

Villa Design Group

"Blue Moon"

22.03. – 26.04.2014

Taking its title from the 1935 song performed by Greta Keller, "Blue Moon" is the first solo presentation of works by the Villa Design Group at Mathew.

At the center of the exhibition sits ***Coastal Road Roulette Table - Lunar Inlay (Torricella, Lysis, Malaparte)***.

Crafted in walnut burl floating in a metallic frame, its top bears myriad pieces of lacquer in various shades of grey resembling the surface of the moon and its craters. Surrounding the table are three chairs inlaid with a continuation of the same pattern. Together, these four pieces of furniture take the shape of Capri in remembrance of a vacation the group spent on the island at the famous Villa Torricella, home of the lesbian millionairesses, the Sisters Wollcott Perry. The chairs, cut from sections of the island's coastline, are positioned in such a way as to become protagonists in a game of chance, indicating three of the island's most famous homes: The Villa Lysis, The Casa Malaparte, and the Villa Torricella.

Although this island retreat was envisaged as a moment of rest after a year of collaborating, the time spent in the bay of Naples ended a three-year romance between two of the group's key collaborators. A drama then, it mirrors the bitter resentments and dissatisfactions of the owners of each of these famous homes, who often fled the mainland in order to flee the pressures of metropolitan life. The end of this adolescent romance allegorizes the group's inability to flee their own professionalization, as they returned to mainland via different routes: two returned to Germany and one to Lisbon.

This failed island retreat and the history of the Portuguese capital are taken up again in the two part work

Tectonic Slide Partition - Blue Neon Isolation (Entrance, Separation, Exit).

On display on a low steel tripod in the gallery's side vitrine are eight contact sheets which index a series of photographs that document the group's interests during the journey to and from the island of Capri: the last fresco cycle of Hans von Marées, the porcelain room at the Capodimonte Palace, and the overworked musculature of the Napalese baroque. These sheets could be placed in rectangular spaces left out in the sandblasted patterns on a set of sliding glass doors positioned in the gallery's window. Sandblasted on the doors are two patterns: facing into the space a motif derived from the map of medieval Lisbon before the 1755 earthquake destroyed the majority of the city and facing out of the gallery a motif derived from the map of the newly rebuilt Lisbon, its city plan marked by its gridded and highly structured rationale. Between these two sets of partially open doors, at the heart of the sculpture hangs a blue neon sign in the shape of the moon, intersected with three arrows: an early line drawing which has subsequently become The Villa Design Group Logo. This two part work melodramatically sets the group's journey to Capri against a larger history of architectural disaster and reconstruction whereby the history of the Lisbon Earthquake is equated to the end of a student love affair.

A second neon work on a red beige lacquered box hanging on the left wall of the gallery, ***Cliff Pediment Lamp - Blue Neon Signature (Love is on the Line)***, again takes up these connections between architectural history and romance. The neon reads "Amori et dolori sacrum" ("Sacred Love and Sacred Pain"), an inscription that originates from the pediment of Count Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen's Capri residence "Villa Lysis". Fersen, exiled from Paris after a journalistic scandal involving intimations of satantic black masses and pederastic orgies, set up home on the island constructing the Villa Lysis for his collection and his Italian lover, until one morning at breakfast he committed suicide drinking a flute of champagne laced with five grams of cocaine.

Hung centrally on the back wall is a black and white photograph of a male model adorned with a futuristic hat titled ***Manuel da Maia Turns Away from Prince Joseph the First whilst Modeling the Gravitational Rotating Door Helmet*** and taken from a photo editorial documenting a set of hats first shown to the public during a performance at Kunsthhaus Bregenz in the summer of 2013.

Turning his back to the camera, the adolescent photo-model in the black and white photograph impersonates Manuel da Maia, the chief engineer of the reconstruction of Lisbon. He dismissed the worries of Prince Joseph the First, who abandoned Lisbon after the earthquake and whose trauma-induced claustrophobia reached such extremes that he moved the entire royal court to a tent city on the hills high above the ruined capital.

Positioned throughout the space, four plinths constructed from water cut aluminum with inverted wooden sections in walnut, partly sprayed in ivory-colored high gloss lacquer, titled ***Scorpion Rotation Hat Stand, Lobster Rotation Hat Stand, Cock Rotation Hat Stand and Crab Rotation Hat Stand*** were manufactured as possible stands for this collection of hats. On top of these plinths sit four busts inspired by Renato Bertelli's "Continuous Profile Of Mussolini". Villa Design Group re-contours this Italian fascist profile with Portuguese Baroque adornments: Wigs, a lobster tail, a cock, and a scorpion's sting, each one extending outwards from the mouth, almost like a tongue. The busts' baroque details nostalgically encrust the futuristic profile in an attempt to reverse the time line of the reconstruction of Lisbon and thus allegorically attempt to reverse the groups own professionalization. Here the group's own re-contouring as an enterprise is attacked by a youthful urge to design an alternative future in which, to paraphrase the British architect Nigel Coates, "form might just follow fiction."

Villa Design Group are Than Hussein Clark, James Connick and William Joys. It was formed at Goldsmith's College in 2011. Blue Moon is dedicated to the memory of Bading Kagalakan (2009-2012), architect, lover and friend.