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These lacustrine homes

curated by Mai-Thu Perret

January 23 – March 6, 2021

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Press, Clayton, “Valentin Carron, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Rämistrasse, Zurich,” *Forbes.com*, February 29, 2020

Forbes

Valentin Carron, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Rämistrasse, Zurich

By Clayton Press | February 29, 2020

Valentin Carron. *The Great Sharing*, 2019. Iron, enamel paint. Sculpture 27 x 70 x 60 cm / 10 5/8 x 27 1/2 x 23 5/8 in; Pedestal 36 x 70 x 60 cm / 14 1/8 x 27 1/2 x 23 5/8 in. © VALENTIN CARRON COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER, ZURICH / NEW YORK; PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER PHOTOGRAPHY, ZURICH .

“Swissness” isn’t in most English dictionaries, but its meaning is instantly clear. It is holey cheese and cow-strewn meadows, snowy peaks and punctual trains. Beyond those (fairly accurate) clichés, Swissness perfectly encapsulates the land of milk and money, a place where attention to detail is a national pastime. And that is Switzerland in a nutshell, preferably one coated in chocolate.” Diccon Bewes, Raconteur.net

With the founding of the Swiss nation-state in 1848, neither national identity nor national unity were immediate. Civic nationalism had to be forged. Liberal intellectuals and portions of the political elite aimed to create a distinct, more-or-less unified identity among an ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse population. The promotion of an Alpine identity was central to unification. As Ernest Bovet, an intellectual who later became the president of the Swiss Homeland Security Association, gushingly, if not inauthentically wrote, “A spirit fills our souls, directs our actions and creates a hymn on the one ideal out of our different languages. It is the spirit that blows from the summits, the genius of the Alps and the glaciers.”

Valentin Carron. *The SaXophone*, 2019. Copper, iron, enamel paint. Sculpture 84 x 60 x 70 cm / 33 1/8 x 23 5/8 x 27 1/2 in; Pedestal 75 x 70 x 60 cm / 29 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 23 5/8 in. © VALENTIN CARRON COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER, ZURICH / NEW YORK; PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER PHOTOGRAPHY, ZURICH

Alpiness, virtually synonymous with Swissness, was promoted by national festivals and rituals. By the mid 19thcentury, painting exploited Alpine themes. The very notion of a romantic, pastoral world was “artificially pieced together . . . in the late 19th century, with the clear political aim of giving [Switzerland] a tailor-made national identity.” Craftwork became part of the cultural construction that was used to build cohesion among mountain regions. In 1930, The Schweizer Heimatwerk (Swiss Crafts Association) was founded by the Swiss farmer’s association ostensibly to provide an outlet for mountain-dwelling farmers to make traditional gadgets and objects and toys during long, otherwise unproductive winters. Shortly thereafter, the association’s focus was modified to encourage Swiss arts and crafts, making what artist Valentin Carron has termed “pseudo authentic” objects.

The reintroduction, reconstruction and re-envisioning of “cultural heritage” was and remains far more common than we normally think, from pottery making in St. Vincent, West Indies, to variants of woodcarving with broad tourist appeal in Côte d’Ivoire (The Ivory Coast.) From authentic “villages” in harborside ports to nationalistic theme parks, variants of real and almost surreal cultural heritage are consumable. In short, economic opportunism, most typically associated with tourism, often appropriates traditional cultural “products” and—intentionally or not—bolsters a sense of identity, in fiction if not in fact.

Valentin Carron’s sculptures have been characterized as “reproductions and reconstructions of vernacular Swiss items . . . [that] have been regarded as equally [and simultaneously] critical, cynical, and comical in their take on the visual cultural and national identities.” This is clear. Carron riffs on Swissness, asserting “I may have spent my life seeking the artifacts of my own vision of the ‘American Way of Life’ in Switzerland.” His work is a unique combination of longing and anti-nostalgia.

Press, Clayton, “Valentin Carron, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Rämistrasse, Zurich,” *Forbes.com*, February 29, 2020

Installation view, Valentin Carron, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Rämistrasse, Zurich, 2020. © VALENTIN CARRON COURTESY THE ARTIST AND GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER, ZURICH / NEW YORK; PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER PHOTOGRAPHY, ZURICH

In his current exhibition at Galerie Eva Presenhuber (Rämistrasse 33, Zürich), Carron again samples Swiss artist traditions and folkloric culture. His three-dimensional works are not appropriations as much as they [are] reinventions. While he has confessed that he has spent his “days making life-size replicas of the objects I abhor . . . and I will keep going on wasting a part of my life this way.” He not only reformulates traditional handicrafts “substituting natural materials like wood for synthetic materials; [and] conversely, he commissions well-trained craftsmen to create precious works imitating cheap industrial articles.”

While Carron’s sculptures may be oriented to the “aesthetics of everyday culture in the popular handicrafts and souvenir industries,” they even more directly address notions of authenticity and nationalism. *The SaXophone*, made of copper mounted on a painted enamel iron pedestal, comes across—intentionally or not—as a twist on the wooden alphorns familiar in Ricola cough drop ads. In *The Great Sharing*, six male figures, imperfectly cut from iron and painted in the red of the Swiss flag, are positioned in a circle, arms stretched, but hands decidedly not touching, in a round dance. There is not unity, harmony.

Imperfection and irony are invasive, even comedic. The plywood patterns on the sculptures’ pedestals look authentic but are not. A boxy construction, The Shelter, seemingly penetrates two floors of Galerie Eva Presenhuber’s impeccable new space. The material is roughly cut, so its imperfections are obvious. Made of MDF, the surface is repainted to look like OSB (oriented strand board). Yes, Carron “questions originality, authenticity, and identity.” But his work is art (Kunst) and not craft (Kunsthandwerk.) His objects are not remotely banal, as everyday things—especially souvenirs and handicrafts—often seem. Carron messes with our minds with his selection of innocuous subjects and his deliberate choice of materials and methods. He questions authenticity and celebrates its opposite.

Zeiba, Drew, “Swiss Institute moves into Selldorf-designed building on St. Marks,” *ArchPaper.com*, June 29, 2018

THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

Swiss Institute moves into Selldorf-designed building on St. Marks

Drew Zeiba I June 29, 2018

The Swiss Institute for Contemporary Art has opened its new 7,500 square foot Selldorf Architects-designed location on St. Marks Place in New York City. Taking over four levels of a former bank built in 1954 and designed by Alfred Hopkins and Associates, the renovation is, in the words of Swiss Institute director Simon Castets, a “counter narrative” to the building’s former financial, low-occupancy use.

The Selldorf redesign uses a seemingly minimal touch. Though there have been significant changes—full stairwells and elevators have been added along with a total plan rework—the overall architectural sensibility feels light and unimposing. White walls remain unadorned. Flooring is understated. On all ceilings, ductwork, lighting, and structural elements remain exposed—a departure from many recent galleries in the city that have instead focused on hiding every functional detail, even the lighting, as much as possible.

Swiss Institute, 38 St. Marks Pl., North View. (Courtesy Selldorf Architects.)

Curators generally aren’t keen on losing space to the workaday trappings of administrative necessity. Swiss Institute has filled every corner, wall, stairwell, and even the elevator with art to allow “artists to reclaim the space lost to New York City building code” as part of the SI ONSITE program. Stairwells feature sculptures and frescoes by Shahryar Nashat and Latifa Echakhch. The elevator has been turned into an artwork, skinned in a welcoming pink from Sherwin Williams called “Memorable Rose,” which is taken from the color of a tongue by artist Pamela Rosenkranz for an installation appropriately titled *Color of a Tongue (Director)* (2018). A cellar gallery remains honest about what it really is with layers of gray paint applied by Dusty Baker.

Like the building itself, the current exhibition, *Readymades Belong to Everyone* (open through August 19), is packed with art. The first floor, which features ceilings that soar over 17 feet, is dense with all variety of sculpture and 2D work. Despite lower ceilings, the new location’s upper level is airy, wrapped in windows with exposed wood shining on the ceiling. There is a reading room, currently taken over by a project from Heman Chong in collaboration with Ken Liu. Chong and Liu’s *Legal Books (Shanghai)* features hundreds of books selected by Liu, a sci-fi writer and attorney, inspired by thinking on the Chinese legal system. The art instillation-cum-reading room features painted curtains by Jill Mulleady, another way in which the Institute is packing in the art.

One enters from Second Avenue to find a visitor welcome desk and a bookshop from Printed Matter. The entire space is decked out in the clean lines of USM’s furniture, and behind the visitor information desk is John Armleder’s *Royal Flush* (2018) installation of mirrored tiles reminiscent of a disco ball.

The Swiss Institute also takes the art outdoors with a terrace that places visitors in the midst of the city. The current plein air setup includes work by Valentin Carron, Nancy Lupo, and Michael Wang. In Wang’s *Extinct in the Wild* series, the artist references Peter Stuyvesant’s original orchard, composed of native plants that now only grow with human care and populated what is now the East Village.

Signage on the building is multilingual, not merely with the four official languages of Switzerland, but also with the most spoken languages in the Swiss Institute’s new surrounding area: English, Spanish, and Chinese. The Swiss Institute, which has free admission, has also been collaborating with local community organizations for artist-led workshops and is actively celebrating the artistic history and present of their new East Village location.

The Swiss Institute’s new 38 St. Marks location opens with the exhibition *Readymades Belong to Everyone*, on view now, curated by Fredi Fischli and Niels Olsen. In addition to the artists described above, the show features many architects and designers including OFFICE, Rem Koolhaas, MOS Architects, and Sauter von Moos in collaboration with Herzog and de Meuron.

Giovannini, Joseph "Swiss Institute Has a New Home Ready-Made for Art," *NYTimes.com*, June 28, 2018

The New York Times

Swiss Institute Has a New Home Ready-Made for Art

Joseph Giovannini | June 28, 2018

For anyone who thinks that the granular, old-fashioned neighborhoods of Lower Manhattan — the kind with ice cream parlors, stoops, barber shops, bars and tattoo joints — are fast decamping to Brooklyn, head on over to one of the area's incandescent holdouts, the East Village, where the new walk-in Swiss Institute has just opened on one of the city's liveliest streets, St. Marks Place.

Perhaps you don't know that the Swiss Institute has been around since 1986, a nonprofit art-world secret housed in various low-profile Manhattan venues. Since 1994, it occupied locations in SoHo but became isolated as high-end boutiques swamped the neighborhood and artists exited. The Swiss Institute wanted to relocate to a neighborhood where its forward-thinking mission would resonate. Led by Simon Castets, the French-born director and curator, the Institute found a high-visibility corner and a built-in audience in the thick of the pulsing, gritty, diverse East Village.

The Swiss Institute's new home — a renovated bank on St. Marks Place — has an open-door policy. Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

Wade Guyton's installation, "Untitled," made from tubular steel frame with polished goldstone finish. Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

The Institute is free, friendly and breezy, a corner museum — like a corner deli or drugstore — dedicated to experimental work by emerging artists. The modest two-story, 1950s building used to be a neighborhood bank, and it still looks it, blending right into a raucous, fine-grained urban melee that would gladden the heart of Jane Jacobs.

