

Mohamad-Said Baalbaki Al Burak

Share

Al Burak

Since 2007, I have been exploring mechanisms of perception within the context of the museum. Why and how does an artefact presented in a museum convey the impression of utmost credibility and authenticity to the spectator? My research thus focuses on the authority and power of the museum as an institution and its reception by society.

„Al-Burak“ is the name of the horse of the prophet Muhammad. It is famous for having a man's head. „Al-Burak“ is also the title of the project that I am working on within the Graduate School for the Arts and Sciences. „Al-Burak“ is the fictional story of an archeological finding in Jerusalem and its investigation by two German scientists at the beginning of the 20th century. This project about mythology and the interaction between western and Islamic culture makes use of different scientific methods: both scientific and humanities methods are put into practice. I work with knowledge and methods developed within natural history, in order to create a credible and seemingly authentic fiction. I question terms like „original“, „copy“, „fake“ and reflect on the role of the spectator. The power of the museum as an institution which decidedly influences how an object is perceived will come under critical observation. The focus lies on how our perception changes depending on the context of reception.

The story of the prophet's winged horse and the phantasies that go with it are closely linked to my own upbringing. They are the cultural background that I grew up with. They define a space in which reality and fiction are closely intertwined, in which authenticity and credibility become ever more questionable. They create a world in which reality is dependent on power. I used assumptions, suggestions and inspirations as a starting

point for my project which gave me the opportunity to combine my passion for archeology and collecting things with my fascination for the museum.

This project aims to show how much the perception of art depends on religious or ideological factors. Judging observations and research results – even those that seem to be utterly objective – depends on cultural conventions. Every interpretation of a work of art is thus tied to subjective motives and reasons.

The events

The archeologist Werner von Königswald, who had led the excavations on the Jerusalem temple mount just before the outbreak of WWI, discovered a cemetery on its south-east side. Königswald assumed that it dated back to early Islamic culture. At the northern wall of the cemetery, he came upon a special finding which had been hidden in a small niche. It was a suitcase which contained a number of bones. For the archeologist, the place and the container which held the bones were unusual. He realized that the bones had to be from an animal, but he could not determine which animal.

The bones were analyzed and partially reconstructed in Berlin. Under the direction of Professor Wellenhofer, the Berlin Museum of Natural History made copies of the bones. At the request of Professor von Königswald, Professor Wellenhofer sent these to Professor Heinrich Ralph Glücksvogel in Munich. Wellenhofer and Glücksvogel corresponded on the nature of the finding. Wellenhofer was convinced that the bones represented the remains of a malformed horse. Glücksvogel on the other hand assumed a connection with mythological animals.

Short Biography

1974 born in Beirut, Lebanon

1994-1998 Studies of fine art (painting) at the Institut des Beaux-Arts in Beirut

2000-2001 Summer school at Marwan, Darat al Funun in Amman, Jordan
 2002-2005 Studies of fine art (painting) at the Berlin University of the Arts, „Meisterschüler“ with Prof. Burkhard Held
 2006-2008 Master of Arts, Institute for Art in Context, Berlin University of the Arts

Awards

2005 „Meisterschülerpreis des Präsidenten“, Berlin University of the Arts
 2006 Scholarship Solidere's „Artist in Residence“, Beirut
 2008 Stipendiary of the pilot phase of the Graduate School for the Arts and Sciences at the Berlin University of the Arts

Exhibitions (selection from 2006 on)

2009 „Zimmer mit Aussicht“, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin (G)
 „INVENTORY #2“, WILDE Gallery, Berlin (G)
 „Heldenhaft“, Auto-i-DAT AG, Zürich (G)
 „Und dann und wann ein weißer Elefant. Kunst und Zoologie“, Kunstverein Schwimmhalle Schloss Plön (G)
 „Scope Basel“, WILDE Gallery, Basel (G)
 „high in the sky. Pilotphase“, UdK Berlin (G, K)
 „Querschläge“, Klasse Burkhard Held, Schloss Oberhausen (G)
 „Out of Place. Künstler aus dem Libanon in der Diaspora“, Galerie Nord, Berlin (G, K)
 „Palmbeach 3“, Contemporary Art Fair, WILDE Gallery, Florida (G)
 2008 „Red Dot“, WILDE Gallery, New York (G)
 „Still Life“, WILDE Gallery, Berlin (E)
 „Augenweiden“, Vattenfall Europe, Berlin (E)
 „Aus dem Kontext“, Masterarbeiten des Studiengangs „Kunst im Kontext“ 07/08, UdK Berlin (G, K)
 „Showdown! Klasse Burkhard Held“, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin (G)

„Toronto International Art Fair“, WILDE Gallery, Toronto (G)
„INVENTORY #1“, WILDE Gallery, Berlin (G)
„BERLINER LISTE Art Fair“, WILDE Gallery, Berlin (G)
„Museumsbauhütte. Zwölf künstlerische Museen und Museumsentwürfe“,
Werkbundarchiv – Museum der Dinge, Berlin (G, K)
„Art Miami“, WILDE Gallery, Miami (G)
2007 „Fremdgehen“, Klasse Held in Halle, Galerie im Volkspark, Halle (G)
„Dialog der Generationen Berlin-Prag“, Kommunale Galerie, Berlin (G)
„7. Weltriennale der Kleingrafik“, Museum Alte Bischofsburg, Wittstock (G)
„Blow-Up“, NBK Studio, Berlin (E)
2006 „Dialoggeneraci Berlin-Praha“, Galerie Diamant, Tschechien (G)
„Meisterschülerpreis Ausstellung“, Galerie Michael Schultz, Berlin (G, K)
„7ème triennale mondiale“ Chamlieres, Auvergne, Frankreich (G, K)
„Grafikpodium VI“, Kiezspinne, Berlin (G)

(G) Gruppenausstellung

(E) Einzelausstellung

(K) Katalog