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REVIEWS
New York: Lehmann Maupin
Julian LaVerdiere: Goliath Concussed
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Lehmann Maupin's new headquarters in Chelsea is a space to be reckoned with. Designed by Rem Koolbaas, it has the gargantuan proportions and unadorned austerity of high modernist buildings. Certainly one of the most originally designed private galleries in the neighbourhood, the space itself demands attention, and one can imagine that for an artist showing there it is equally a pleasure and a challenge to work in. From its unique façade and entrance to the open-plan office where workers are exposed like players on a stage, Koolhaas's gallery reflects the ethos of architecture since the advent of Modernism.

Julian LaVerdiere's first solo show with Lehmann Maupin holds its own within this space. He succeeds where many other artists today fail: in entertaining the viewer. LaVerdiere is an American, horn in 1971, who studied with Hans Haacke at Cooper Union and later with Ronald Jones at the Yale School of Art. He now lives and works in New York. He is a self-proclaimed inventor and historian who divides his time between fine art practice and a commercial enterprise called The Big Room, which is engaged in art direction and design for advertising. Despite his youth and entrepreneurial experience, or indeed because of these things, he has created an exhibition that at once intrigues and enthrals.

The fun begins when one enters the gallery. Immediately the viewer is assaulted by the sound of a mechanism and the sight of several large sculptures. The sound emanates from a gigantic installation, Lost Cornerstone, which is a monumental kinetic sculpture of an eagle. By kinetic I mean rotating on a rig that is fixed to the ceiling, which the gallery had to hire an engineering team to install. By monumental I mean about five feet tall and presumably made of lead. (It is actually made of urethane, hut at 250 pounds it really could inflict damage if it went astray.)

This massive object swirls about the room, seemingly defying gravity with its agile movement around the circumference of the gallery. Like a hypnotist's pendulum, it draws

the viewer into its rhythmic pattern. The sheer weight and appearance of the eagle suggest something one would find on an architectural element: on a pediment of a building, or on a plinth in front of one, like the beloved lions on the steps of the New York Public Library. The first reaction is one of amazement at the ability of the machine to make this object move in such a graceful motion, which is followed immediately by terror at the prospect of the gigantic eagle flying out of its harness. In fact, there is a floor-to-ceiling cargo net separating the sculpture from the audience, who tend to remain captivated by this performance. LaVerdiere has taken sculpture to a new level of meaning, one that combines the commercial aspects of cinematic special effects with ideological and political enquiry.

The eagle is a replica of the last surviving cornerstone of the 22 that once adorned the original façade of the late Pennsylvania Station, or Penn Station as it is affectionately known to the locals. This is the sister station to Grand Central, also located midtown, from which New Yorkers can catch Amtrak trains to various parts of the country. The original station, in its neoclassical glory, was demolished in 1963. LaVerdiere hangs this effigy in replica as the survivor of what he calls the ideological conflict between Empire-style Neoclassicism and International Style Modernism. This conflict was played out throughout New York in the early part of the twentieth century, from the aforementioned public library and the midtown post office headquarters to Mies van der Robe's modernist classic, the Seagram building. In LaVerdiere's installation the battle comes full circle with the last remnant of Penn Station in Koolhaas's modernist gallery.

LaVerdiere is no stranger to spectacle, having been a master model-maker and special effects wizard in his commercial life. An earlier show at Andrew Kreps gallery in New York prompted *New York Times* critic Ken Johnson to comment that it had the 'thrill of a new Spielberg epic'. Indeed, there is something filmic about LaVerdiere's exhibition at Lehmann Maupin. Why does the eagle spin endlessly and how does it relate to the other pieces in the gallery? The eagle is, of course, a loaded symbol: a symbol of American freedom, long the image on the postage stamp, but also, of course, the icon of the Third Reich.

The space in front of Lost *Cornerstone* is occupied on one side by a triumvirate of pieces titled *Imperial Dragsters.* These large-scale sculptures are slicker than the eagle, giving the impression of toys blown up in scale for effect. Their slickness is the result of poly-iridescent auto paint. The forms are hybrid, the top half resembling a tomb and the bottom half a militaristic vehicle. These shapes are in fact derived from Visconti's 1861 neoclassical *Tomb for Napoleon Bonaparte*
and the chassis of the Lamborghini LM001, the first luxury sports utility vehicle (the jeep-like cars with which middle-class mothers terrorise the streets). The fact that these

sculptures seem to have a belligerent purpose belies their enticing surfaces. Indeed, it is as if LaVerdiere is inviting us to think about America as an empire, rather than the democracy it is supposed to he.

Across the gallery from the *Imperial Dragsters* is *Lantern Shuttlecock,* a suspended, oversized sculpture of a neoclassical municipal lantern. The sculpture is hung horizontally from the ceiling so that it resembles a missile in flight. Seen from underneath, the illuminated interior hosts a model of the great El Hambra mosque in Cordoba, Spain. Like all of LaVerdiere's sculptures, *Lantern Shuttlecock* combines not only architectural styles, hut also various political ideologies.

LaVerdiere is the son of the sculptor Bruno LaVerdiere and, like his father, he evidently shares an interest in memorials. All of the works in the show combine the forms of commemoration with contemporary technology and political ideology. It is perhaps important to remember that LaVerdiere had his studio on the ninety-first floor of Tower One of the World Trade Center, and was part of the team that created a memorial in the form of towers of light. *Goliath Concussed* continues LaVerdiere's abiding interest in the themes of war, power and politics: it is a show about American culture and comes at a time, in the light of recent events, when it is essential to examine this regime.