

Press Release: Rory Menage - “Back to Nature”

September 7 – October 11, 2018

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 6, 7–9PM

McNamara Art Projects, Hong Kong is pleased to present *Rory Menage: Back to Nature* - the artist's first solo exhibition in Asia. The exhibition is curated by Nico Epstein and includes an interview with the artist.

Rory Menage (b. York, 1988) reflects on traditional facets of statuary, sculpture and portraiture. His work is dedicated towards discovering new possibilities involved in portraying naturalism. Using a variety of raw materials, the artist's realm of inquiry examines the position of object-making in a digitally biased era.

While many young artists today turn to digital forms of creation, introspection and reimagination, Menage's practice pointedly centres around a classical form of sculpture. Carving, in his busts and torsos, represents an almost anti-digital mode of working where the imprecisions and imperfections visible in his subjects' features are diametrically opposed to the airbrushed, backlit, pixel-perfect faces we see throughout our everyday media intake. With *Back to Nature* the artist moves us away from the original human likeness of his protagonists and into a more abstracted, elemental domain where the essences of raw materials, especially the dark matter of iron and stone, can be re-examined.

For Menage, carving, caving, mining and sculpting relate to his own personal background where land and landscape, specifically that of the northern British countryside, retains an omnipresent place in his life. Growing up on a farm in Yorkshire, England, experiencing the change of seasons there and watching the farming machines cut into the land have profoundly affected the artist. These experiences are felt in his excavatory methods, on both a physical and metaphysical level where Menage seeks to make psychologically oblique works by carving into solid matter and then often casting these works into metal alloys.

The artist's sculptural repertoire signposts his virtuosity when it comes to the manipulation of natural substances. Bronze (a mix of copper, tin and lead), cast iron, wood bases, alabaster, and limestone form part of a rich symphony of organic and inorganic formants. Take, for example, *Head of Leaves Study III*, which makes use of foliage to create the contours of a head, transforming the delicacy of ivy leaves into cast iron. The result is an exploration of the intersections between humanity and nature and the metaphorical preoccupation of how humanity will always be a part of nature itself; made of biological and chemical components. Or, consider *Head of a Woman (Facets)* a bronze sculptural portrait in which the striated removal of styrofoam generates deep trenches that showcase both the porousness of the original material that was used and, perhaps, the way in which the inorganic attributes of our existence both eat away and reveal us.

As well as taking inspiration from his connection to the topography and contours of the landscape he grew up in, Menage's sculptural work is anchored to both the history of British Cathedrals and canonical tropes of Western Modernist sculpture. When it comes to the former, the artist considers not merely the architectonic nature of their facades, abounded by gargoyles and misericords as they are, but also the quarries from which the mineral is hewn and the rich seam of limestone that forms the spine of England. Also formally, when it comes to the casting processes used to create them, the sculptures that form the core of *Back to Nature* bear a notable affinity to the work of Jacob Epstein, Alberto Giacometti and Noam Gabo among other celebrated sculptors. When viewing *Girl* one can't help but look back at the polished bronze busts of the ground-breaking and influential artist Constantin Brancusi. However, its controlled mistakes and futuristic visage is firmly of the present, if not beckoning towards the future.

Menage brings to the fore his personal past while asking questions of sculptural traditions that are far too often overlooked in contemporary artistic practice. Each fragment, each slice, each configuration, each detailed and cut angle raises intangible and metaphysical ideas as well as certain feeling of sympathy towards the artist's animate subjects. Clay, lime, iron, bronze, all lead towards a process of (re)discovery and new possibility. As John Ruskin in *The Poetry of Architecture* described: "For a stone, when it is examined, will be found a mountain in miniature".

For more information please contact:
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Rory Menage

Rory Menage received his BA at University of Oxford and his MA in Creative Practice from Leeds College of Art, UK. He currently lives and works in London. His work was recently the subject of a one person exhibition at The Averard Hotel, London, organized by Slate Projects (2016). Recent group exhibitions and projects include In the Manner of Smoke at Alice Black, London (2018); Dentons Art Prize, Niamh White Projects, London (2017); The Life and Work of John Bunting, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK (2017); Figures in a Landscape, The Aesthetica Short Film Festival, York, UK (2016); Tic Tac, Gallerica Civica, Trento, Italy (2016).

Nico Epstein

Nico Epstein is a London based curator and art advisor. He has organised exhibitions of emerging and mid-career artists throughout Europe. His short course New Dynamics: The Digital Contemporary Art World launches this fall at Christie's Education, London. Epstein currently serves as the director of Artvisor, a London based art advisory firm.

McNamara Art Projects

McNamara Art Projects is an independent art consultancy and curatorial body founded in 2015. Their newly established 3,500sqft project space in Wong Chuk Hang creates a platform committed to showcasing dynamic and cutting edge, emerging as well as established Western and Asian artists in Hong Kong.

The art programme for the project space will take the form of collaborations with significant Western and Asian galleries who do not have a physical presence in Hong Kong, by bringing a diverse range of art that would not otherwise be shown in the city. The aim is to create deeper engagement between the people of Hong Kong and contemporary art. Future exhibitions include collaborations with Urano Gallery, Tokyo, showcasing figurative paintings by Toshiyuki Konishi.

McNamara Art Projects also provides guidance in shaping public and private collections across the Asia region, with a focus on Western modern and contemporary art. Their previous public programmes included the critically acclaimed retrospective of British sculptor Lynn Chadwick (2016), and the exhibition Les Lalannes during Art Basel Hong Kong 2017 in collaboration with Hong Kong Land.



Rory Menage, Head of a Woman (Facets), Polished Bronze, Ed. 3/5, 2017, 37x37x20cm



Rory Menage, Carved Head Piece (Eyes), Bronze and Walnut, Ed. 1/ 2, 2017, 30x17x17cm



Rory Menage, Thayaht Dux Study, Alabaster and Walnut, 2017, 37x21x21cm



Rory Menage, Carved Torso Fragment 1, Limestone, Steel and Walnut, Unique, 2018, 65x30x20cm