With educational outreach programs, an open-door policy, and an inaugural show — "Readymades Belong to Everyone" — the Institute adds energy and edge to a neighborhood that it clearly gets and supports. It's chill.

"The ability to engage with such a vibrant, high-traffic neighborhood is unprecedented for S.I.," says Mr. Castets. "There are many schools, cultural and community organizations in the neighborhood, as well as an incredible history of art making and experimentation."

Sensitively restored on the outside and repurposed in spanking white on the inside by Selldorf Architects of New York, the cleaned-up, handsome-but-not-fancy, 7,500-square foot building fits right into the neighborhood.It wears the former bank building like camouflage. It's a reappropriated ready-made. Squint and you can't tell that there's much difference between the Institute's funky, un-precious inaugural show, and the 24-hour T-shirts-and-everything-else emporium across the street. On two floors of the Institute, plus the basement and rooftop, the show updates the idea of Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" — his signed, pedestalized urinal of 1917 — using images of buildings or designed objects as ready-mades. The young Swiss curators Niels Olsen and

Giovannini, Joseph "Swiss Institute Has a New Home Ready-Made for Art," *NYTimes.com*, June 28, 2018

An array of ready-mades, left to right: Alan Belcher's installation "Desktop," from 23 ceramics; Oliver Payne and Nick Relph's work, "Technical, Taxi," from metal bicycles wheel and plastic stool and Lutz Bacher's "Fire," from print on plywood and wood. Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

There are familiar names. We find the famous, striped Aldo Rossi changing cabana (1980), plucked off Italian beaches and intended as a wardrobe. Petra Blaisse, the Dutch designer, hangs (and signs) a floor-to-ceiling Bubble Wrap curtain ("Don't Pinch!"), while her Dutch design colleague, the architect Rem Koolhaas, sent in slides of the Berlin Wall from an architecture school project ("Field Trip, 1971"): his long, typed, amusing narrative points out the apparent irony that this walled city was a prison of freedom, and East Berliners wanted in.

The Chilean poet-architect Smiljan Radic sent one of the very few flesh-and-blood objects, a Dada-esque collage of a violin bow suspending part of a violin's belly on strands of its horsehair. The bow teeter-totters delicately over two large industrial light bulbs planted in a crude wooden bowl.

Fredi Fischli invited 60 artists and architects to interpret street signs, chairs, teakettles and architecture.

At the entrance, you step through "Gate," a common airport security gate with graffiti slapped on its sides by Reena Spaulings (who is actually an anonymous, mash-up New York persona, sort of an art-world avatar). In this context, we notice another artifact of our culture that we take for granted. Three steps away, "Fire," a tall, free-standing billboard depicting a fire truck, by the New York artist Lutz Bacher (a pseudonym), could be the image of the fire truck passing by just outside the window, siren wailing — again something we no longer really see even if we hear it. Next to it, the British artist-filmmakers Oliver Payne and Nick Relph appropriated Duchamp's first ready-made, "Bicycle Wheel" (1913), using instead a high-performance Aerospoke bicycle wheel.

What's changed since Duchamp, of course, is that the displaced object is no longer just industrial, as artists including Robert Gober, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Michael Landy and Gabriel Orozco have long shown. The deceptively simple works at the Swiss Institute owe a considerable debt to Mr. Gober, an American sculptor, who simultaneously recognized and rejected the industrial ready-made using hanging sinks, playpens, beds and doors (before he moved, in the 1990s, into environments).

Many of the ready-mades here are domestic, like the old bathtub, complete with Rorschach rust stains, that the Los Angeles artist and poet Ser Serpas hangs up in the corner.

Claire Fontaine's installation, "Yoda." Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

Giovannini, Joseph "Swiss Institute Has a New Home Ready-Made for Art," *NYTimes.com*, June 28, 2018

The curators have cast a wide net in local, international and underground communities to find artists, including street artists, known for rephrasing objects in distortional ways. The rows of logo T-shirts on boxes lined up against the wall, by the London-based artists Richard Sides and Gili Tal, are just like the T-shirts you'll find outside, rewritten with an anarchic twist: "Vote Acid," reads one. Those shopping bags on the floor, sent by the German artist Maria Eichhorn, are filled with empty tea boxes, plastic water bottles, and chewing gum wrappers discarded by people installing the show, a kind of behind-the-scenes gallery diary.

Smiljan Radic's installation, "Gryphon," a Dada-esque collage of a violin bow suspending part of a violin's belly on strands of its horsehair. Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

Many of the 65 exhibits are art-referential pieces, art about art, and you start consulting the exhibition menu for clues to understanding them. But after a while, you get into the rhythm of trusting your eye and instincts. You notice that in "Maso Chair," the subversive Swiss architects Trix and Robert Haussmann replaced the gaskets on the metal frame of an Eames chair with flower studs used to support floral arrangements — ouch! And isn't that contorted steel tube that the New York artist Wade Guyton twisted up into the air the remnant of the iconic 1920s Breuer chair?

Currently on the Swiss Institute's rooftop terrace: Valentin Carron's "Vecchio Cuore," center; Nancy Lupo's "Bench," top right; and "Extinct in the Wild," Michael Wang's work of aluminum planters. Credit: Jeenah Moon for *The New York Times*

These ready-mades are not beautiful, signature originals with a strong physical presence, but artworks that critique formal art. You have to get rid of that nasty notion that "I could have done this," or, rather, you gradually understand that you actually could do this, at home, tonight. Your perception shifts. Pleasantly and unexpectedly brainwashed, you walk back out to St. Marks Place and gaze at the T-shirts and hats and hookah pipes and think about signing them. Somehow you hear the rumble of motorcycles with a new interest and curiosity: it's a John Cage cantata.

Even the lively St. Marks Place feels more alive. Life is art and art, life. Dada rules.

Armstrong, Annie, “The Swiss Institute Opens Its New East Village Home With Show of Readymades,” *ArtNews.com*, June 22, 2018

ARTNEWS

The Swiss Institute Opens Its New East Village Home With Show of Readymades

Annie Armstrong | June 22, 2018

A sense of place is established as soon as you step into the ground floor of the Swiss Institute’s new 7,500-square-foot location on St. Marks in the heart of the East Village in New York. To your right, a hunk of wall left over from the building’s renovation stands as a readymade object, now titled Untitled (Loveseat) by Klara Liden, and to your left, the likeness of a New York City firetruck is flattened onto plywood, in FIRE by Lutz Bacher. Both works are part of “Readymades Belong to Everyone,” the institute’s inaugural exhibition in its new home, which sprawls over its four floors, including a basement and a rooftop—all accessible via stairs or an elevator splashed by Swiss artist Pamela Rosenkranz in “tongue pink,” as the institution’s associate curator, Alison Coplan, put it.

Last night, though, at the institute’s private opening, all the action was on the roof, where guests attendees mingled with each other, romped atop a heart-shaped sculpture made by Valentin Carron out of lavender-painted pine logs, and tried to figure out what was a readymade object and what was just debris from the festivities, an admittedly difficult project when pieces like Lena Tutunjian’s The Individual (Lunch), which consists of a Subway cup and cookie, are on view.

Claire Fontaine, *Yoda* , 2016.
ANNIE ARMSTRONG/ARTNEWS

The building was originally constructed as a bank in the 1954, and a Chase last occupied it. Following a renovation by Annabelle Selldorf, the space feels a bit like a smaller New Museum. Compared to its former space on Wooster St., which is once again Deitch Projects, it is much less of a white cube; its basement has gray walls, and nooks and crannies throughout the space harbor little pieces. During its renovations, most of the building’s original bones were replaced with fittings from Swiss design firms—window treatments from Vitrocsa, furniture from Vitra, and so forth.

As a part of the “SI Onsite” show, Hans Haacke, who taught for decades at the nearby Cooper Union, is offering iPads with a program called Swiss Institute Visitors Poll, which consists of 20 questions—half focused on demographics (“Where are you visiting from?”), and half on politics (“Do you think Donald Trump will make America great again?”). The poll will run for a year, with weekly updates looking at correlations between the questions being projected in a library space on the building’s second floor.

Elsewhere, a wall is lined with the kind of kitschy T-shirts one might see sold at a St. Marks thrift shop—it’s a piece called the masters have always been anarchists, by Richard Sides and Gili Tal, which Fredi Fischli (who curated the show with Niels Olsen) said represents the “hollowing out of youth culture” within the East Village. Maybe the Swiss Institute can fix that! Beyond its robust plans for exhibitions and events, there’s also a Printed Matter outpost on site.

Back upstairs, as the sun began to set aside planters of flora (Extinct in the Wild, an onsite piece by Michael Wang), staff members joked that they wished they hadn’t had to remove the bank’s original vault door, but said that they had to, lest the door be confused with a readymade object itself.

Hanson, Sarah P., “Collector’s Eye: Steven Guttman,” *TheArtNewspaper.com*, December 6, 2017

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Collector’s Eye: Steven Guttman

The entrepreneur tell us his preferred way to buy art and which work he would save if his house was on fire

Sarah P. Hanson | December 6, 2017

The collector Steven Guttman

Steven Guttman, the founder and chairman of Uovo, launched his collections storage company in New York three years ago out of necessity. As a buyer of space-gobbling furniture and design, there was no facility that met his exacting standards. So, after 40 years in banking and real estate, Guttman built his dream warehouse in Long Island City, Queens with museum-level security and environmental controls and concierge-like service. Today, with 500,000 sq. ft across three facilities, Uovo houses the collections of museums, foundations, galleries, archives and artists—and, yes, Guttman’s own. Reflecting his roving lifestyle, he serves on the chairman’s council of the Whitney Museum and is the chairman of the Centre Pompidou Foundation, the US friends group that supports the museum. But as much as he loves Paris and New York—Miami, where he has a home, is a favourite port of call. “The exciting thing about Miami”, he says, “is that it is changing all the time”.

The Art Newspaper: How did you first get into collecting?

Steven Guttman: I have always had a passion for architecture and design. How various environments influence human behaviour and feelings fascinates me. As a real estate developer, I have taken great pleasure in creating settings that people enjoy experiencing. Art plays a vital role in most environments, so it seems quite natural that art would be an important part of my life.

What was your first purchase for your collection?

I was living in Washington, DC in the 1970s. The Washington Color School was the focal point of the local art scene at that time and, while I could not afford a painting by Morris Louis or Kenneth Noland, I was able to acquire a draped painting by Sam Gilliam—which I later donated to what is now the Pérez Art Museum Miami.

What is your preferred way of buying art?

My wife Kathy and I enjoy meeting the artists that we collect. There is no substitute for studio visits and gallery shows. Our participation with the Centre Pompidou Foundation gives us access to artists and curators, and has been most valuable in helping us make informed decisions on which artists to add to our collection.

Hanson, Sarah P., “Collector’s Eye: Steven Guttman,” *TheArtNewspaper.com*, December 6, 2017

What is the most valuable piece in your collection?

That’s a hard question to answer because the value of a work to us is not defined by money. Some pieces in our homes have been hanging for years and we couldn’t imagine living without them, although financially they don’t have extraordinary value. Collecting for us is about an emotional and intellectual connection. We find it exciting to put together a collection where the works are in dialogue. We are passionate about discovering young, new artists and also collect many historical artists. Some pieces that have a special meaning for us are a Gene Davis painting in the family room of our weekend home in Washington, Connecticut, and a Valentin Carron steel sculpture of a snake that is over the bed in our Paris apartment.

If your house was on fire, which work would you save?

I couldn’t imagine losing a work we own by Franz Kline, which is in our Miami Beach apartment. It’s a small work from 1954, which he painted on a page from the New York City phone book. It’s highly representative of his work, and it’s fun to make out the names and phone numbers in the background. With my other hand, I’d grab our silver Mallet-Stevens desk box on the way out.

“The real challenge is figuring out what you love and what you don’t”

If money were no object, what would be your dream purchase?

A major painting by Ellsworth Kelly. In recent years he has become my favourite artist of that generation, and I would love to own one of his monumental paintings.

Which work do you regret not buying when you had the chance?

When I first started collecting in the mid-1970s, the Max Protetch Gallery had recently opened in Washington, DC and was showing works by Andy Warhol, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Carl Andre. I was attracted to the pieces, but I couldn’t quite get my head around their conceptual/minimal nature. Frankly, I was too uninformed and inexperienced. I didn’t buy a single piece and opted for “safer”, more mainstream artists that have long been forgotten.

What is the most surprising place you have displayed a work?

We recently installed a large work by Marguerite Humeau above an elevator bank and busy hallway at Uovo. It looks like six large eyes that follow you as you move. The work is about being monitored, which is quite fitting in a highly secure storage facility. There have been some strong reactions, to say the least.

What’s the best collecting advice you have been given?

Only buy what you love, which sounds like a cliché. But what nobody tells you is that the real challenge is figuring out what you love, what you don’t, and how your taste and collection evolve over time. The real winners for us are the works that challenge and resonate with us months and years after acquiring them.

Davies, Lillian, "Valentin Carron, Galerie Kamel Mennour," *Artforum*, Reviews, May 2015, p. 387

ARTFORUM

PARIS

Valentin Carron

GALERIE KAMEL MENNOUR

A direct translation of the title of Valentin Carron's exhibition "*L'Autoroute du soleil à minuit*" yields "Highway of the Sun at Midnight." The romantic-sounding phrase evokes a real highway, the 591-mile-long toll road from Paris through Lyon to the Mediterranean at Menton; francophone vacationers, their cars stuffed with beach towels and topped with parasols and folding chairs, call this road "*l'autoroute du soleil*." The highway, the first section of which opened in 1960, was designed to serve an emerging European thirst for leisure and consumption. It is an appropriate reference for the artist as he mines the modern visual vernacular. Here Carron transformed the gallery space, literally piercing a false wall in *Un mur cinq trous* (One Wall Five Holes), 2015, while advancing the aesthetics of an imagined village somewhere in contemporary Western Europe. For example, he introduced the wood-slat carpentry of a white-painted barn facade onto the ceiling of the narrowest room of the gallery, making evident the provincial scenography that informs Carron's work.

Valentin Carron, *Tout près presque dedans* (So Close Almost Inside), 2014, vinyl ink on PVC tarpaulin, galvanized steel tubing, metal wire, 35½ × 29½".

Seven works, each titled *Belt hanging on the wall*, 2014, were just that, but not quite. From afar, the snakelike belts crafted in pastel glass and hung in a row like animal pelts suggest Daniel Buren's deliberate patterns of stripes. On view concurrently at Kamel Mennour's new exhibition space two blocks away, Buren's "degree zero of painting" could not have been an unintended subject for Carron's interpretation. Most of the belts mimic a single cut piece of leather, but one, cast in a rich amber glass, is of the woven-leather variety, the kind worn too long by hipsters in high-waisted jeans. When speaking about these works, the artist describes the belts' "menacing" quality and their "domestic virility." But one perceives, instead, a laughable impotence in these sculptures—a sense of defeat that does not take away from their strength as cultural artifacts. A Brutalist-influenced gray sculpture finished with gently faded white stripes, *The great object (after André Gigon)*, 2014, is an identical copy, in polystyrene and resin, of a public work in concrete from the 1950s by a minor Swiss artist. "My materials are artists themselves," Carron has explained. "It's a negation of creativity in a way, because I don't create, I copy." The detached coolness of the artist's works, essentially assisted readymades, is contrasted by his obsessive attention to surface and source material.

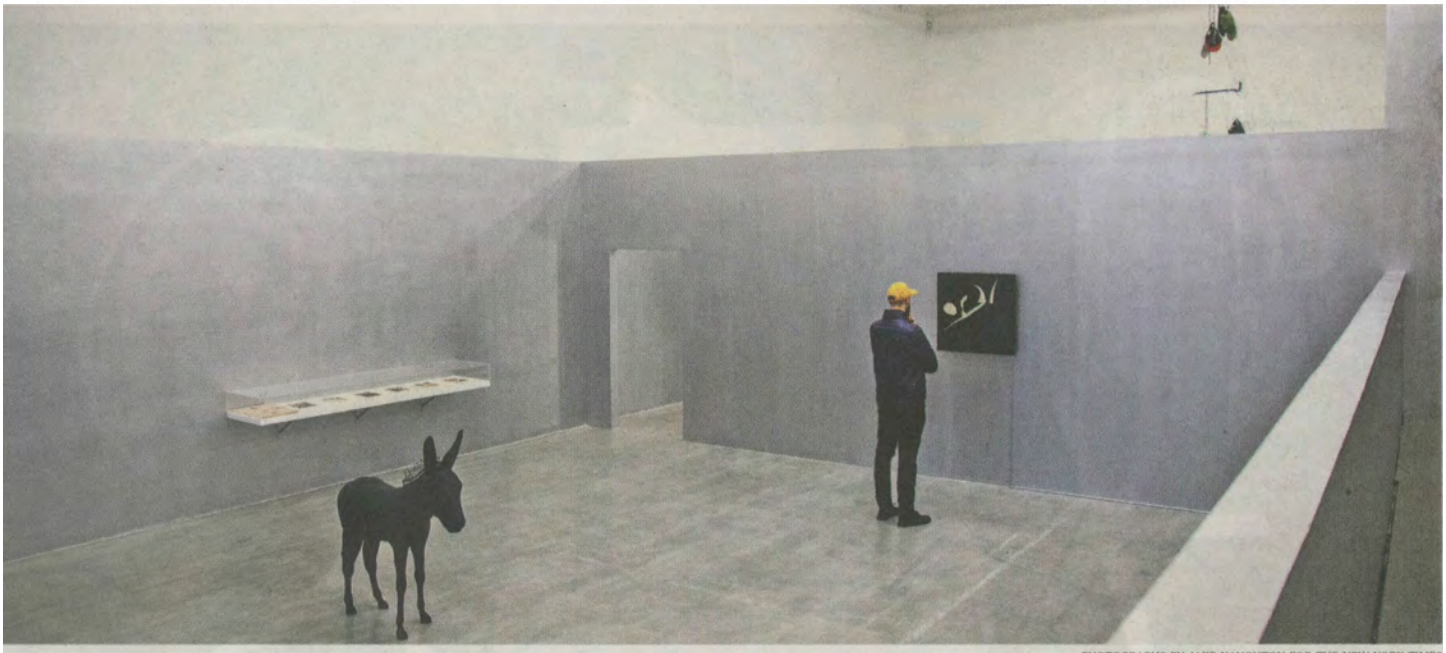
"Fundamentally, I've always been a painter," Carron has confessed. Here he presented three paintings, each realized with vinyl ink on PVC tarpaulin and mounted on steel tubing and metal wire. Appropriating the graphic design of book covers from the 1950s and '60s and transferring them onto weatherproof industrial supports most typically used for roadside advertising, Carron exaggerates the aspirations of modern aesthetics. The formal graphic pattern of *Tout près presque dedans* (So Close Almost Inside), 2014, four bold black stripes on a flat yellow background, could be read as either an attempt at Burenesque Minimalism or cryptic signage for summertime hikers. The undulating black stripes of the large-scale *Père et fils* (Father and Son), 2014, loomed on the wall adjacent to the small, icon-like *Main bleue bougie blanche* (Blue Hand White Candle), 2014, which, we might imagine, futilely seeks to illuminate a stretch of asphalt in the middle of the night.

—*Lillian Davies*

Galleries of New York: SoHo and TriBeCa

Martha Schwendener

Altered Consciousness in Creative Oases



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAKE NAUGHTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

IN PLAIN SIGHT The show "Work Hard: Selections" by Valentin Carron at the Swiss Institute in SoHo features a kinetic installation, "Peut-être No. 11," by Jean Tinguely, above at right, and "Black Balthazar," by Mai-Thu Perret, above at left. Below left, works by Tracey Snelling, in the show "Feel Big Live Small," at Apexart in TriBeCa. Below right, visitors watching "Liquidity Inc.," by Hito Steyerl, at Artists Space in SoHo. Bottom right, Mercer Street in SoHo.

originate from an absurd but hilarious premise inspired by another artist. At a news conference, Edward Ruscha once revealed that a sculpture titled "Rocky II" had never been shown: Mr. Ruscha had buried it in the Mojave Desert in the 1970s. Following this lead, Mr. Bismuth hired a detective and went into the desert to find the work. The resulting videos feature a cameo by Jeffrey Deitch and the baritone of the conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner, who performed the fake movie trailer for this art caper. (Mr. Bismuth himself shared an Oscar for original screenplay in 2005 with Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman for "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind.") At Team's auxiliary space at 47 Wooster Street, a performance series is continuing: The last segment features the great video artist Alex Bag.

SWISS INSTITUTE Cultural institutions devoted to national patrimonies are out of step with today's art world, which argues for global unity (even if that is illusory). But the Swiss Institute, in a space once occupied by Jeffrey Deitch on Wooster Street, is an exceptional case. In "Work Hard," Valentin Carron, who represented Switzerland at the 2013 Venice Biennale, continues to probe the question of "Swiss-ness" with a range of curious and fabulous objects (in other words, who cares if they are actually Swiss). A small kinetic installation by Jean Tinguely hangs opposite bunny ears carved from wood by Claudia Comte, in the style of Henry Moore; watercolor drawings by the visionary artist Marguerite Burnat-Provins look like gruesome fairy-tale illustrations, while Denis Savary's "Alma (After Kokoschka)" (2007) riffs on the life-size doll that the artist Oskar Kokoschka had made of Alma Mahler after she left him for the architect Walter Gropius. Kokoschka lived with the doll for a year, then beheaded it.

RONALD FELDMAN FINE ARTS Vitaly Komar is best known for his collaboration with Alexander Melamid, but his exhibition at Feldman, a landmark SoHo gallery, explores his interest in allegory and justice. Paintings of brown bears, symbols of Russian power, and the balancing scales of justice dominate the show. Works from the '80s by Komar and Melamid in the rear gallery prove the artists were in top form when critiquing the Soviet Union and its abuses, particularly against artists. Mr. Komar has lived in New York since 1978, but the Komar and Melamid oeuvre, with its intrepid critiques of totalitarian-

“Work Hard: Selections by Valentin Carron,” *The New Yorker*, March 2015

ART

“WORK HARD: SELECTIONS BY VALENTIN CARRON”

March 4 2015 – May 24 2015

This quirky but substantial show, organized by a witty Swiss sculptor, brings together two dozen artists who favor uncertain imagery and unpolished style. The oldest works are magnificent drawings by Marguerite Burnat-Provins, a writer born in 1872, who endured hallucinations and sketched creepy portraits (an over-powdered hag, a downcast man encircled by swans). Among the contemporary artists, sculptures by Mai-Thu Perret and Latifa Echakhch are particularly fine, but the eeriest and most compelling piece is Denis Savary’s “Alma (After Kokoschka).” When Alma Mahler left him for Walter Gropius, Kokoschka ordered a life-size doll in her likeness; Savary’s gawky homage is a seated doll covered in fur, displacing desire from human to beast. Through May 24.

Ebony, David, “David Ebony’s Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for March,” *Artnet.com*, March 19, 2015

artnet

David Ebony’s Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for March

David Ebony, Thursday, March 19, 2015

Installation view, “Work Hard,” 2015, curated by Valentin Carron. | Photo: Courtesy Swiss Institute.

“Work Hard,” curated by Valentin Carron, at the Swiss Institute, through May 24.

In his curatorial debut, Swiss artist Valentin Carron, who represented Switzerland at the 2013 Venice Biennale, presents “Work Hard,” a compact and compelling overview of contemporary Swiss art (see Venice Biennale Curator Okwui Enwezor On “All the World’s Futures”). The show’s title refers to the fabled Swiss work ethic, as well as to a graffiti scrawl Carron saw on a public sculpture in Lausanne. This particular story of recent Swiss art trends is told from a very specific point of view, a kind of eccentric, neo-Dada vision that reflects Carron’s own quirky sculptures and installations. Visitors circulate through the exhibition in custom-designed rooms lined with silver walls, echoing Warhol’s “factory.” The show contains engaging works by Ugo Rondinone, Urs Luthi, Fabrice Gygi, and others.

A black-painted plywood and rattan donkey, *Black Balthazar*, by Mai-Thu Perret, makes for an intriguing show opener, positioned at the exhibition’s entryway near one of Claudia Comte’s small Arp-like modernist wood sculptures placed on a low shelf. A motorized black-and-white wall relief by Jean Tinguely, hung on the rear wall of this room, is just one of several historical pieces, including works by Daniel Spoerri, Luciano Castelli, and Meret Oppenheim, that Carron has selected in homage to his artistic forebears.

“Valentin Carron and Fabrice Stroun,” *Valentin Carron: do ré mi fa sol la si do*, text by Fabrice Stroun, Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 2014, pp. 15-19

Valentin Carron
and Fabrice Stroun

Do

When we met in the late Nineties, you were producing Minimalist-inspired sculptures with a skateboarding culture twist. But you started making art quite young, initially as a painter, right?

I got into the art school (Beaux-Arts) of Sion in 1992. In those days, for me, art meant painting, I didn't know anything else. I was already a skater, which to me meant a break with childhood, a kind of emancipation—giving up group sports, football, etc. And of course skating carried with it a whole culture, a clothing style, bands. California!

How old were you?

15.

At the time, art schools in Switzerland did not yet function on the model of academic training, as they do now. They were still trade schools.

Quite right. My main goal, when I registered at the art school, after the end of compulsory schooling, was to escape from technical training or construction sites.

What were your paintings like at the time?

I was a teenager, I was malleable, I had to hang in there, and thus was actually quite focused. Most of my professors were painters, practicing a kind of late Trans-Avant Garde style. The book that meant the most to me at the time was the Klaus Honnef anthology, published by Taschen, which contained mostly figurative, neo-Expressionist painting. And a bit later on, like a lot of students my age, I went through a Tuymans phase.

What motifs were you painting?

Elements from the skateboarding world. I would read *Trasher,* a magazine which seemed to me to contain the seeds of a new visual language—a radical departure from everything I had been taught in Sion. But also from my immediate environment: agricultural storerooms or my village church.

In 1996, you left for Lausanne, where you continued your studies at the École Cantonale d'Art de Lausanne (ECAL). Once you got there, you had already stopped painting. How did that happen?

Giving up painting was a gradual process. A major moment for me was when I discovered Minimalism, which looked weirdly similar to what I would see in the skate parks I hung out at. It was a real shock! Not so much the artworks in themselves, but the idea that art could be made

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from objects belonging to my ordinary, everyday life. At more or less the same time, in Switzerland, one began to see the works of a generation of artists who were precisely working with ordinary, 'non-artistic' materials: Fabrice Gygi's temporary housing structures made with urban furnishings, Francis Baudevin's use of motifs from medical and pharmaceutical packaging, Sidney Stucky's cold Techno installations, and so on. The last paintings I did in that period are in fact remakes of Stucky's paintings: a series of enamel drips on vinyl. After four years in Sion, I then decided to extend my education in Lausanne, where Baudevin and Gygi were both teaching.

ré mi

In 2000, when you came out of ECAL, you began to articulate different iterations of an Alpine vernacular aesthetic, of the sort that was supposed to express a rustic, national authenticity. Each of your works at that point was produced according to a differentiated process of delegation, and in that sense could be grasped on its own terms. Taken together, however, they functioned like props in a scenery. For *Saison Morte,* your first exhibition at Forde in Geneva, you showed a pile of dirty snow made out of resin, which you surrounded with old, impeccably restored snow-bikes, and you painted the concrete ceiling structure with an 'imitation fake wood' patina, along with game-boards hanging on the walls as if they were paintings.

They were carambole boards, that I had made in marquetry by a local artisan. The game is a kind of table billiards, originally from India, which became popular in Switzerland in the Seventies, and quickly became identified as a typical mountain village accessory. In the cafés in my village, these boards often hang on the wall, like decorative objects. In fact, at Forde one could take them down and play a game on a table intended for that purpose. A bit of left-over, supposed 'relational' functionality, from my very *Nineties* education at ECAL…

So you weren't conceiving of these objects as 'paintings' yet at the time. My point here isn't to track down the premises of an autonomous pictorial practice in your work. And yet, your paintings do have significant processual and formal particularities. In 2006, you started producing paintings done with a paintbrush in synthetic ink on PVC tarpaulins stretched with wire on plumbing tubes. Unlike the rest of your work, these did not reproduce preexisting objects. Moreover, there was nothing deceptive about their surface: we had moved from the world of the 'fake' (fake wood, fake concrete, 'imitation fake wood' on fake concrete, etc.) for a more raw industrial aesthetic. What you are showing us is 'what is there': a PVC tarpaulin stretched on plumbing tubes. For the last two or three years, a major part of your production has moved away from your initial appropriation strategies. In that respect, these paintings from the mid-2000s seem to herald significant aspects of your current practice. And also, they seem to be the only objects that you continue to produce yourself, without delegating any of the process. How did you come up with this form?

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It's all Joe Style's fault.

Sorry?

Joe Style. Once, when I was driving through Daillon, in the Valais, I discovered his paintings by the side of the road. He's an artisan fascinated by the art of Native Americans. I don't know if that kind of craft is mainly intended for tourists wanting souvenirs near the reservations, or if it belongs to an actual local cultural practice. Regardless, Joe Style would do paintings on animal skins, stretched with leather strips on frames made from tree branches. The motifs were spraypainted, and included buffalo herds and portraits of Indian chiefs with feathered headdresses. I ended up commissioning him to do a series of works featuring images from Léger paintings.

What aesthetic features especially interested you in these objects? And why Léger?

They were genuinely incongruous objects, and also—I have to say—singularly ugly. I wanted to do something with that object long before I thought of an image. Ultimately, I chose Léger's populist Modernism, which stood for a kind of failure in my eyes. He too dreamed of America. He would have liked to be the French Diego Rivera. But he was never allowed to design the headquarters of the Communist Party, so he ended up doing stained glass windows for churches... In 2006, for my show at the Kunsthalle Zurich, I simply 'modernized' the object by replacing the branches or twigs with metallic tubes, the strips of leather with wire, and the animal skin with a PVC tarpaulin. I then felt like I was inventing a new medium, which I could paint on without any qualms or reservations.

But you're not the first person to paint on synthetic tarpaulins. I'm thinking of Keith Haring, of course, but also, closer to home, of Fabrice Gygi who had also stretched this kind of tarpaulin on frames a few years earlier.

In Haring (who by the way, was also an admirer of Léger), these materials have a cultural connotation: they are meant to remind us of the street, of advertising billboards in public space. In Fabrice Gygi, they belong to the world of construction sites and temporary urban structures. Whereas what mattered to me was, on the contrary, the (relatively) generic dimension of these industrial materials—the fact that they did not represent any cultural 'authenticity' in themselves. At that point, I felt like I was dealing with a soulless material, freed from all the narratives of the history of painting onto which I had projected myself thus far.

The first one of these paintings was enormous, almost 7 meters by 5. It showed a dog made of stars looking at the moon. Where did that image come from?

It was a mural on the walls of a clothing store in Martigny, the town where I live. It's the only fairly chic fashion store in the area, where one can find the latest brands. The way I reproduced this image was, at the time, quite

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similar to how I did all my other three-dimensional pieces: appropriating a piece of scenery, which had been built in order to liven up a basically sad outer-urban landscape.

fa sol la si do

Can you describe the technique you use to make these paintings?

It's the culmination of a series of mistakes. First of all, painting with a brush with a silkscreen ink on PVC tarpaulins is a mistake from the beginning. It's the right combination of materials, but not the right technique. That kind of ink is meant to be printed in thin layers, in one go: it dries quickly—too quickly—and becomes gooey. It's extremely toxic, gives off noxious fumes, and eats away at the surface of the tarp. It's a bit like painting *a fresco* with tar. I start by projecting a motif that I sketch out free hand, with a marker. I hold it halfway along its handle so as to not be overly precise or imprecise. My decision as how to frame the motif happens then, directly on the tarpaulin. I don't do any preliminary sketches. The tarpaulins I order from a company are dyed in different colors. I then try to play with the background color, which is always partly visible, and the color I add on top, with the paintbrush. Most of the time I try to duplicate the color of the original image, but once in a while I allow myself some interpretive freedom. After that it's just a matter of 'coloring in'. Everything is done in one layer, without touch-ups. Any feeling of painterly sensibility is an illusion. It's nothing other than the material result of a series of more or less burdensome technical hindrances that I willingly submit to. The end result can only be disappointing, a failure.

Could you have these paintings made by assistants?

Ideally, yes. But actually, it is always hard for me to work with craftsmen, who are naturally inclined to do the best possible job. I couldn't make them 'make mistakes' on purpose. It wouldn't be respectful. In a sense, it doesn't matter, because I am not really the one making these objects. Since 2006, I have only painted about 15 paintings. For this exhibition, I made almost 70 pieces in 6 months, of which almost half ended up in the bin. I rented a studio in the industrial zone of Martigny, where I would come every day to work, until late at night. And I would be back early in the morning and notice that the color wasn't right, or that the image wasn't properly framed, and I would have to start all over again. I was effectively forcing myself physically to play the role of the 'painter' all the way. But it is a game, like method acting. It's ultimately a constructed pause.

On what basis do you consider a painting to be a success or a failure?

It's quite subjective. These paintings cannot be too well or too badly painted. I am looking for a slight feeling of fatigue and bitterness. Each piece has to produce a kind of buzzing, a barely perceptible sense of displeasure.

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We've been talking for years, you and I, about the specific ugliness of a whole swath of German painting. In fact, our first conversation was about Werner Büttner's paintings from the late 70s and early 80s.

I continue to look at these paintings today. I would have loved to be a painter like him, but these kinds of paintings of the period have a punk provocative charge which I cannot historically identify with. And besides, in the meantime I was also influenced by the coldness of Appropriation and Neo-Geo. I like to think, though, that something remains in my work of their deliberate regression, their meanness, their humor.

Can you describe, in fact, the specific protocol of appropriation of the paintings you are showing in Bern? Nearly all the images come from book cover art.

Yes, from the cover (or spine) illustrations of books published in the post-war years. Most of them are from the Fifties and Sixties, books that were published by book clubs like the 'Club français du livre' or, in French-speaking Switzerland, the 'Guilde du livre'. They come from various parts of Europe: Germany, Poland or the Scandinavian countries. These were industrially produced books, with a cloth or leather binding. Handsome collector's items at affordable prices, that also served a decorative function. The cover illustrations were generally Modernist-inspired motifs, printed in relief.

Are some of them by renowned illustrators?

Yes, some of them, like Mario Prassinos, who worked for Gallimard until the mid-Sixties, and belonged to the circle of Alberto Magnelli. All the images of the paintings in the central room of Kunsthalle Bern are from him. But it is not that significant. One could perfectly well see these objects as the result of a collective effort—that all these illustrations were commissioned and sometimes touched up by publishers, series editors and designers before they ended up as cover illustrations. Above all, we are dealing here with a generic expression of pre-war Modernism, and that is specifically what makes this imagery interesting. Namely, it's a move away from a complex pictorial language, understood by a specialized circle, to a 'modern' industrial aesthetic accessible to everyone. Of course, one can see this graphic transformation as an impoverishment, but it is hard not to be touched by the progressive dimension of these products intended for mass distribution.

Yet your paintings are hardly optimistic. They seem on the contrary to be permeated by a profound melancholia.

It's true that I tend to be more attracted by motifs I find ineffectual and outdated. They produce a sentiment of weariness in me, which has less to do with some weakening of the original power of invention of Modernism, and more with the fact that the post-war promises of a better world they embody have not been kept. When I look at these images, it is hard for me not to see them as just so many harbingers of defeat.

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

Valentin Carron

VALENTIN CARRON, BERTRAND, 2010, dichroic glass, acrylic lacquer, 2 parts, 15 3/4 x 10 1/4 x 4 3/8", each / Zweifarbiges Glas, Acryllack, 2 Teile, je 40 x 26 x 11 cm.

(ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER, ZÜRICH; DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY, LOS ANGELES / PHOTO: REBECCA FANUELE)

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

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Valentin Carron

The Pavilion of Contrasts

GIOVANNI CARMINE

A snake greeted visitors in the entranceway of the Swiss Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), rising to reveal jaws open in a sly, captivating smile. Instinctively, the visitor stroked its head. This natural act, almost as if to ward off evil—to calm the animal down or subdue an irrational fear—was often followed by another gesture, equally natural in contemporary society: The visitor snapped a picture. Yet the pavilion’s sensual guardian was more than a likable companion to pose beside for a memorable photo of the lagoon. Fashioned out of wrought iron, it was at once a sculpture and a line unfolding in space, like the stroke of a pencil on a sheet of paper. In a gesture typical of Valentin Carron, this archaic symbol and archetypal form questioned its own status as an artwork.

Sculpture lies at the center of the Swiss artist’s work. As Carron has often pointed out, he works according to the strategies of appropriation art. Reinterpreting works of art in materials different from the originals, he grants them new meaning, transferring them to new contexts for another generation. The ultimate goal is to reactivate formal motifs that have been lost over the course of time, yet without giving in to nostalgia. In this quest, which is never without a subtle sense of humor, Carron is often inspired by public art as well as by minor architectural details and decorative phenomena he encounters in the region of Valais—from which he hails and where he continues to live—or during his travels. His work

GIOVANNI CARMINE is director of Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, Switzerland. He was the curator of the Swiss Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

plays on these vernacular traditions and on the misinterpretations to which the idea of “the modern” has often been subject.

Carron’s snake was a bicephalic monster, a detail unveiled only to those who followed its turns to the end: The same head that greeted visitors at the entrance reappeared at the tail, emerging over the enclosure wall. The artist described this snake as a sort of guide, leading the viewer along a predetermined path and back outside. The repetitions in the work’s title, YOU THEY THEY I YOU (2013), suggest the sinuous twists the 260-foot snake made through the galleries while its wealth of pronouns alludes to the relationship between sculpture, spectators, and artist.

Left / links: Swiss Pavilion, 55th Venice Biennale, 2013 / Schweizer Pavillon, 55. Biennale von Venedig.
(ALL VENICE PHOTOS: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

VALENTIN CARRON, YOU THEY THEY I YOU, 2013, iron, 311’ / DU SIE SIE ICH DU, Eisen, 95 m.

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON, YOU THEY THEY I YOU, 2013, iron, 311’ / DU SIE SIE ICH DU, Eisen, 95 m.

Spectacular in its minimalism, the work is the fruit of an artistic theft, reinterpreting a detail from the window grates of an early twentieth-century barracks in Zurich, whose iron bars are fixed between two snake heads. Carron thus upsets the hierarchy of the fine and applied arts as he transforms a decorative but functional element into a sculpture. In this sense, the artist redefines the form’s original purpose and metaphorically overcomes the danger associated with the animal. The viewer is free to indulge in infinite associations with this iconographically rich symbol, from the Bible’s stories of Eden to Aby Warburg’s lectures on serpent rituals.

Instead of seeking to stand out amid the general hubbub of Venice by creating a spectacle, Carron offered a classical exhibition of works shown previously, all recently remade. This too, in a sense, was an appropriation: of the 1952 pavilion building, designed by Bruno Giacometti, who conceived of separate galleries for painting, sculpture, and prints and drawings. In the room designated for sculpture, YOU THEY THEY I YOU rose up like a parabola, taking on

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON, BLAH BLAH, LABOR, ORANGEY, 2012, cast bronze /
BLA BLA, ARBEIT, ORANGENÄHNLICH, Bronzeguss.

VALENTIN CARRON, installation view, Swiss Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2013 /
Installationsansicht.

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON, CIAO N° 6, 2013 / AZURE, URANIUM, UMBRAGE, 2013.

Carmine, Giovanni, "The Pavilion of Contrasts," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

a spatial plasticity, while six wall hangings—cumulatively titled DIE ZERBROCHENE BRÜCKE EURER REINEN ABER UNERWARTETEN INFAMIEN (The Broken Bridge of Your Pure but Unexpected Infamies, 2013)—recalled large-scale abstract paintings. These compositions are also replicas of architectural details, reproductions in acrylic resin and fiberglass of stained-glass panes that adorn the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels; the original works, created using the dalles de verre technique, are made of thick slabs of glass set in concrete. In his architectural "sampling," Carron's strategy echoes that of Gordon Matta-Clark, but the younger artist then translates three-dimensionality into painterly works with strong tactile and rhythmic valences. Placed against a solid wall of the pavilion rather than in openings through which light could pass, Carron's copies lost their sense of purpose, becoming pure compositions dictated by a rigid formal economy based on repetition. In front of these works, viewers experienced a feeling of estrangement, if not out-and-out exclusion, as they were unable to enjoy the spectacle of light passing through the colored panes, as in Brussels. Instead, they were forced into a frontal contemplation of an architectural detail rendered aphonic.

The walls of the pavilion also served as the support for Carron's most delicate installation: He lined two walls with white shirt-cotton, striated with a subtle pale-blue grid. This almost invisible gesture created a light vibration in space while moving the modernist building into the architectural context of Venice, where fabrics and wallpaper decorate the elegant palazzi. But Carron's art often changes register, as brutality and elegance inhabit the same space to create strong narrative tension. Opposite in tone to the gentle intervention of the covered walls, the eight bronzes of AZURE, URANIUM, UMBRAGE (2013) were hung rhythmically throughout the pavilion. These casts of crushed instruments are the product of a performance not without humor, in which the artist stomps on trombones, tubas, and other members of the brass family—an ironic punk gesture. The violence is at once frozen and ennobled by being fixed in bronze. Carron has described these works as "late Nouveau Réalisme"—a repetition, perhaps full of intentional misreadings, by an epigone, which is more likely to find its audience at a provincial bar than in a museum. Indeed, it was in just such a bar, near his hometown, that Carron saw a crushed trumpet hanging on the wall.

If AZURE, URANIUM, UMBRAGE is the result of a destructive act, CIAO NO. 6 (2013)—the moped that sat in the pavilion courtyard—is the product of a delicate restoration. Through this object, Carron delves deeply into all the problems connected with the restoration process and the search for the original. How far can he allow himself to go? The result is what art historians might call an assisted readymade. Above all, perhaps, the work is an homage to an industrial culture presently disappearing from Europe: This Italian-made vehicle, popular in the Switzerland of Carron's youth, is no longer produced. CIAO NO. 6 is a pop icon, a celebration of movement and modernity a century after Futurism, and a memorial to the desires of adolescence.

Carron took advantage of the Biennale to continue and refine his research, which centers on the complexity of the sculptural genre in the contemporary context. Juxtaposing contrasts and mixing functions, he involves the viewer in a train of thought. It doesn't matter if a work such as the Swiss Pavilion's snake, developed with formal and conceptual precision, ends up as a souvenir selfie. Actually, it is better that way, because it provides the sculpture with yet another role.

