

Figures of Fire

The installation *Figures of Fire* is built on an imaginary letter—fictionally written by the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and sent to the French writer André Breton.

Lévi-Strauss and Breton, who knew each other in real life, had met each other on a ship in the Atlantic, both escaping from Nazi-occupied France—Lévi-Strauss because of his ethnicity, Breton due to his political activism.

The two Frenchmen maintained a lifelong friendship and kept up correspondences, and while both living in New York they would often visit museums, galleries and antique stores together. In an interview given after Breton's death, Lévi-Strauss said of his late friend:

“I owe him a lot about the knowledge and appreciation of objects. I've never seen him doing a mistake on exotic and unusual objects. When I say a mistake, I mean about its authenticity but also its quality. He had a sense, almost of divination.”

In accordance with this acknowledgement the letter in *Figures of Fire* envisions Lévi-Strauss asking Breton for help—requesting his friend's ‘objective’ advice while on an Amazonian mission in search of the mythical origin of fire.

Featured in the installation is a sound montage of Lévi-Strauss' voice, assembled from various lectures, reading aloud the letter.