

**melvin moti**  
**echo chamber**  
**09.02.2012 – 24.03.2012**



**kunsthalle**  
**lissabon**

Kunsthalle Lissabon presents Echo Chamber, Melvin Moti's first solo show in Portugal. The title comes from what E.M. Forster describes as a space in which writers speak so helpfully to each other across time and space.

Ludwig Gosewitz (1936, Naumburg - 2007, Bad Berka) was an artist typically known for his contribution to the Fluxus group. In his most precious body of work, Gosewitz found a way to translate scientific data about planets and constellations into geometrical diagrams and colorful maps. In addition the artist made drawn versions of astrological birth charts for a friends and fellow artists. From 1971 onwards however, Gosewitz started to produce his lesser-known mouth-blown glass objects. The unpredictable process of glassblowing follows exactly the opposite logic to the geometrical and mathematical based drawings the artist is generally known for. Later in life, Gosewitz became professor for glass art in the Academy of Art in Munich.

In Moti's most recent film, glass plays a central role. Coming from the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, a number of glassworks were shot floating in outer space, a science fiction exhibition in film format. After working with Victorian glassworks for months, doing research on them and hunting for V&A collection pieces on the antique market, Moti started feeling the natural urge to start making glass pieces himself. Another inspiration has been Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* (1915-23) and how this piece allows one to travel through different layers of glass, each narrating a scenario, a time-based piece as it were. This has lead Moti to produce his own glassworks, a number of spheres, in which both the texture and the form of the glass refers to the surfaces of planets. The exhibition functions as a channel of communication across generations of artists, in particular Ludwig Gosewitz; a universe where astrology and astronomy blend into a single constellation of shared ideas.

The exhibition *Echo Chamber* is generously supported by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Mondriaan Fund and has the production support of VICARTE - Glass and Ceramic for the Arts.

## WORDS DON'T COME EASY

Conversation between Melvin Moti, João Mourão and Luís Silva, on the occasion of the exhibition Echo Chamber, held in February 2012 at Kunsthalle Lissabon.

KL

**E. M. Forster, the English novelist, describes a space in which writers speak helpfully to each other across time and space. One could say that such a chamber is at the core of your project for Kunsthalle Lissabon and while inside it, you entertain a very generous and open dialog with a constellation of several other authors. Do you mind us joining the conversation?**

MM

Please join, let's dance.

**Every time we came here, we noticed that you have been spending quite some time with Ludwig. We don't mean to pry, but we have been very curious... If you don't mind us asking, what have you two been discussing?.**

When I first saw Gosewitz' glass pieces in Gallery Barbara Wien, about two years ago, I was instantly drawn to the awkwardness of these objects. They certainly didn't introduce themselves as artworks immediately. They seemed to have been made with a different intention. I thought it was extraordinary for an artist to reach such a tipping-point, where an object slips into having a different status. After my exhibition at Wiels the artist Willem Oorebeek told me that he was rather disappointed as he thought I would make an exhibition that wouldn't look like contemporary art. It's a comment that stuck with me. How could I? How can I reach that tipping point? Gosewitz has been my advisor on that matter.

**It is interesting that you mention the tipping point as the point after which things stop looking like contemporary art rather than stop being art. The being is more connected to the essence of a phenomenon, its ontology if you will. If it stops looking like art, is it a question of surface?**

It's more the moment before things stop being contemporary art, which I've been interested in when looking at Gosewitz' glass pieces. In that, I've been interested in how these objects look at us, rather than how we look at them.

**Yet the surface, as the outside part or uppermost layer of something, seemed to us like a way into Echo Chamber. It now presents itself as all the more relevant. Is this notion of surface (and superficiality) something you have also been discussing with Ludwig?**

Surfaces have been on my mind for a while. Ever since Warhol pointed our view towards the surface, and asked us to stay there, not to look any further, because there was nothing behind the surface. Duchamp scratched the surface of a mirror, to return from the dead, to haunt us indefinitely. Weird pieces of dust are on the surface of our eyes, they are these embryonic, drifting translucent silhouettes, which remain in the field of vision for a lifetime. Our lips have the thinnest surface (skin) on our body. I have a friend who always 'kisses' on the lips. It's not a kiss really, it's more of

a soft touch. Another friend always kisses very closely to the lips (this is a real kiss). They're acts of love, through the ultra-thin surface of the lips we enter each other's soul. And that's what the surface is: it's a gateway.

