

tubing. Attached to a propane tank, it flares up when ignited by a gallery attendant. The work may be seen as a one-liner, but its simplicity as well as its stunning sense of urgency help deliver a potent comment on the relentless violence of today.

—David Ebony

## PARIS

### Helga Natz at Arnaud Lefebvre

Helga Natz, an artist born in Germany, has been exhibiting internationally for 15 years. She is known for her Post-



View of Helga Natz's "Arnaud's Room," Sculpture No. 188, 2005, painted wood, approx. 10 feet tall; at Arnaud Lefebvre.

Minimalist sculptural objects as well as temporary, site-specific works, such as a group of nine sculptures situated in a sand pit in Westphalen, Germany. Made from sand on the site and prepared metal sheets, these sculptures were executed over the course of a week and were extant for one day.

The artist's most recent work, "Arnaud's Room," Sculpture Number 188, occupied Lefebvre's primary exhibition space on the ground floor of an 18th-century building on the rue Mazarine. The room is only a little over 7 feet high, about 12 feet wide and some 20 feet deep from the front door to a spiral staircase at the back that leads to the basement office.

In this space, Natz built two vertical, floor-to-ceiling enclosures made from evenly spaced, rough-cut wooden strips that were about 1 inch wide and painted white. They looked like cages but were still delicate and airy. Secured top and bottom by wooden runners, both constructions were six-sided, with an internal divider that made it seem as if they were spiraling in on themselves. The unit closer to the door had one opening just a bit narrower than was comfortable for an adult to walk through. The unit behind had two openings of the same width as the entrance in the first structure.

The installations were not barrier-like, but seemed to exist primarily to subtly harmonize with the architecture of the gallery. The wood had warped a bit after the application of the paint. This seemed deliberate, as if to age the pieces quickly and bring them into character with the site. The whiteness of the paint on the wooden verticals had the effect of dispersing the mass of the structures. The even spacing of the wooden strips echoed the old beams that ran across the ceiling. The spiral paths the structures created in their interiors repeated the design of the rear staircase. Also notable was how the artist situated each enclosure so that it surrounded one of the fluorescent lights affixed to the ceiling.

The general effect was very satisfying, nuanced and slow, like a complex chord being struck and then held for an indefinite period. "Arnaud's Room," like the sculptures Natz executed in Westphalen, appeared directed at creating a situation that utilizes an environment in order to create continuity. The piece seemed to symbolize the serious exchanges available between temporary and permanent spaces or even, given its title, between artist and gallery owner.

—Joe Fyfe

### Barthélémy Toguo at the Palais de Tokyo

Barthélémy Toguo was born in Cameroon in 1967 and studied art in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. He moved to Europe in 1993 and began exhibiting and doing performances while finishing his studies in Grenoble, then Düsseldorf. Political geography and personal boundaries have been an implicit subject in his studio work and an explicit one in his

performances. Toguo recently showed an ensemble of 1999-2004 pieces, collectively titled "The Sick Opera," at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the city he now calls home.

He astutely filled the raw, cavernous space with small and large watercolors, sculptures and sculptural installations. Accumulation is fundamental to his work: he shows his watercolors in large series and makes his sculptural works of numerous heterogeneous parts. All Toguo's titles are in English—an instance of his ironic play with dominant modes, given that he's francophone. His facture is generally rough and quick, whatever the medium, and he treats contemporary art as a sort of lending library, borrowing from the work of Boetti, Clemente and Cragg, among others. His deft appropriations may be seen as an inversion of the historic pillaging Africa underwent during the colonial period.

The 18-foot-high *Climbing Down* (2004) towered over the other works in the show. Here Toguo stacked three store-bought pine bunk beds to make a six-decker. He subverted this minimalistic structure by leaning four ladders against the beds; by hanging 23 bulging, brightly colored, plaid nylon bags of the sort familiar from immigrant neighborhoods at various heights on the bedposts; and by placing three no-frills suitcases around the bottom bed. The mattresses sported various coverings, including an Air France blanket and printed African fabrics. While the bags, suitcases and stacked beds conjured images of migration, cheap lodgings and cultural mixing, the experience of the piece remained joyful and expansive: the beds felt like a latter-day stairway to heaven, however spare the linens and basic the possessions in the bags. The evocation of descent in the work's title mitigated this optimism and brought in a note of social criticism.

For *The World's Greatest* (2002), which occupied the end wall of the space, Toguo crammed a roughly 15-foot-wide stagelike construction with more objects than can be catalogued here. Included were life-size carved-wood human busts, which doubled as administrative stamps. Inscriptions such as "SHAME ON YOU" and "MOVE ON" were incised on their flat

bottoms. There was a coffin adorned with the symbols of four major religions, carved-wood sewing machines sprouting antennae of multicolored spools of thread, two large bright-green watercolor portraits of a boy and a girl, a looped video of Toguo serenely watering a bunch of dollar bills, and more. While Toguo sets a lively stage for an open-ended play, the undertone is serious, since administrative and economic borders, religion, labor, money and gender relations are all potential territories of conflict and inequality.

Toguo's watercolors provided a strong visual beat for the



Barthélémy Toguo: *Climbing Down*, 2004, three wooden bunk beds, mixed mediums, dimensions variable; at the Palais de Tokyo.

show. He installed them on two side walls, on which he had roughly painted two oversize black and red images. His watercolors use a limited repertoire of images and colors to depict a dreamy world of human, animal and vegetal metamorphosis. Sexy female bodies sprout plant life or undefined organs; a male body extends into a spiraling elephant trunk; two animals mate under a pissing woman. Rows of nails frequently appear planted in the bodies, an intimation of physical pain in this generally joyful world. Toguo's watercolors, with their humor, erotic energy and sense of possibility, are the most accessible part of his endeavor, if the least critical of the here and now.

—Anne Rochette and  
Wade Saunders