

ArtReview

Martín Soto Climent *The Contemporary Comedy: Glossy Mist*

Clifton Benevento, New York 20 February – 25 April

Today every artist becomes a brand once he or she capitulates to capitalism's hegemony over the artworld system. The only way to shed this brand is to disappear entirely from the marketplace – or, as Martín Soto Climent attempts to do in *The Contemporary Comedy: Glossy Mist*, acquire an entirely new set of personalities. Consisting of 24 works made by eight 'different' artists, seven of whom are personas created by Soto Climent – one is his alter ego, Martín Soto – the exhibition was inspired, according to the press release, by a text by the fourth-century Chinese anarchist philosopher Bao Jingyan about the existential crisis of a warrior facing death. In his dreams, the warrior kills a man who wears his own face, a metaphor, no doubt, for what Soto Climent attempts to do in this exhibition. The problem is that *The Contemporary Comedy: Glossy Mist* reads less like a pivotal confrontation with oneself and more like a Gabriel García Márquez novel, or like the private ramblings of a schizophrenic person with an international coterie of friends, which might be saying the same thing.

Known best for creating sublime objects out of trash, stockings, shoes and beer cans, here Soto Climent assumes the characters of Lola Lago, a Tierra del Fuego-born choreographer and

dancer who committed suicide during the 1970s; John Brown, an artist with 'very little means' who creates Plasticine faces in crumpled beer cans; Felix Manz, a Swiss depressive who defaces newspaper advertisements; and João Carvalho, a composite of a group of men imprisoned by a military dictatorship in Brazil during the 70s, to name just a few examples of the avatars. Each of these personas deals more overtly than obliquely with death. Animal skulls, skeletons and death masks abound. Rather than a group show of artists dealing with the same theme, it's readily apparent that this one belongs to a single artist experimenting with different mediums – drawing, painting, collage, photography and sculpture.

Tashiro Tsuramoto: Hagakure (all works 2015) is a three-sided structure in the centre of the gallery consisting of a wood frame wallpapered with loosely brushed ink drawings of howling skeletons on white sheets of paper. According to the press release, Tashiro Tsuramoto is a ninety-one-year-old calligraphy master who lost most of his family in a concentration camp in Mexico during the Second World War – one can't help but imagine Soto Climent himself hunched over in a silk kimono with an ink-stained brush,

affecting Tsuramoto's personality as much as he does Tsuramoto's 'hand' on paper. *Iris Shady: Desnuda* is a ladder constructed from cement, plaster, plastic bags and wire, which are moulded to resemble the pelvis and various leg bones of a human skeleton. Shady is a New Zealand sculptor attempting to create/anticipate the fossilised remains left behind after the extinction of the human race. The hanging installation is meant to symbolise the work's suspension between time and space, but without the context provided by the checklist, it just looks a prop from the serial-killer drama *Hannibal* (2013–).

In the bathroom of the gallery hangs *Felix Manz: Untitled (Obama)*, a minor work that speaks volumes about the exhibition. It consists of a photograph of President Obama over whose face Manz has sketched a skull. Even defaced, Obama is still immediately recognisable thanks to his signature gesture of leaning slightly forward, with his right hand pinching his chin. In other words, everyone has a tell. Soto Climent's might be flamboyance. Inside of him there's a manic character actor attempting to break free – either that, or an ingenious artist who needs to figure out what he wants to be doing. *Brienne Walsh*



Felix Manz: Untitled (Obama), 2015, newspaper, black pencil, 43 × 33 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Clifton Benevento, New York