About the Cover

Video still from Dennis Adams, *Malraux's Shoes* (2012).

Photo: Courtesy of Dennis Adams and Kent Fine Art, New York.

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In 1935, André Malraux began work on ‘The Museum without Walls,’ the first version of his *The Voices of Silence* ([1951] 1967). This project was realized in his three-volume work *Le musée imaginaire de la sculpture mondiale* (1952–1954), which compiled reproductions of works of sculpture from a global history within its pages, allowing the viewer to interact with artworks across time and space through the synchronicity of this imaginary museum on the page. Like Aby Warburg’s unfinished *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* from 1924–1929 (2000), which staged a series of encounters between images across the history of art on boards, Malraux’s *musée imaginaire* [‘imaginary museum’] allowed one to ‘estrangle the works they bring together from their original functions and to transform even portraits into “pictures”’ (Malraux, [1951] 1967, 9). These modes of seeing

ground the ontology of the modern artwork in a condition of radical contemporaneity, which brings into the present all art and makes all art contemporaneous with each other. Through this radicalized contemporaneity, the imaginary museum gives way to an infinite and ever-reconfigurable encounter on its flattened plane.

The cover image here comes from Dennis Adams's film *Malraux's Shoes* (2012), which builds on the well-known photograph of Malraux amidst the images for his imaginary museum, circa 1950. In his film, Adams, playing the part of Malraux, constructs in a similar setting an elaborate pageantry of an indecorous, profane and frustrated Malraux who rants about the history of art, its methods, politics and culture. In his rage and drunken stupor, Malraux's images are shuffled out of place. In a solemn dance over his images, Malraux's shoes push and toss them around, mixing them together and disordering the neat grid that once held them in place. In this gleeful yet somber act of disturbance, the plane of the imaginary museum gives way to the imagined encounter discussed within this volume. In the wakes of Malraux's shoes, bearing the begrudging brunt of his entitlement, the crash and pileup of images postulates the power and efficacy of the imagined encounter. It not simply the museum without walls that enacts a space for the artwork, but rather the violent and erotic encounters, collisions, and slashes between these various historical fragments.

This volume, in a sense, seeks to understand the histories that emerge from those haphazard and arbitrary encounters. It asks: What can we gain from these shuffled images on the floor, as one gleefully waltzes across time and space in one's own ecstatic manias?

References

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Roland Betancourt
University of California, Irvine, CA.