

João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva***On the Movement of the Fried Egg and Other Astronomical Bodies*****3 February – 21 March 2010****First Floor Galleries**

Based in Lisbon, artists João Maria Gusmão and Pedro Paiva have worked together since 2001, producing film, sculptural pieces, installations and text anthologies. This is their first solo exhibition in the UK comprising a selection of new and recent 16mm films.

Gusmão and Paiva's films typically evoke scientific studies, set in sparse, unidentifiable landscapes or darkened studio environments. Always silent, they cast a variety of curious characters in scenarios that allude to intellectual and esoteric texts. The artists cite Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa as a key inspiration for them. Pessoa did not write as himself, rather he created a string of 'heteronyms', fully formed characters or pseudonyms, each with a distinct world view. Through these Pessoa conveyed ideas that were often contradictory. Following him, Gusmão and Paiva describe their work as 'poetic philosophical fiction', making beautiful dream-like films that suggest a number of philosophical approaches to the world that cannot be reconciled.

Like the poet they revel in the creative energy that engenders such ideas, expressed with humour and a sense of wonder in their work. The commonplace becomes extraordinary, even hallucinatory, as we move through darkened space to encounter colour-saturated films literally as revelations.

In the first room we see a series of short films that deal with time, matter and form. *Ventriloquism* is shot at super-high speed, so when played back normally it seems to be in slow motion; this drawing out of time, used at the start of the exhibition, to create a meditative atmosphere, is cautionary: what you are about to see is out of time, a projection, a vision. Other films present archetypal motifs, the egg, the sun and the moon. *Fried Egg* relates to the ancient philosophy of Atomism, asserting that the world consisted of two oppositional states, atoms and the void, each indivisible. *Essay on a Liquid Sculpture* on the other hand contradicts ideas of the unchanging archetype; water is thrown at a rigid armature and so again reference

is being made to ancient thoughts, specifically Plato's *Theory of Form*. Through such playful slapstick, the artists skeptically interrogate the foundations of western culture.

Later in the exhibition we see *The Great Drinking Bout* set in a tropical forest. Here a group of ten men with blackened faces pass a clay pot full of liquid between them, each drinking in turn in a kind of tribal ritual, intended to induce a trance-like state, towards enlightenment. Ironically, comically, the pot is placed over the head of the leading figure, who then blindly guides the others.

Columbo's Column is similarly parabolic. Featuring a man who attempts to make a column of eggs, by carefully balancing one on top of another, it is derived from the myth that Christopher Columbus was the first person to stand an egg on its tip. The story goes that during a dinner party, post-voyage, Columbus was confronted with claims that anyone could have discovered the Americas. The explorer called for an egg, wagering that no one present could make it stand on end by itself. All tried but failed, until Columbus tapped the egg, slightly denting it to make it stand upright, explaining that 'once the feat has been done anyone knows how to do it'.

The exhibition is accompanied by an artist's book, an anthology of texts sourced from thinkers, poets and theologians that similarly present a range of incompatible ideas, here focused around the existence of God.