(Translation: Stephen Sartarelli)

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

Valentin Carron

Der Pavillon der Kontraste

GIOVANNI CARMINE

Beim Betreten des Schweizer Pavillons auf der 55. Biennale von Venedig wurde der Besucher von einer Schlange empfangen. Angezogen von dem aufgesperrten Maul mit dem hämischen Grinsen, das sich genau auf Brusthöhe befindet, strich man ihr unwillkürlich über den Kopf. Es war eine unbewusste, ja fast beschwörende Geste, als wollte man ein wildes Tier besänftigen oder eine irrationale Angst bannen. Die verführerische Wächterin des Pavillons war zum beliebten Photomotiv geworden. Aber sie war viel mehr als nur eine sympathische Gesellin, neben der man für ein Erinnerungsphoto aus der Lagunenstadt posiert. Das schmiedeeiserne Tier ist Skulptur und Linie in einem, eine Linie, die sich durch die Räumlichkeiten zog wie ein Strich über ein Blatt Papier. In typischer Manier liess der Walliser Künstler Valentin Carron diese Schlange nicht nur einen Parcours vorgeben, sondern hinterfragte auch den Stellenwert des Kunstwerks und die Bedeutung der Skulptur, ohne vor dem Gebrauch archaischer Symbole und archetypischer Formen oder vor Bezügen zur Kunstgeschichte zurückzuschrecken.

GIOVANNI CARMINE ist Direktor der Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen. Er war der Kurator des Schweizer Pavillons der 55. Biennale von Venedig.

Die Skulptur stand im Zentrum von Carrons Werk, der (wie schon oft betont wurde) mit den Strategien der Appropriation Art arbeitet. Durch die Neugestaltung mit anderen Materialien und die Nachbildung existierender Kunstwerke und Formen verleiht er ihnen eine neue Bedeutung, indem er sie in einen neuen Kontext überführt, auch in den seiner eigenen Generation. Letztendlich geht es ihm um die Wiederbelebung eines Wissens über Ästhetik und die Funktionen der Form, das im Laufe der Jahrhunderte vergessen ging, doch ohne jemals in Nostalgie zu verfallen. Auf seiner Suche lässt sich Carron, nicht ohne eine Prise feinen Humors, immer wieder von Kunst im öffentlichen Raum inspirieren. Oder auch von weniger erhabenen architektonischen Details und dekorativen Elementen, die ihm zuweilen in seiner Heimatregion, wo er auch lebt, oder auf seinen Reisen begegnen. Dabei entwickelt der Künstler konsequenterweise auch einen Diskurs über Regionalismen und nicht zuletzt über die Deutungsmissverständnisse im Zusammenhang mit der Idee des Modernen. Während «modern» für das breitere Publikum vor allem «neu» bedeuten dürfte und oftmals gleichbedeutend ist mit «unverständlich», gilt das Interesse Carrons den Vorstellungen des Unüblichen und dem damit einhergehenden Missbrauch.

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON, YOU THEY THEY I YOU (DU SIE SIE ICH DU), 2013 / CIAO N° 6, 2013.

Carrons Schlange war ein Ungeheuer mit zwei Köpfen. Dieses Detail erschliesst sich jedoch erst, wenn man den Windungen bis zum Schluss folgte: Der Kopf, der den Besucher am Eingang empfing, wiederholte sich am anderen Ende des Schlangenkörpers, der über die Umfassungsmauer ragte. Der Künstler bezeichnete die Schlange als eine Art Wächterin des Pavillons, deren Aufgabe es sei, den Besucher auf dem vorgegebenen Rundgang bis nach draussen zu geleiten. Mit ihren 80 Metern Länge schlängelte sie sich – wenngleich formal fast auf eine einfache dunkle metallene Linie reduziert – durch den modernistischen, ultraleichten Bau von Bruno Giacometti aus dem Jahr 1952 und wurde zu einem wichtigen dekorativen Element. Der Titel YOU THEY THEY I YOU (Du Sie Sie Ich Du) suggeriert mit seiner Pronomenhäufung die mäandrierenden Windungen der Schlange durch die Ausstellungsräume und verweist darüber hinaus auf die Werk-Besucher-Künstler-Raum-Beziehung. Das in seinem Minimalismus spektakuläre Werk ist die komplexeste Anfertigung einer ganzen Serie von schmiedeeisernen Schlangen in Carrons Schaffen. Sie sind die Früchte eines Kunstdiebstahls, ein umgedeutetes Detail der

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

Valentin Carron

VALENTIN CARRON, DIE ZERBROCHENE BRÜCKE EURER REINEN ABER UNERWARTETEN INFAMIEN (THE BROKEN BRIDGE OF YOUR PURE BUT UNEXPECTED INFAMIES), 2013 / YOU THEY THEY I YOU (DU SIE SIE ICH DU), 2013.

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON, THE SUFFERING WATERFALL IS MOCKING THE WHIMSICAL FOUNTAIN, 2013, polystyrene, fiberglass, acrylic resin, acrylic paint, varnish, 83 1/8 x 132 5/8 x 3 1/2" / DER LEIDENDE WASSERFALL MOKIERT SICH ÜBER DEN WUNDERLICHEN BRUNNEN, Polystyrol, Fiberglas, Acrylharz, Acrylfarbe, Lack, 211 x 337 x 9 cm.

Fenstergitter einer Zürcher Kaserne des ausgehenden neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, bestehend aus zwei Schlangenköpfen zum Fixieren der Stangen. Carron bringt hier also die Hierarchien ins Spiel, indem er ein dekoratives und zugleich funktionales Detail in eine Skulptur umwandelt, die in ihrer Autonomie einen Ausstellungsraum belegt und ihn so ganz in Beschlag nimmt. In diesem Sinne definiert der Künstler eine Funktion neu und bannt metaphorisch auch das Gefühl der Angst, das landläufig mit diesem Tier assoziiert wird. Der Betrachter ist eingeladen, frei zu assoziieren in den Bedeutungen, die ein so universelles und ikonographisch reiches Symbol wie die Schlange bereithält – von den biblischen Vorstellungen des Bösen bis zu Aby Warburgs Vortrag über das Schlangenritual.

Statt sich spektakulär vom venezianischen Gewimmel abzuheben, hat sich Valentin Carron für eine «klassische» Ausstellung entschieden. Er zeigte bereits bekannte Arbeiten, die eigens für die Biennale neu hergestellt wurden. Auch dies eine Art Appropriation im 1952 von Bruno Giacometti entworfenen Pavillon, dessen Raumfolge eigens für Gemälde, Skulptur und Druckgraphik konzipiert wurde. Carron machte die Funktionalität des Pavillons wieder sichtbar: Im Saal, den Giacometti für Skulptur vorgesehen hatte, erhob sich YOU THEY THEY I YOU wie eine räumliche Parabel, während sechs Wandarbeiten, summarisch DIE ZERBROCHENE BRÜCKE EURER REINEN ABER UNERWARTETEN INFAMIEN (2013) betitelt, an abstrakte grossformatige Ölmalereien erinnerten. Auch diese Arbeiten sind Repliken architektonischer Details, in diesem Fall Harzglas-Reproduktionen von Fenstern, die ein Palais der Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brüssel schmücken. Diese Fenster wurden nach dem «dalles de verre»-Verfahren her-

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

gestellt; bei diesem werden Glaselemente in Zement gegossen; sie sind typisch für öffentliche und sakrale Bauten der Nachkriegszeit. Bei Carron verlieren sie ihre Funktionalität und mutieren zu reinen Kompositionen, die einer strengen, repetitiven Sparsamkeit gehorchen. Mit seinen architektonischen Entlehnungen geht Carron ähnlich vor wie Gordon Matta-Clark, mit dem Unterschied, dass er das Volumen in Bilder mit starker haptischer und rhythmischer Wirkung überführt. Bei ihrem Anblick verspürte der Betrachter ein Gefühl der Entfremdung, ja sogar regelrechte Ausschliessung, denn statt sich wie in Brüssel an dem spektakulären Licht zu erfreuen, das durch die bunten Glasfenster fällt, wurde er gezwungen, ein opak gewordenes architektonisches Detail frontal anzuschauen.

Die Mauer als Grundelement der Architektur ist ebenfalls ein wiederkehrendes Motiv in Valentin Carrons Werk. Aber nicht nur als trennendes und daher für den Standort des Betrachters bestimmendes Element, sondern auch als Träger einer Oberfläche mit spezifischen ästhetischen Eigenschaften. In diesem Sinne ist auch der womöglich feinste Eingriff im Schweizer Pavillon zu deuten: zwei Wände, ausstaffiert mit einem weissen Baumwollstoff, den ein feines blaues Gitternetz überzieht. Durch diesen fast unsichtbaren Eingriff liess sich einerseits eine leichte Vibration im Raum erzeugen, andererseits wurde der modernistische Pavillon in das architektonische Umfeld Venedigs eingebettet, wo Stoffe und Wandbekleidungen die wichtigsten Schmuckelemente in den Palazzi sind.

In den Arbeiten von Valentin Carron wird häufig und gerne das Register gewechselt, und wie kaum ein anderer versteht er es, Brutalität und Eleganz in einem Raum koexistieren zu lassen und eine grosse narrative Spannung zu erzeugen. Und so schmückten die Wände des Pavillons, statt eines lieblichen textilen Bezugs, in rhythmischer Abfolge verteilt acht Bronzeplastiken mit dem Titel AZURE, URANIUM, UMBRAGE (Azur, Uran, Anstoss, 2013), die Posaunen, Tuben und andere Blasinstrumente in einem deformierten Zustand zeigten. Sie sind inspiriert vom «Nouveau Réalisme tardif», wie ihn der Künstler selber definiert, das heisst von der Wiederholung – mit allerlei Fehldeutungen vermutlich – durch einen Epigonen. Doch statt ihr Publikum im Museum zu finden, enden diese Nachahmungsversuche meistens an den Wänden irgendwelcher Bars in der Provinz. Carrons Bronzeplastiken sind das Resultat eines performativen Aktes, bei dem der Künstler, nicht ohne einen Anflug von Ironie, einen cholerischen Wutanfall simuliert und echte Instrumente zertritt. Der brutale Akt wird durch das anschliessende Giessen in Bronze festgehalten, geradezu eingefroren und gleichzeitig durch das Material nobilitiert.

Auch das Mofa Piaggio Ciao im Innenhof des Pavillons spiegelte diesen auf die fruchtbare Koexistenz der Gegensätze abzielenden künstlerischen Gestus wider. Während AZURE, URANIUM, UMBRAGE das Resultat eines destruktiven Aktes sind, ist CIAO N° 6 das Ergebnis einer akribischen Restaurierung. Mit diesem Objekt dringt Carron in sämtliche Problematiken des Restaurierungsprozesses und der Wiederherstellung des Originals ein. Wie weit kann ich mich vorwagen? Wie weit dürfen oder sollen die Änderungen gehen? Das Endergebnis ist dann eine Art modifiziertes Readymade, wie die Kunsthistoriker vermutlich sagen würden, vor allem aber ist es eine Hommage an die im Verschwinden begriffene europäische Industriekultur. CIAO N° 6 ist in diesem Sinne nicht nur eine Pop-Ikone, es wird nachgerade zu einem Monument, das hundert Jahre nach dem Futurismus die Ideen der Geschwindigkeit und Moderne einerseits und andererseits die Erinnerungen und Wünsche der Jugend feiert.

