

## THE NAME FONTAINE WAS NOT FOUND. NAMES THAT SOUND SIMILAR TO FONTAINE:

AN INTERVIEW WITH CLAIRE FONTAINE BY ADAM CARR  
(MOSTYN, Visual Arts Programme Curator)

*Adam Carr (AC): For the purpose of some of the readers please tell me what and who Claire Fontaine is, and how Claire Fontaine was formed?*

*Claire Fontaine (CF): Claire Fontaine was created in 2004 as a shared space by James Thornhill and Fulvia Carnevale in Paris. We were looking for a space of desubjectivisation which means a space where they could be free of the biographical determinations and produce artworks and thoughts that would be freer and stronger than if they were signed by the two of them. They defined themselves as the assistants of this artist that they wanted to be French and female, young and playful like Benjamin's destructive character.*

*AC: The piece that is on view at MOSTYN | Wales currently is titled 'Foreigners Everywhere' (Welsh) and has been shown in many of the exhibitions part of the History Series. My idea for showing the work on more than one occasion in the series was partly down to the fact that it was a new commission and its pertinence to the series felt well connected and multifaceted. The work's meaning remains and its reading can shift in relation to the framework it is presented within... the idea of discrimination and race surrounding the show 'Women's Art Society', ideas of land, ownership and difference in 'WAR', and the issue of displacement in 'WAR II'. Could you explain the circumstances in which the series 'Foreigners Everywhere' came about?*

*CF: The idea of the series 'Foreigners Everywhere' was inspired by the name that an anti-racist collective in Turin had given to itself. The ambivalence of the sentence reacts with the different sites and contexts where the signs are placed. The signs stress that we can feel like foreigners wherever we go and we will find foreigners in every place. The translations of the two words act as subtitles to public or private spaces, awaking dormant antagonisms and fears. The artwork also suggests that immigration and emigration are no longer simple epiphenomena linked to the economy but they are existential and perceptual experiences in their own right. The strangeness that we can all feel when faced with a world, that is entirely fabricated and governed by senseless logic, unites natives and immigrants of our time, it makes exile a generalized condition. The use of different languages questions the implicit violence of every translation and the necessity to submit a language to another in order to be more widely understood while being more deeply colonized. However the*

*contradictions and the power relations that one's own language buries or blunts become manifest when one uses a language that isn't one's own. The struggle with meaning can then give form to what Deleuze and Guattari claimed to find in Kafka's words: a foreign language within language*

*AC: The work has been shown in a number of different countries worldwide and always in the native language of the respective country, yet I do not think it has been shown in English. Could you tell me more about that decision?*

*CF: It has been made in English but it is different from the others, it is made in ultraviolet neon so in daylight it is dark, not luminous somehow the opposite than the others. English has a status of Esperanto for economic and electronic transactions. It has become, despite itself, a non-language. English replaces and brutalizes all the other languages, it overwrites them; there is a deep violence in this enforced translation.*

*AC: In your work language and the politics of language engage with art history. The use of neon, for example, is perhaps a nod to the pioneering practices of artists associated with beginnings of conceptual art, in particular Joseph Kosuth or Bruce Nauman. Previously, your work has previously been described as 'appearing' to look like other artists' work. I think that this is somewhat of a reduced reading though. What are your thoughts about this, especially of the idea that your work uses art history as a way to unearth other forms of debate?*

*CF: Art history is an important part of history, art captures the affects, the textures, the vibrations and the essence of events better than anything else, it isn't even necessarily contemporary and of its own time, sometimes it is ahead of it. So the term "criticality" should also be re-examined: the community that during the Sixties and the Seventies could coagulate around this word, this ambition, this utopia has now completely faded; our political and historical conditions are extremely hard and tragic. How is it be possible not to be critical of the status quo? Who, in any possible way is apologetic of our times isn't making art; he or she is making something else that the future will judge harshly. History is full of these kinds of examples. The formulation that describes our work as looking like other people's work comes from John Kelsey that once was asked by us to write a small biography for Claire Fontaine. We liked it at the time and we put it on the home page of our website. Asking someone else to write our biography amused us and put some distance between ourselves and Claire Fontaine but of course, we never declared ourselves ready-made artists nor existential terrorists. Our work is saturated with the problems of our time (because they are our problems): authorship, appropriation, the crisis of singularity, and the human and political disaster we are all going through. Using art to address these problems isn't a Machiavellian manoeuvre but a necessity. The field*

*of contemporary art, unlike any other field of culture, is open to the use of every medium, from writing to filming, from performance to sculpture, it's the only possible space to think freely without having to adopt conventional codes and a fixed language in order to be understood. For us making art is a way of thinking through forms, our work can be read like a series of visual sentences around the questions that obsess us, the coherence is in the problems that inspire and awaken the different forms that translate and expose them.*

*AC: Currently there is a debate that for art to be critical, to be socially and political innovative that it has to have a 'use' value. I am thinking here in particular of the discussions surrounding the recent Turner Prize winners, a time in which everybody seems to have an opinion on already forlorn questions of what is or what is not art. Ironically those questions are probably more relevant this time since collectively the winners do not describe themselves as artists. I have my own thoughts about it, perhaps too long to discuss here, but it be great to hear your own thoughts about the so-called 'use' function in relation to arts ability to change and shift thought.*

*CF: The use value of art is existential: art exerts secret pressures, like acupuncture, on the body of the viewer and affects it, artists cannot control this process, often they cannot even register it: they are not aware of their reception, of the public's reaction, unless they have had a very large exposure and they have been the object of debates in newspapers. For us art is a way of thinking through life, of interrogating the things that we don't understand and we keep encountering, of imagining a space outside the violence of institutional and administrative powers and outside the revolting vulgarity of our pornographic commercial society. We have a conceptual practice that sometimes takes the form of writings and it isn't necessarily in a direct relationship with our visual body of work, artists can write and artists should think, everybody can and should do these things. It's up to us to materialize the freedom that we need for our lives; who is content with living a politically and existentially unambitious life damages everybody else.*

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CLAIRE FONTAINE is a Paris based collective founded in 2004. Solo shows of Fontaine's work have taken place at Museion, Bolzano; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis; T293 Naples/Rome; Metro Pictures; New York; Jewish Museum, New York; CCA Wattis, San Francisco; Air de Paris, Paris; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Chantal Crousel, Paris; among many others. Her work is held in a number of public and private collections worldwide including Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, France; La Maison Rouge, Paris, France; FNAC Fonds National d'Art Contemporain; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Mexico; Fundación/Colección Jumex, Mexico City; Espacio 1414, Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico

