

JOÃO VILHENA

Deux lunes à l'autre

20.10.11 | 19.11.11

Opening on Thursday, 20 October 2011 from 6pm to 9pm

Following his widely noticed participation in the Salon de Montrouge and the Salon du Dessin Contemporain 2011 in Paris, João Vilhena, a Portuguese artist currently living in Nice, will exhibit in Alberta Pane Gallery from October 20th to November 19th. He will present an entirely new series of large format drawings, accompanying an *in situ* wall painting.

João Vilhena's work is, and has always been, led by the interest he takes in the role of the beholder. For the artist a work enters into existence via the audience's scrutiny, through the act of observation itself, which brings it to life and gives it meaning. His practice naturally oriented itself towards drawing, a particular style of drawing which he executes with unsettling precision. A virtuoso of the pencil and the word, João Vilhena feints, hides, substitutes and disguises without ever unveiling what lies beyond. To this end he uses different techniques such as optical illusions, trompe l'œil or anamorphoses, and in the works' titles spoonerisms, anagrams and other word games.

The artist's latest obsession is with the moon, this celestial body so near and yet so far away, which may well have been the subject of mankind's first observations and questions.

For a long time Aristotle's perception of an ideal globe, perfectly spherical and smooth prevailed. But in 1609 Galilei used a telescope of his own invention and saw it "as close as if it was barely two of earth's radii away". He published his observations in the 1610 book *Sidereus Nuncius*: "Everybody is free to verify that the moon's surface is not smooth and polished but that its surface is coarse and uneven and just as the earth, features huge bumps, profound dents and windings."

This science, seeming so revolutionary and poetic from a modern perspective, has inspired João Vilhena to undertake his big diptych "Deux lunes à l'autre" (*literally: "Two moons to another", a French play on words: "De l'une à l'autre" ≈ "From one to another"*), in which he revisits the image of a nineteenth century stereoscopic view from Karl Dupont.

Two photographs of the moon had been taken at an interval of one month, in order to create the illusion of stereoscopic relief. Having worked on the aspect of dissimilarity between these two photographs, the artist encourages us to perpetually compare the two pictures. Furthermore he incites the spectator to continually move around his work to render the vision of the two moons, which he has deliberately distorted through his drawing techniques, perfectly spherical. The post-it, a recurrent element throughout the artist's recent work, is a visual mnemonic which reminds us that, after all, at the centre of the work lies each spectator's individual approach and perspective.

There are some fundamental preoccupations implicit in João Vilhena works - the love of a classical technique that is slowly becoming misunderstood or relegated, the reference to memory via the evocation of a visual culture that was popular at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, coupled with an underlying eroticism and playful language games. The result is an ensemble of drawings that invite the spectator, without whom they would be devoid of purpose, to reflect and contemplate.