Valentin Carron hat sich die Biennale mit ihren Eigenheiten zunutze gemacht, um seine eigene Erkundung fortzusetzen und zu verfeinern, in deren Mittelpunkt die Komplexität der Skulptur im zeitgenössischen Kontext steht. Carrons Diskurs ist elegant in seiner Wirkungskraft, eben weil er sich für die Koexistenz der Gegensätze, die Vermischung der Funktionen und die Einbeziehung des Betrachters in seine Gedankenabläufe entschieden hat. Es ist nicht wirklich von Belang, wenn ein konzeptionell und formal so präzise entwickeltes Werk wie die Schlange im Schweizer Pavillon für den Kunst-Touristen zum Motiv für ein Erinnerungsphoto wird. Im Gegenteil, um so besser, das Werk erhält dadurch noch eine zusätzliche Funktion.

(Übersetzung: Caroline Gutberlet)

Carmine, Giovanni, “The Pavilion of Contrasts,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 26-37

VALENTIN CARRON,
YOU THEY THEY I YOU, 2013, iron, 311’ /
DU SIE SIE ICH DU, Eisen, 95 m.

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

Valentin Carron

Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that—My business is Circumference.
—Emily Dickinson, Letter to T. W. Higginson, July 1862

How wrong Emily Dickinson was! Hope is not "the thing with feathers." The thing with feathers has turned out to be my nephew. I must take him to a specialist in Zurich.
—Woody Allen, *Without Feathers* (1975)

Carrion: Valentin Carron's *Restoration Act*

DAVID BRESLIN

Valentin Carron's restored moped was taking sun the first time I saw it at the Swiss Pavilion in Venice. Its lush Oxford blue body, a deeper shade than the azure of the ornament on its front, greedily sucked in the light while the chrome of the wheel covers coughed it back up in blinding little blasts. Propped on its kickstand, still as immobile as the run-down patient Carron rescued, the Piaggio Ciao convalesced on its own, under the open sky and in the walled garden, mutely receiving visitors. It was raining the next day I visited the Biennale, and someone had moved the Ciao under cover to keep it dry. The blue now seemed dull, the metal more like granite. If yesterday the patient seemed to be in remission, today relapse and recurrence—the threat of rust in that damp, salt air—crept into view.

The Ciao was the cheapest line of mopeds made by Piaggio, of which the stylish Vespa is the most deluxe and fashionable. Basically a motorized bicycle, the Ciao is nothing but utilitarian, with Carron going so far as to describe it as the moped "of choice for adolescents and drunkards who have had their licenses revoked—a vehicle of marginality."[1] But in 2006, after nearly forty years of production, Piaggio discontinued it. The polished and buffed Ciao that Carron presents first registers as your everyday readymade, the once lowly object tran-

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Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, installation view, Swiss Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2013 / Installationsansicht.

substantiated by purchase, transport, and installation within those resonant garden walls. But what Carron offers in this centenary of Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* is not the assisted readymade of that famous stool-and-wheel hybrid or the hermetically sealed, brand-new vacuum cleaners that Jeff Koons began exhibiting in the early 1980s. Instead, Carron presents us with the *restored*—the abject, abandoned, sold, or unwanted nursed back to a state that approximates what it would have been if it had been cared for (or not used at all).

A step, however, precedes the activity of restoration—an activity adjacent to a contemporary sculptural (and cultural) ethos of recycling and one indebted to various theorizations of appropriation—and that is the work of salvaging. The trope of salvaging and the salvaged precedes the Duchampian readymade and the Surrealist objet trouvé and burrows deep into the origins of modernity. With the rapid rise of finance capital, urbanization, and industrialization in nineteenth-century Europe, newly transformed cities teemed with the rejected items and wreckage of the places that used to be. The disclaimed, for writers like Charles Baudelaire and later Walter Benjamin, became inseparable from the new of the burgeoning consumer culture. Take, for example, Baudelaire's description of the work of the ragpicker in Haussmann's Paris:

Here we have a man whose job it is to gather the day's refuse in the capital. Everything that the big city has thrown away, everything it has lost, everything it has scorned, everything it has crushed underfoot he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the capharnaum of waste. He sorts

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

Valentin Carron

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

things out and selects judiciously; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of Industry.[2)]

Carron's judicious salvaging of the humble and discontinued moped gestures toward two exemplars of the refused: an object lost both to the vagaries of fashion and to an economy geared to higher profits as well as a marginalized population bereft of the utilitarian objects that participate in the daily acts that add to subsistence (i.e., a cheap ride to work).

If the act of salvaging as an aesthetic act has its roots in the nineteenth century, a concerted interest in the restoration and protection of cultural patrimony dates from the same period. With the founding of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, the polymath William Morris ecumenically articulated the range of objects qualified for preservation. He wrote, "If, for the rest, it be asked us to specify what kind of amount of art, style, or other interest in a building, makes it worth protecting, we answer, anything which can be looked on as artistic, picturesque, historical, antique, or substantial: any work, in short, over which educated, artistic people would think it worthwhile to argue at all." But is it worth arguing over the Piaggio Ciao? Or is it the connotative significance of this discontinued vehicle, used by the working poor, kids, and drunks, that makes it worthy of restoration and historical reflection? But perhaps salvaging and restoration are just the aesthetic counter-reaction to that much older activity of destruction that plagues history and modernism alike.

The familiar narrative about Carron's art grounds it in "Swissness." His reproductions and reconstructions of vernacular items such as architectural details, religious imagery, public statues, and tourist tchotchkes from the canton of Valais where he was born and continues to live have been regarded as equally critical, cynical, and comical in their take on the visual culture of national idioms and identities. I would contend that looking at the Piaggio Ciao through the snow globe of Swissness permits us to see it, like the Italian name itself, as both a greeting to Carron's familiar themes and a goodbye to a formal and appropriative agenda that has dominated his work. In interviews, and often repeated in the literature about his work, the artist points to the construction of a Swiss national identity in a turbulent nineteenth century through objects and images that evoked a shared, pastoral idyll—the "Heidi Land" aesthetic—and that subsequently trumped parochial and provincial (and political) differences.[3)] His previous practice has sought to reveal the speciousness of these claims to authenticity by reproducing those very signs of Swissness in contradictory materials (the typical carved wooden bear remade in resin) and absurd exaggeration (the countryside cross now at a height of forty feet and plopped in front of Art Basel's main venue).

Nothing about the Piaggio Ciao, however, necessarily reads as Swiss or connotes Switzerland. True, the mopeds can be found in Carron's canton, yet they can also be spotted in Calcutta, Karachi, Cleveland, or Caracas. But what if Carron's sculptural activity of restoring has itself become the culturally freighted and symbolically loaded process? What if, at least for this series of moped sculptures, he has traded the iconography of Switzerland for an act—*to restore*—that has its own Swiss mythology, lore, history, and claims of authenticity? Along with the anonymous figure of the ragpicker that haunts modernism, it is the Romantic notion of the consumptive—the dreamy, otherworldly, and delicate figure ravaged by tuber-

VALENTIN CARRON, UNTITLED, 2009, wood, steel, paint, 433 1/8 x 247 1/4 x 43 1/4" (sculpture), 43 1/4 x 247 1/4 x 247 1/4" (base) / OHNE TITEL, Eichen- und Tannenholz, verzinkter Stahl, Farbe, 1100 x 628 x 110 cm (Skulptur), 110 x 628 x 628 cm (Sockel).

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

Valentin Carron

VALENTIN CARRON, CIAO N° 6, 2013,
Piaggio Ciao restored, 41 3/8 x 63 x 25 1/4" /
Restaurierter Piaggio Ciao, 105 x 160 x 64 cm.

culosis—that wheezes and limps from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. In books such as Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and in reports from patients like Robert Louis Stevenson, the tortures of tuberculosis are countered by the restorative powers (or at least attempts) found in Switzerland: the sanatorium, the milk cure, rest and elusive recuperation, the altitude and dry air of the Alps once thought ideal to return the consumptive to health.

By adopting "to restore" as a Swiss act that also has a sculptural equivalent (an elegant elaboration of Richard Serra's *Verb List* of 1967–68), Carron escapes direct recourse to a known image or object familiar to a consumer of Swiss culture. In so doing, he is able to extend a discourse about national representation that is endemic to his practice without reproducing the critiqued thing itself. Emphasizing the activity of restoration also permits him to engage in the very processes of transformation—the processes of sanitization—that generally attend the passage of an innocent object into a coded and static cultural signifier.

Indeed, it is possible to see the act as double-headed if not Janus-faced. Restoration can be seen simultaneously as the generous and precarious act that endows the compromised object with the functionality to endure and as the obfuscating mechanics that efface wear and deny histories of use. That is, Carron's work on the Ciao reveals any concept of restoration as a cohesive cultural value to be as conflicted and constructed as any cultural sign. In the popular conception of the Swiss sanatorium, it is generally the foreigner who comes to find the cure that already resides there in that preternaturally healthy place. Thus, the Ciao, product of Italy, *comes to Switzerland and is healed*. If the newly pristine machine conjures the dream-state of a national idyll, it is one where that which could harm always comes from outside and that which heals is already within. The phobic object of the nation-state—the immigrant, the foreigner—is now shrouded in Swissness.

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

For this reason, the taking of the Ciao as the object for Carron's act of restoration is far from a neutral selection. Made in Italy, wealthy Switzerland's poorest direct neighbor, with whom it shares its longest border, the Ciao is not only a product of international trade and the cheapest vehicle available for the least affluent Swiss; it can also be imagined as an economic refugee. A humble object, the Ciao not only stands in for the death of Italian industry[4] but emblematizes a period of economic cataclysm in Europe that has caused some rich countries, including Switzerland, to engage in isolationist acts. During the week that the Venice Biennale opened, it was reported that Switzerland, for the first time, had applied its European Union immigration quotas, a "safeguard clause" included in the 1999 "Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons" between the Swiss Confederation and the EU, whereby right of entry, residence, and access to paid work is afforded to European and Swiss nationals alike. Immigration is blamed for Switzerland's tepid 0.6% economic growth in the year's first quarter (compared to 1.1% in 2012) as well as an overheated real-estate market. It would seem that any ill is the immigrant's fault.

In this context, the Ciao becomes the symbol of the economic troubles that surround and threaten to suffocate Switzerland. But that hardy vehicle, with its fifty-cc engine and maximum speed of thirty miles per hour, is also a reminder of the precarious position of the rider who trembles along on the shoulder of the road. He sits in our rearview mirror, as if immobile. As fortunates, we leave him in the dust.

1) Carron, quoted in Aoife Rosenmeyer, "Valentin Carron in the Studio" in *Art in America*, March 2013, p. 137.
2) Charles Baudelaire, "On Wine and Hashish" in *Artificial Paradises* (ed. and trans. Stacy Diamond), New York: Citadel Press, p. 7.
3) Carron, quoted in Fabrice Stroun, *Valentin Carron* (Zurich: Pro Helvetia, 2004), n.p.
4) See Rosenmeyer, "Valentin Carron in the Studio," p. 137, where Carron suggests this.

