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HAMMER PROJECTS: NATHANIEL MELLORS

On view at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, January 18 – June 1, 2014



Los Angeles—British artist **Nathaniel Mellors** makes irreverent and absurd [videos](#), sculptures, performances, and writings that challenge our notions of taste, morality, and intelligence. His seminal series *Ourhouse* (2010–) features a cast of misfit characters enacting the decline of an eccentric British family. A more recent work, *The Sapphage* (2012), examines the literal and metaphoric waste produced by contemporary society. Mellors’s Hammer Projects exhibition centers on his newly completed film *The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview*, produced in collaboration with Commonwealth Projects during a residency at the Hammer. For the last three years Mellors has been particularly interested in the sculpture and culture of the Upper Palaeolithic, which informs this new body of work.

The 35mm/HD transfer film features an interview between a naive contemporary young man (Truson, a character from *Ourhouse*) and an apparently real Neanderthal. The Neanderthal is cleverer than Truson and plays with him and his expectations of primitivism. The interview appears to take place in a version of the mythic “Eden” (“E-Den”), and was filmed in the historic Bronson Caves in Griffith Park. The Neanderthal has been thrown out of the caves by an organization called “The Sporgo,” which, he claims, owns the caves and controls cave art. This Edenic site functions as a metaphor for the shift between a sustainable mode of human existence (hunter-gatherer) in the Upper Paleolithic age, to the Neolithic mode of existence based on an economy of ownership which is ultimately ecologically untenable.

The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview explores the emergence of art as a marker of human consciousness and the idea that art and religion are hard-wired into the human brain. The work also plays off the formerly accepted idea that Neanderthals were not capable of making art—hence the

Image caption: Nathaniel Mellors. Still from *The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview*, 2013-2014. 35mm film and Digital-8 HD transfer, color, sound. 22 min. Courtesy the artist and MONITOR, Rome; Stigter van Doesburg, Amsterdam; and Matt’s Gallery, London.

eponymous “Sophisticated Neanderthal” character, who is cleverer than his interviewer. *Hammer Projects: Nathaniel Mellors* is organized by curator Ali Subotnick.

Biography

Nathaniel Mellors was born in Doncaster, England in 1974. He currently lives and works in Amsterdam & Los Angeles. He studied at the Royal College of Art, London and the Ruskin School, Oxford University. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Nathaniel Mellors: The Nest*, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen, Netherlands (2011); *Performa Biennial 2011*, New York; *Nathaniel Mellors: Ourhouse*, ICA, London (2011); *Ourhouse*, De Hallen, Haarlem (2010); *Volatile Dispersal*, Whitechapel Gallery, London (2009); *Giantbum*, Stedelijk Bureau, Amsterdam (2009); *The Time Surgeon*, South London Gallery (2009); *The Ill-Tempered Manifesto*, Manifesto Marathon, Serpentine Gallery, London (2007). Mellors has also been featured in several important group exhibitions including *British Art Show 7: In The Days of the Comet*, touring: The Slaughterhouse, Plymouth; CCA, Glasgow; Hayward Gallery, London (2011); *La Biennale di Venezia - 54th International Art Exhibition – ILLUMinations*, Venice, Italy (2011); *Un'Espressione Geografica*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy (2011); *Hey, We're Closed!*, Hayward Gallery, London (2010); *Contour Biennial of Video Art 2009*, Mechelen, Belgium (2009); *Altermodern*, Tate Triennial 2009, Tate Britain, London; and *Art Now*, Tate Britain, London (2008). He is the recipient of the 2011 Cobra Art Prize, the Montehermoso Visual Arts Grant, and the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam Production Residency. Mellors was commissioned to make short films for the U.K.'s Channel 4 in 2013 and BBC One in 2010.

Hammer Projects is a series of exhibitions focusing primarily on the work of emerging artists.

Hammer Projects is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; Maurice Marciano and Paul Marciano; Susan Bay Nimoy and Leonard Nimoy; and the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission.

Additional support is provided by Good Works Foundation and Laura Donnelley; the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; the Decade Fund; and the David Teiger Curatorial Travel Fund.

Hammer Projects: Nathaniel Mellors is presented through a residency at the Hammer Museum.

The Sophisticated Neanderthal Interview was realized with the generous support of the Mondriaan Fund, Netherlands; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Film London Jarman Award; Matt's Gallery, London; Stigter van Doesburg, Amsterdam; MONITOR, Rome; and Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin.

ABOUT THE HAMMER MUSEUM

The Hammer Museum, a public arts unit of the University of California, Los Angeles, is dedicated to exploring the diversity of artistic expression through the ages. Its collections, exhibitions, and programs span the classic to the cutting-edge in art, architecture, and design, recognizing that artists play a crucial role in all aspects of culture and society.

The museum houses the Armand Hammer Collection of Old Master, Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist paintings and the Armand Hammer Daumier and Contemporaries Collection. The Hammer's newest collection, the Hammer Contemporary Collection, is highlighted by works on paper, particularly drawings and photographs from Southern California. The museum also houses the Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, comprising more than 45,000 prints, drawings, photographs, and artists' books from the Renaissance to the present; and oversees the management of the Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden on the UCLA campus.

The Hammer presents major single-artist and thematic exhibitions of historical and contemporary art. It also presents approximately ten Hammer Projects exhibitions each year, providing international and local artists with a laboratory-like environment to create new work or to present existing work in a new context.

As a cultural center, the Hammer offers a diverse range of free public programs throughout the year, including lectures, readings, symposia, film screenings, and music performances. The Hammer's Billy Wilder Theater houses these widely acclaimed public programs and is the new home of the UCLA Film & Television Archive's renowned cinematheque.

HAMMER MUSEUM INFORMATION

For current program and exhibition information call **310-443-7000** or visit **www.hammer.ucla.edu**.

Hours: Tuesday–Friday 11am–8pm; Saturday & Sunday 11am–5pm; closed Mondays, July 4, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

Admission: **FREE FOR ALL VISITORS BEGINNING FEBRUARY 9, 2014.** Currently: \$10 for adults; \$5 for seniors (65+) and UCLA Alumni Association members; free for museum members, students with identification, UCLA faculty/staff, military personnel, veterans, and visitors 17 and under. The museum is free on Thursdays for all visitors. Public programs are always free.

Location/Parking: The Hammer is located at 10899 Wilshire Boulevard, at Westwood Boulevard. Parking is available under the Museum. Rate is \$3 for three hours with Museum validation. Bicycles park free. The Museum is easily accessible via public transportation.

Hammer Museum Tours: For group tour reservations and information, call 310-443-7041.