

Antoine Levi

Beatriz Olabarrieta

CLEVER TO FOLLOW GOAT

September 6th – October 15th, 2017

Hi Beatriz,

It's been good to slowly get to know these characters. Before I met them I had thought about what they might talk to one another about. How they might interact and how they might know one another through their proximity. I initially thought of Pirandello with regard to my invitation to give voice to these characters. It was Pirandello in reverse! Rather than 6 characters in search of an author it seemed to be an artist and a curator in search of their characters. How, or better who, to give that voice though? This is a responsibility. And it made me consider Boris Groys. In *Going Public* (2010) Groys considers the etymological link between 'to curate' and 'to cure'. He argues that the artwork is inherently sick when devoid of context. An artworks inability to show itself reveals the need they have to be 'nursed' from their own latency. It is the demonstration of the artwork that nurses the object to health, giving something life. This seemed useful but irresponsible. I couldn't begin from a place that might suggest these things are alive because of me. I understand the sentiment but reject that role. They were far from sick, perhaps just unaware of who they were? I am no nurse but maybe I could be their coach? Besides, this seems far from Benjamin's notion of artworks needing to be 'extant' rather than simply 'seen'. He says 'cult value' depends on existence rather than exhibition. I like Groys and I know he likes to pick a fight with Benjamin from time to time. But I also agree with Byung Chul-Han's analysis of Benjamin; That locking sacred items in an inaccessible room, and thereby withdrawing them from visibility, heightens their cult value. The act of exhibition is a capitalist value as it verifies itself through a necessity of attention. Commodification in other words. Giving voice to your work wasn't about reviving or birthing them into functioning exhibitionists but giving character to things already living outside of this conundrum.

Your messages confirmed we were always finding our way to these characters with some synchronicity. You spoke of how they might be individual parts of the same brain, talking to themselves, (itself). You pointed me to Baudrillard on cars, and their reluctance to make full advantage of their freedom to move, instead conforming to patterns governed by safety and the rules outside. You wondered if these characters were in a moving vehicle, the world passing by while they recounted themselves inside, learning of their singularity in a multiplicitous world. I was considering their own cognitive awareness through the confines of a gallery. An allegory for what enunciates art as such. Not so much their individual value but their relation to one another. Within a confined space, deliberately brought together for the purposes of communication. In their anthropomorphised condition they might similarly be components of a singular circumstance, given meaning simply because they were brought together, separate from the world but with an intention of some kind. Their dialogue with one another might offer a discovery that they exist only because they exist together in a given place.

But it's when we both discovered inescapable family connections persisted that this metaphor became something more. Like with the artwork or specifically the annunciation of art through an object's display and proximity to another, the family becomes a unit of consciousness and identification. I had been reading Roussel's *Locus Solus* where the anthropomorphisation of objects reveals the constituent parts of Cantarel's expansive mind. Each object an opportunity for a story to unfold. You found your way to 'the fable of the goat' by S.Y. Agnon. In this story a goat holds a letter instructing a distanced father to follow him to the location of his son. The letter was never found and the father killed the goat, losing the key to the reunion with his son. You saw familial relationships and breaking ties, finding the world and oneself through alternative routes to knowledge. Your father's drawings are literally in these works but I don't know how to give character to these things. They know each other and that is how we will know them.

I insisted my mother kept all my father's technical drawings when he died. They were damp, mildewed. Perfectly rendered in pencil on a kind of paper that would be hard to come by now. They had been made when he was an apprentice draftsman in the 1960's and I loved looking at them regardless of the fact I couldn't understand what they depicted. He had kept them until his death in 1999 and having inherited his sentimentality I wanted them now in a way that was hard for others to understand.

I also have my Grandfather's cartography tools. Things to this day I don't know how to use, even though they still accompany me on the desk that I'm writing at now. I have never tried to use them. I rarely look at them in fact.

I look exactly like my father did. He looked exactly like his father. We were carbon copies of one another but my Grandfather looked nothing like his. My mother discovered after both their deaths (by cross referencing dates of my Great Grandad's death in the First World War with the dates of my Grandfathers birth) that my Great Grandad was not my Grandad's biological parent. His biological father was unknown and now, as then, it's an unrecoverable secret. We were carbon copies of an unknown man. One, who I suspect, could also draw.

I studied architecture for one year, 10 years after my father's death. Nights spent at a desk, hand drawing plans in pencil elicited emotions that I fetishized. But it turns out drawing was not for me. Applying myself in this concentrated way was not what I wanted to do. I liked the drama of the emotion but not the real heartache of hard work. The genuine connection I lusted after had been tainted and made impossible by my own indulgent knowledge of its significance. I wanted to be drawing, but I didn't want to draw. Even though I too was a good draftsman.

My dad worked predominantly in the Middle-East and was lonely, missing his family. When home we avoided him. For no other reason than for the awkwardness and fear that is roused when in the company of something you feel you don't fully understand or know.

He was someone we all observed intensely though. To observe him was to observe our environment. To anticipate him was to understand ourselves and how we would need to behave. Reading us back, our cautiousness upset him and the revolving observation of one another built an environment we misunderstood even more. This is how I knew my dad which is to not have known him at all. This was only knowing who we were together. What it was to be.

We spent a lot of time in the Middle-East where he mostly lived through the 80's and 90's during long stints of work. Nearly 20 years after his death I find myself coincidentally, and for very different reasons, frequently working in the same places. I have taken the same flights as he did to the same airports, with the same routes into city centres. I recognise the architecture and the roads. I know the smell of the desert and the dry heat of the air when doors are opened. This is simultaneously a re-enactment of my childhood and of my father's own experience. I have even on occasion stayed in the same hotels, wondering alone if I've been in these very rooms before. Of if he has. I no longer crave the nostalgia but I feel the connection. Not just to him but to it all. Perhaps it is in feeling it all that we know.

We might yet know these people, Beatriz.

Best,

Lynton

CLEVER TO FOLLOW GOAT is Beatriz Olabarrieta's first exhibition at Antoine Levi, Paris.

Beatriz Olabarrieta (Bilbao, 1979) lives and works between London and Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include *Book! don't tell me what to do*, Parallel Oaxaca, Mexico DF, 2017; *DUMB BELLS*, Saturdays Live, Serpentine Galleries, London, 2016; *Pocketful*, Platform Artist in Residence, Site Gallery, Sheffield, 2016; *Plot Bunny*, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, 2016.

Her work has also been included in the group shows: *¿PARA QUÉ?*, Parque Galeria, Mexico City, 2017; *Assorted Paper*, The Sunday Painter, London, 2017; *The boys the girls and the political*, Lisson Gallery, London, 2015.