**Speaking of gateways, something that came to our mind, during this conversation, is that words are also gateways. They have an uncanny ability to summon ghosts and during any conversation, or piece of writing for that matter, one can choose the ghosts that will haunt you and keep you company. We've opened up a portal and brought the ghost of surface to the conversation. Another ghost that has been here with us, quite invisibly, since the beginning, is the ghost of constellation. We summoned it the first time we spoke, because it is an integral part of the show, and mostly, it is a metaphor that can be used when referring to your work.**

It's very tempting to speak of an exhibition in terms of a constellation of works, to describe connections in terms of patterns that can be drawn throughout a space. This exhibition however is based on the idea that we're all a continuation of the big bang, and our very own celestial body is a part of a constellation itself. As we speak, our planet is suspended in deep space. In fact, the mural that I'm making for this show is based on a star map, which I saw in an artist book by a friend of mine, Irene Kopelman. Her book is a collection of all the photographs she collected during her research. One page is dedicated to the Atlas Eclipticalis and my mural is based on this atlas of stars. In a sense, the mural is a continuation of the moment I saw that image in Irene's book, which is a continuation of the moment she saw that image and decided to take photographs of it, which is a continuation of that image, made by Antonín Běčvář in the 1950's, etc. etc. all the way back to the big bang. So really, each one of us is 4.7 billion years old. In this exhibition I'd like to think of the constellation as a pattern in time rather than in space. Does that make sense at all?

**Absolutely. If you think about constellations closely, you'll see they are also (if not mostly) about connecting different times. When constellations were created the sky was perceived as a surface, with no more depth than that of the celestial sphere. All the stars were perceived as being at the same distance from the person who was making the connections between them. But since the stars in one constellation can actually be thousands of light-years apart, what we are seeing is nothing more than an image of the stars' past. In the Orion constellation, for instance, one can find Bellatrix, which is 200 light years away from us, and Epsilon Orioni is 1359 light years away from us. From where we stand they simply appear to be two flickers of light, but one of the images we are receiving is two centuries old and the other is over a thousand years old.**

Indeed, looking at the stars is looking back in time.

**Do constellations, as a metaphor, seem like an appropriate way to think about your practice?**

I wasn't entirely speaking in metaphors. We are truly a continuation of the big bang, and following that thought the exhibition is a continuation of other artists' practices. In that sense I believe it's more of an experiment in methodology, and not so much an attempt to create a discursive outline. One could speak about originality, but really that is all said and done. I hope this space will become a physical space through

which the attempts of other artists will echo.

I was wondering, what words have haunted you, since you started the Kunsthalle? How do you feel about always being required to use words when explaining Kunsthalle? Don't you think eyebrows are more critical than words?

**A few ghosts have kept us company throughout this journey. We'd have to say that hoax was the first one, but gradually that ghost sort of shape-shifted and transformed into hospitality... a strange thing, we must admit, but that's where we are right now. There have been others, of course, but the presence of this new ghost of hospitality is very evident to us at the moment. But then again, ghosts only appear to those who believe in them...**

The words hoax, ghosts, shape-shifters all refer to something elusive, they escape any sense of concreteness. I think it's beautiful that the Kunsthalle has started out by inhabiting these rather mysterious terms and is developing into a very concrete function. Hospitality as a word seems to describe the present role of the Kunsthalle very well. I remember being there during the exhibition of Mariana Silva, and one by one, artists from the building would stop by. It seems that Kunsthalle now takes an important role as a communal space, which is fundamental even before one thinks about art-production and exhibitions. I'm not sure if you'd agree with me? And if so, do you think the Kunsthalle has been redefined, or would you rather see this as a transient phase?

In that sense, it's not at all coincidental that my exhibition has developed in such close collaboration with the Kunsthalle. I'm proposing a communal exhibition with many dead artists stopping by. I do hope you're not afraid of ghosts!

**No, not at all! We welcome ghosts as we do the living. But just out of curiosity, have you ever seen one? We ask you this because one of us, a few years ago, had an experience that could be described as an encounter with a ghost... it was during the night after having spent a long time trying to fall asleep. I (Luis) finally managed but it wasn't a good rest though, because I was turning in my bed a lot and waking up every now and then. One of the times when I woke up, I turned my head and saw someone, a man, standing next to the bed, looking at me. I got really scared and jumped out of the bed thinking a burglar had entered the apartment. In those quick moments, from when I saw him to when I got up, he was already gone. I thought he was trying to escape. I ran after him and looked for him in every room, but nothing. He was gone, no burglar, no one, nothing... everything was dark and quiet... I got really confused and went back to bed... To this date, that episode still haunts me... I imagine the logical explanation for what happened is that I was dreaming, half awake and half asleep, and I got reality and dreams mixed up. Nevertheless, it felt very real, present and a bit frightening... but we digress... So far you have mentioned E. M. Forster, Ludwig Gosewitz, Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, should we expect anyone else joining us?**

A crow will join us. I have never seen a ghost, but I have seen a number of conspiracies. One of my first memories is of sitting on the porch, in my parents' garden. On squeaking hot summer's days, I would just sit there bored to death. I must have been around four or five years old. That particular day my uncle came by and sat in the garden with my father. My uncle would always wear plenty of Old Spice cologne, which combined with the smell of Marlboro's, would forever be his

trademark. Crows always populated our garden. We had a number of fruit bearing trees, and they would hang around those trees, snooping for something to nibble on. They're smart, you know - crows. They are clever little bastards. At some point my dad and my uncle got up, but my uncle left his cigarette-butt burning. A crow jumped on the table, poked around a little, and took the cigarette in its mouth. And then he puffed. I was looking at a freaking crow smoking a cigarette. I got up and the crow flew away, with the cigarette in its mouth.

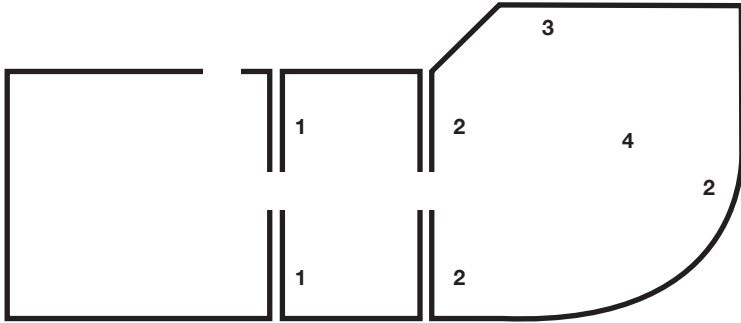
That moment initiated a friendship. The crow would come everyday and sit right in front of me. Staring at the distance, as I would do, watching my summer holiday pass by. Now all that sounds fantastical, but here is what makes it spooky. That was about thirty years ago. Up to this day, in whatever city I am in, whenever I sit down on a bench or in a park or just on the streets, a crow will arrive and sit right by my side. I'm not sure if this is the same animal, in fact I don't care. It could be a figment of my imagination altogether, but there will always be this bird and it will always be with me. This is my first memory, which tells me that everyday life is already supernatural. There is no need to believe in ghosts.

**We actually believe that you will be visited by a crow soon, Lisbon would not be what it is without its crows. Did you know that during medieval times two crows escorted the boat that was carrying the body of Saint Vincent until it safely reached Lisbon, where he was buried? Maybe one of those crows is the same one that has kept you company over the years...**

**Going back to the idea of Kunsthalle inhabiting those mysterious and elusive terms, you are absolutely right. From the beginning we wanted to abandon all sense of concreteness that is associated with an institution. Institutions tend to be perceived as fixed, immutable and eternal entities. Most of the times they are perceived in a very naturalized way, as if they could have an existence outside of human activity. We wanted to do the opposite, to develop and operate within a precarious, unstable model, and see how people would react to it. Hospitality gradually became part of this narrative once we realized three things. For one, the community really needed a space like Kunsthalle Lissabon and we think, as you mentioned, it shows; but hospitality can also be a critical way of inhabiting the mainstream, and that speaks very closely to our ethical/political concerns; and finally we really enjoy having people over, working closely with them and doing our best to make them feel welcome...**

This exhibition is fairly material-based I would say. There are very few metaphors. It can't be a coincidence that the exhibition is made at a moment when Kunsthalle is also being defined more in concrete terms, more stabilized by the needs of a community. The hospitality I experienced has been essential to the making of this exhibition. I have never encountered collaboration with curators who were so closely involved and present when the work was being produced. This intimacy creates confidence, which is important for such an experimental exhibition (for me at least, I'm way out of my comfort zone). My prediction is that your new words will become "intensive care". Intensively caring for the artist, and for all the disenchanting casualties of the crisis, looking for a cure in art. You are the curators, so you must have a cure.

**Once again E. M Forster has the cure: the epigraph to his 1910 novel *Howards End*, later used as his epitaph in a monument in his honor in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, reads: "Only connect".**



**1**

Ludwig Gosewitz

2 portraits / Dyptychon (for Daniel Spoerri), 1990

drawing

**2**

Ludwig Gosewitz

Three women - Three children / Triptychon, 1993

drawing

**3**

Atlas Eclipticalis, 2012

ink

**4**

Echo Chamber, 2012

glass

Melvin Moti was born in 1977 in Rotterdam, where he lives and works.

Moti graduated from the Academie Voor Beeldende Vorming, in Tilburg, Netherlands, in 1999 and was a resident artist at De Ateliers, in Amsterdam, from 1999 to 2001, where he now is a tutor. His work has been shown in numerous European institutions, namely FRAC Champagne, in Reims, France, the Stedelijk Museum, in Amsterdam, Museum für Moderne Kunst, in Frankfurt and Kunstverein Köln, In Cologne. He participated in the 5th Berlin Biennial and had recent solo shows at Wiels, in Brussels, Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea di Trento, MIT List Visual Arts Center, in Boston and MUDAM, in Luxembourg.



**new address!**

**av. da liberdade 211, 1º, 1250-194 lisboa, portugal**

**thursday to saturday 3–7 pm**

**[www.kunsthalle-lissabon.org](http://www.kunsthalle-lissabon.org) — [info@kunsthalle-lissabon.org](mailto:info@kunsthalle-lissabon.org)**



FUNDAÇÃO  
CALOUSTE  
GULBENKIAN

