four bodies of works —by **Hope Atherton**, **Nicolas Baier**, **Gonzalo Lebrija**, and **Anne Lindberg**—resonate with Farīd-ud-Dīn Attār's epic allegory of Islamic Sufi mysticism, The Conference of the Birds. Each body of work forms a unique cosmography that chimes with aspects of this allegorical tale. An auditory experience, conceived by **Frank Dufour** of the collective Agence 5970, compels the visitor to delve into their mysteries.

Attār's poem is an esoteric quest for truth following the birds of the world on a journey as they seek the king of birds, the Simorgh. The hoopoe offers to lead them to Mount Qaf, a green emerald mountain surrounding the earth, where the Simorgh live. The birds fly across seven valleys: quest, love, knowledge, detachment, unity, wonderment, and annihilation. After various trials, just thirty birds overcome suffering and reach spiritual enlightenment; When they arrive at Mount Qaf, the exhausted and depleted birds, realize that the Simorgh, which in old Persian means thirty (si) birds (morgh), is a reflection of themselves. The powerful bird is hidden in each of them and they all together, in unity, are the Simorgh.

In his "Veladuras Nocturnas" paintings, **Gonzalo Lebrija** achieves spatial depth with a traditional glazing technique involving the application of multiple layers of translucent and iridescent paint over an opaque underlayer. The painting's geometric shapes are based on origami paper planes reminiscent of childhood memories. Evocative of cones of light, they recall the cosmic landscape of Mount Qaf, where the invisible is revealed.

Anne Lindberg's diaphanous installation also summons a dimension in which the corporal becomes ethereal. The artist has stretched a multitude of threads across a corner of the gallery which brings to mind a flock of birds. The aggregation of lines seems to dissolve the space while creating a sense of velocity, reminding us that space and time are embedded in a continuum. Presented on another wall, her "insomnia drawings" evoke landscapes from a bird's-eye view. The artist drew serpentine lines on vellum that is laid atop photographs of her bed taken each morning upon waking; a process that resulted in subtle topographical reliefs.

Nicolas Baier's bas-reliefs from the "Constellation" series depict arbitrary connections between the stars from a non-terrestrial vantage point. He creates cartographies based on coordinates issued by astronomical databases such as the Bright Star Catalogue. The stars connected via an algorithm form random constellations. These topographies are carved in high-density foam with a CNC (computer numeric control) machine and coated with brass or with meteorite graphite.

Hope Atherton resorts to ancestral techniques to create sculptures that point toward nontraditional temporalities. Due to their elemental qualities, they occupy a site of possibility between the past and future. Two birds coalesce in an enigmatic posture so as to form one mass. Their vulnerability recalls the trials encountered by the birds in Attār's poem and the ultimate transformation that followed.

¹ Translated by Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi