

Simon Fujiwara



Encompassing formats including performance-lectures, published fiction, and collections of various articles and artefacts, the recent projects of Berlin-based Simon Fujiwara take shape as if scattered trails of evidence whose parts are more-or-less plausible. Each unearths an implicit myth of human origins and an explicit sexual archeology which together weave narratives that take us from our shared and most distant human past, to up close and personal with Fujiwara and his family history. The son of a British mother and a Japanese father, the artist unfolds a practice that is ostensibly a 'journey of personal discovery' about his own origins, or so the cliché goes, into a carefully constructed borderline of ethology, eroticism, architecture and ancestry. Histories and biographies are written, rewritten – or faked – and gay porno stories hold just as much credence and craft as paleontological treatises.

The Museum of Incest (2007– ongoing) is a multipart project which spins out from the Olduvai Gorge in northern Tanzania, a site often referred to as 'The Cradle of Mankind' due to its importance in the understanding of human origins. The Gorge has unveiled some of the earliest hominid remains from over 2 million years ago, and through the study of successive deposits a picture of how modern man has evolved has emerged. Fujiwara has taken this most resonant of locations as the venue for a fictional museum dedicated to a most unpromising of subjects: incestuous practices. With three tableaux around this taboo – 'ancient', 'modern' and 'middle ages' (here actors portray the last days of Sodom and Gomorrah) – and completed by an underground gallery and café – this absurdist building proposes the ancestry and the sexualising of the family as central themes for education and entertainment: facilities intended to stimulate the local economy. Fujiwara's mischievous museum is wilfully spurious, a visitor attraction where human sexuality and identity are rendered gloriously ambiguous.



Following a field trip to Tanzania in 2007, Fujiwara produced *Ancestral Grave Dig – A Site Survey for the Museum of Incest*, an installation that seemed to mimic an interrupted lecture or a dysfunctional archive which appeared to be either half finished or semi vandalised. Slides of the purported expedition were scattered on the floor or were projected on a screen. Several display cases, filled

with spuriously labelled items (“fragments ... not used by our hominid ancestors”) as well as maps, drawings, newspaper clippings (“Man’s dread of incest is deeplyrooted feeling”, “600,000 year old skull is unearthed”, and slippery clues (a banana skin), lay alongside a model of the ‘controversial’ new museum. The proposed form of the museum itself, three interlocking spheres, is taken, as if in an act of creative inbreeding, from a design for a goldfish bowl, conceived by the artist’s father.



Fujiwara presented ‘a guided tour’ of the museum within an installation at the London gallery Limoncello in April 2008. Detailing the inspiration for the displays through a slideshow supplemented with family photographs, the lecture took place in front of a reproduction of a mural depicting a family scene, another of his father’s designs. Further complicating this expansive project, the artist has published a text in the form of diary entries supposedly written by the renowned archeologist Louis Leakey (who discovered the profound potential of the Olduvai Gorge in the 1950s), wherein the trauma of unveiling the origins of mankind seem to precipitate incestuous conflicts.



The Erotics Project is a largely text-based enterprise based on the artist's re-imagining of his parents life in the 1970s, before the artist was born, as foreigners running a tourist hotel near Sant Feliu de Guíxols, on the Costa Brava, during final years of the dictatorship of General Franco. This much is certain. Yet Fujiwara has turned this ripe reality into the setting for a number of 'real life' tales which

he has had published in the erotic men's zine *Straight to Hell Magazine: The Manhattan Review of Unnatural Act*. Set against the military, political and sexual suppression enforced by the fascist regime of the time, 'Paquito: Egg White Jack-Off', for example, details the father character's exploration of the erotic and farcical possibilities of the raw ingredients of the Hotel Munber's famed tortillas – favourites of both tourists and military policemen – while fantasizing about Paquito the "quick-witted kitchen hand".

Curator Nicolas Bourriaud, expanding on the thoughts of Peter Osborne and others, has noted that rather than treating history in the form of a catalogue or repertoire, as with Postmodernism, a major axis of the art of today is concerned with "the past as defined through territory and usage, articulated in and through space"¹. In producing art as an unfolding of signs, stories and sites, articulated through various modes and sequences, Fujiwara seems exemplary of this mode of thinking and practice through architecture and eroticism: the past is not assimilated into the present as a fact, but unfolded as a necessary fiction.

– Max Andrews & Mariana Cánepa Luna

Images: Installation view of *Museum of Incest: A Site Survey* (2008, Frankfurt am Main); Detail of vitrine from *Museum of Incest: A Site Survey* (2008, Frankfurt am Main); Installation view of *Welcome to the Museum of Incest: A guided Tour* (2008, Limoncello Gallery, London) and archival family photographs (1970-1975) from *Welcome to the Hotel Munber*. All images: Courtesy of the artist

1 Nicolas Bourriaud, interview with Aude Launay, *O2*, No.47, autumn 2008, p.43