

As one of its key project's for this year's programme, Taut invited the young London-based curator and writer Rebecca Collins to develop a project in response to this year's themes.

Taking the notion of the moving image and fashion in its broadest cultural sense, she has developed a very special project indeed. Taut is particularly delighted that she will screen the full seven-film cycle of the work of the American artist Lewis Klahr, a timely Belgian premiere of this full body of work.

Curator's Text

Lewis Klahr- *Engram Sepals* (1994-2000)

Taut presents a screening of master collagist Lewis Klahr's lauded seven film cycle *Engram Sepals*. Conceived as a history or American intoxication, the films use cut-out animation and music to transport viewers into the world of the 40s, 50s, 60s and 70s. Images of stylish heroines and fetishized material goods merge and interact in film noir landscapes and fashionable interiors. These works evoke bygone eras not through text or action, but through familiar products, clothing and other desirable objects. Thus these tapestries reveal to us just how fashion and material obsession can dominate our memories and epitomize a time, place or feeling.

Within these material landscapes glossy characters from comic strips and magazines are removed from their original static scenes and come alive, drifting across lush fabrics, falling in love. This is not the real past, but one populated by only the most beautiful, the most melodramatic, the most fashionable. Characters communicate with controlled frozen gestures and sultry sideways glances. In *Downs Are Feminine* this animation of the static is taken to the extreme, with figures from pornography interacting sexually with not just each other, but also their kitsch 70s home environment. Kitchen utensils are caressed, cabinets kissed. Passion for people and materials is blurred, bringing to mind Richard Hamilton's 1956 collage *Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes so Different, so Appealing?*. Whilst Hamilton's work is a constructed still-life of perfection, Klahr gives emotion and movement his collage, capturing a sense, not just a view.

It is this sense-capturing that makes Klahr a moving collagist rather than animation artist. With his work one does not seek for narrative, or lament the lack of it. Instead, one uses the combination of images to enter a world where each aspect is a canvas for one's own story: a fashion world, seen particularly in *Altair* and *A Failed Cardigan Manuever*.

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The clothing, products and campaign shots of high fashion do not give us entire fables from beginning to end. Instead they represent potential and by nature encourage the viewer to incorporate them into their own lives, to make their own fable to be coveted by others. Klahr reveals to us how we are intoxicated by the potential of objects, and the suggestion that this glamorous, dreamy world can become our own if we could just possess the necessary ingredients.

This is also a unique opportunity to view the rarely-screened *Govinda* (1999). This live action work uses found footage combined with the artist's own family films to construct a challenging and hypnotic audiovisual experience of 1960s psychedelia. The cycle also features some of his most famous works: *Pony Glass* (1997), *Altair* (1994) and the mesmerising *Downs Are Feminine* (1993).

Lewis Klahr has been making films since the 70s and is ranked by Film Comment as the 4th most important avant-garde filmmaker of this decade. He has been screened extensively in the United States and Europe, including twice at the Whitney Biennial and for the past 3 years at the New York Film festival. He received a fellowship from the Guggenheim in 1992 and a special citation for experimental work from the National Society of Film Critics in 1994 for his epic film *The Pharaoh's Belt* (1993). He is currently a faculty member at CalArts.

In October 2010 his film cycle *Engram Sepals* had a special screening at the Tate Modern in association with the BFI London film festival, curated by Mark Webber.

Engram Sepals comprises of the following films:

Altair (1994) 8 mins.

Altair was included in both the 1995 Whitney Biennial and New York Film Festival and is part of the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection.

"*Altair* offers a cutout animation version of color noir. The images were culled from six late 1940s' issues of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and then set to an almost four-minute section of Stravinsky's *Firebird* (looped twice) to create a sinister, perfumed world. As in my 1988 visit to this genre, *In the Month of Crickets*, the narrative is highly smudged, leaving legible only the larger signposts of the female protagonist's story. The viewer is encouraged to speculate on the nature and details of the woman's battle with large, malevolent societal forces and her descent into an alcoholic swoon.

However I feel it is important to add that what interested me in making this film was very little of what is described above, but instead a fascination with the color blue and some intangible association it has for me with the late 1940s.”—Lewis Klahr

Engram Sepals (2000) 6 mins.

“The dead body remembers. The Tibetan book of the dead meets film noir. An elliptical narrative of adultery and corporate espionage set to a score by Morton Feldman.”—Lewis Klahr

Elsa Kirk (1999) 5 mins.

“In the mid 1990s I unearthed three photographic contact sheets of three different women in a thrift store in the East Village. Only one was named and dated—Elsa Kirk, Feb 22 '63—but all looked like they were from the same photographer and time period. There were 12 images per sheet of these models/actresses and I found myself quite moved by the strong sense of aspiration in their poses, by the poignant blend of fiction and reality. At first, I was unable to translate these images into collage animation. So instead, I began making xerox enlargements of the sheets that I turned into a series of flat collages. Eventually these became storyboards for the films and led to the hieroglyphic montage style of the completed [work]—an approach that I had intuited when first attracted to the potential of cutouts two decades ago, but had never been able to capture on film.”—Lewis Klahr

Pony Glass (1997) 14 mins., 30 secs.

“Pony Glass is the story of comic book character Jimmy Olsen's secret life. In this 15-minute cutout animation, Superman's pal embarks on his most adult adventure ever as he navigates the treacherous shoals of early 1960s' romance trying to resolve a sexual identity crisis of epic proportions. A three-act melodrama—each act has its own song—filmed in my signature collage style that ‘unmasks’ our collective iconic inheritance as Americans while significantly expanding the notion of what a music video can do.”—Lewis Klahr

Govinda (1999) 23 mins.

“A three act countercultural coming of age melodrama told from a generational rather than individual point of view. Beginning with appropriated student, super 8 footage of a 1970s' alternative high school and finishing with footage I shot a month after college graduation of my brother's hippie wedding, Govinda charts a path from innocence to too much experience.”—Lewis Klahr

Downs Are Feminine (1994) 9 mins.

"Lewis Klahr's *Downs Are Feminine* unveils a kind of rainy day, indoor, peaceable kingdom of desultory and idyllic debauchery, masturbatory reveries and hermaphroditic transformations. Klahr's onerous collages graft 1970s' porn of pallid stubbly flesh flagrantly onto Good Housekeeping/Architectural Digest décor (varicolored crab-orchard stone foyers, modacrylic sunbursts, jalousie windows and orientalist metal scrollwork), interior states where characters despoil themselves in Quaalude interludes of dreamy couplings. In this out-of-touch realm, touching is intelligence gathering for a carnal knowledge that will never attain its platonic ideal. The whole atmosphere is pervaded with euphoria, a hopelessness without despair, a contentment beyond longing."—Mark McElhatten, New York Film Festival

A Failed Cardigan Maneuver (1999) 15 mins.

"Children in a garden of outsized fruit dream of food and love, then grow up to have unhappy office love affairs in the glamorous Manhattan of the late 1950's."—J. Hoberman, Village Voice

Rebecca Collins, 2011