VALENTIN CARRON, COFFRE (CHEST), 2009, Styrofoam, fiberglass, resin, acrylic paint, hinges, 28 3/8 x 66 1/2 x 27 1/8" / KISTE, Styropor, Fiberglas, Kunstharz, Acrylfarbe, Scharniere, 72 x 169 x 169 cm.

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, PORTRAIT DU VIEUX ZAZOU (PORTRAIT OF THE OLD ZAZOU), 2009,
Tiflex on tarpaulin, galvanized steel tubing, black paint, 18 1/8 x 12 5/8 x 1" / PORTRAIT DES ALTEN ZAZOU,
Tiflex auf Plane, galvanisierte Stahlröhren, schwarze Farbe, 46 x 32 x 2,5 cm.
(PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, LES CAPTIVES (THE PRISONERS), 2007,
Tiflex on tarpaulin, copper pipe, wire strap, 31 1/8 x 28 3/8 x 3/4" /
DIE GEFANGENEN, Tiflex auf Plane, Kupferröhren, Kabelbinder, 79 x 72 x 2 cm.
(PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

Valentin Carron

Vielleicht lächeln Sie mir zu. Anhalten könnt' ich dafür nicht: meine Sache ist die Peripherie.
– Emily Dickinson, Brief an T. W. Higginson, Juli 1862

DAVID BRESLIN

Wie sehr Emily Dickinson irrte! Die Hoffnung ist nicht «das Ding mit Federn». Das Ding mit Federn ist, wie sich herausstellt, mein Neffe. Ich muss mit ihm zu einem Spezialisten in Zürich.
– Woody Allen, *Ohne Leit kein Freud*

Valentin Carrons *Akt der Wiederherstellung*

Valentin Carrons restauriertes Moped nahm gerade ein Sonnenbad, als ich es zum ersten Mal im Schweizer Pavillon in Venedig sah. Sein üppig geformter, dunkelblauer Körper – der Farbton etwas tiefer als das Azurblau des Ornaments vorne – saugte gierig das Licht ein, während das Chrom der Radkappen dieses in blendenden kleinen Lichtexplosionen zurückwarf. Gestützt auf seinen Ständer, nach wie vor so reglos wie der abgetakelte Patient, den Carron gerettet hatte, erholte die Piaggio Ciao sich auf eigene Faust, unter freiem Himmel im eingefriedeten Garten, wo sie stumm Besucher empfing. Als ich am nächsten Tag die Biennale erneut besuchte, regnete es und jemand hatte die Ciao unter eine Abdachung geschoben, um sie trocken zu halten. Das Blau wirkte nun stumpf und das Metall eher wie Granit. Hatte der Patient am Tag zuvor noch so ausgesehen, als sei er in Remission, so schlichen sich jetzt Rückfall und Rezidiv – die Rostgefahr in jener feuchten, salzhaltigen Luft – ins Bild.

Die Ciao war die billigste der Motorroller-Baureihen des Herstellers Piaggio, unter denen die stilvolle Vespa die luxuriöseste und modischste ist. Die Ciao ist im Grunde ein motorisiertes Fahrrad und reines Zweckmoped, wobei Carron sogar so weit geht, sie als das «bevorzugte Mofa für Jugendliche und des Führerscheins entledigte Säufer – ein Fahrzeug der Randständigkeit» zu beschreiben.[1)] Aber im Jahr 2006 stellte Piaggio nach fast vierzig Jahren ihre Fabrikation ein. Die hochglanzpolierte Ciao, die Carron präsentiert, registriert man

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Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, BLIND BEAR, 2000, polystyrene, fiberglass, acrylic resin, paint, 129 7/8" diameter of base 35 1/2" / BLINDER BÄR, Polystyrol, Fiberglas, Kunstharz, Farbe, 330 cm, Durchmesser Sockel 90 cm.

zunächst als alltägliches Readymade, das einst bescheidene Objekt, verwandelt durch den Kauf, den Transport und nun die Installation innerhalb der widerhallenden Gartenmauern. Doch das, womit Carron zu dieser Jahrhundertfeier von Duchamps Fahrrad-Rad aufwartet, ist nicht das begleitende Readymade zu jener berühmten Hocker-und-Rad-Kombination und auch nicht wie die hermetisch versiegelten, nagelneuen Staubsauger, die Jeff Koons Anfang der 1980er-Jahre auszustellen begann. Stattdessen bietet Carron uns das Instandgesetzte dar: das Erbärmliche, Verlassene, Veräusserte oder Ungewollte, das wieder aufgepäppelt und in annähernd den Zustand versetzt wurde, in dem es sich befunden hätte, wäre es sorgfältig gepflegt (oder überhaupt nie gebraucht) worden.

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, L'INTOLÉRANCE (INTOLERANCE), 2009, polystyrene, fiberglass, resin, acrylic, 26 3/4 x 55 1/2 x 6 7/8" / DIE INTOLERANZ, Polystyrol, Fiberglas, Harz, Acrylfarbe, 68 x 92 x 17,5 cm.

VALENTIN CARRON, LE MÉPRIS (CONTEMPT), 2009, polystyrene, fiberglass, resin, acrylic, 26 3/4 x 55 1/2 x 6 7/8" / DIE VERACHTUNG, Polystyrol, Fiberglas, Harz, Acrylfarbe, 68 x 92 x 17,5 cm.

Ein Schritt geht allerdings dem Akt der Wiederherstellung – einer an das zeitgenössische bildhauerische (und kulturelle) Ethos des Recycelns angelehnten sowie verschiedenen Appropriationstheorien verpflichteten Tätigkeit – voran, und das ist die Arbeit der Rettung. Der Topos der Rettung und des Geretteten ist älter als das Duchampsche Readymade und das surrealistische *objet trouvé* und rührt an die tiefsten Wurzeln der Moderne. Im Zuge der rasanten Zunahme von Finanzkapital, Urbanisierung und Industrialisierung im Europa des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts wimmelten die frisch verwandelten Städte nur so von verworfenen Dingen und Trümmern der Orte von einst. Im Verworfenen sahen Schriftsteller wie Charles Baudelaire und später Walter Benjamin etwas, was untrennbar mit dem Neuen der aufkeimenden Konsumkultur verbunden war. Betrachten wir zum Beispiel Baudelaires Schilderung der Arbeit des Lumpensammlers im Paris von Georges-Eugène Haussmann:

Hier ist der Mann, der die Aufgabe hat, die Abfälle eines Grossstadttages zu sammeln. Der alles, was die grosse Stadt fortgeworfen hat, alles, was sie verloren hat, alles, was sie verachtet, alles, was sie zerschlagen hat, verzeichnen und sammeln wird. Er liest in den Archiven des Lasters nach, im Auswurf Sodoms. Er trifft eine kluge Auswahl; wie der Geistige den Schatz, sammelt er den Schmutz auf, der durch die Gottheit der Industrie wiedergekaut, wieder zu brauchbaren oder Luxusgegenständen wird.[2)]

Carrons kluge Rettung des ärmlichen und aufgegebenen Mofas verweist auf zwei Grundmuster des Verworfenen: ein Objekt, das sowohl den Launen der Mode als auch einer auf immer höhere Profite ausgerichteten Wirtschaft entzogen ist; beziehungsweise auf eine randständige Bevölkerung, der die Gegenstände zur täglichen Bestreitung des Lebensunterhalts (mit anderen Worten, einer billigen Fahrt zur Arbeit) entzogen sind.

Hat der Akt der Rettung als ästhetischer Akt seine Wurzeln im neunzehnten Jahrhundert, so geht das konzertierte Interesse an der Wiederherstellung und Bewahrung kulturellen Erbes auf die gleiche Zeit zurück. Mit der Gründung der Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings im Jahr 1877 umriss der vielseitig gebildete William Morris grosszügig das Spektrum jener Objekte, die für den Denkmalschutz infrage kamen. «Würden wir im Übrigen gebeten, näher zu bestimmen, welches Mass an Kunst, Stil oder sonstiger Bedeutung an einem Bauwerk dieses schützenswert mache, so würden wir sagen: alles, was als künstlerisch,

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

malerisch, historisch, antik oder bedeutend betrachtet werden kann, kurzum, jedes Werk über das zu streiten gebildete, künstlerische Personen überhaupt lohnenswert finden.» Doch lohnt es sich, über die Piaggio Ciao zu streiten? Oder ist dieses aufgegebene, von Erwerbsarmen, Kindern und Säufern benutzte Gefährt aufgrund seiner konnotativen Bedeutung der Wiederherstellung und historischen Reflexion würdig? Vielleicht ist Rettung und Instandsetzung aber einfach nur die ästhetische Gegenreaktion zu jenem wesentlich älteren Akt der Zerstörung, der die Geschichte ebenso wie die Moderne heimsucht.

Darstellungen von Carrons Kunst verankern diese üblicherweise in der sogenannten «Swissness». Seine Nachbildungen und Rekonstruktionen traditioneller Elemente wie architektonischer Details, religiöser Bildmotive, öffentlicher Standbilder und touristischer Nippes aus dem Kanton Wallis, wo er geboren wurde und bis heute lebt, sind als gleichermassen kritisch, zynisch und komisch in ihrer Einstellung zur Bildkultur nationaler Ausdrucksweisen und Identitäten angesehen worden. Ich würde behaupten, dass die Betrachtung der Piaggio Ciao durch die Schneekugel der «Swissness» es uns erlaubt, sie – ebenso wie den italienischen Namen per se – als Reverenz an die vertrauten Themen Carrons und als Verabschiedung von einem formalen, appropriativen Programm zu betrachten, das sein Werk bisher dominiert hat. In Gesprächen – und in der Literatur zu seinem Werk vielfach aufgegriffen – verweist der Künstler auf die Konstruktion einer nationalen Schweizer Identität in einem turbulenten 19. Jahrhundert anhand von Objekten und Bildern, die eine gemeinsame ländliche Idylle – die Heidiland-Ästhetik – beschworen und anschliessend über örtliche und provinzielle (wie auch politische) Unterschiede triumphierten.[3)] In seiner bisherigen künstlerischen Praxis hatte er versucht, die Wahnhaftigkeit jener Ansprüche auf Authentizität aufzuzeigen, indem er ebensolche Zeichen der «Swissness» in widersprüchlichen Materialien oder absurd vergrössert nachbildete (der typische geschnitzte Holzbär neu aufgelegt in Kunstharz; das ländliche Kreuz nunmehr über 12 Meter hoch und aufgerichtet vor der Basler Messehalle, dem Schauplatz der Art Basel).

Nichts an der Piaggio Ciao ist unbedingt schweizerisch oder deutet auch nur mittelbar auf die Schweiz hin. Gewiss, den Mofas begegnet man in Carrons Kanton, man sieht sie aber auch in Kalkutta, Karatschi, Cleveland oder Caracas. Was aber, wenn Carrons bildhauerische Arbeit des Wiederherstellens nunmehr selbst der kulturell befrachtete und symbolisch aufgeladene Prozess ist? Was, wenn er zumindest bei dieser Serie der Motorroller-Plastiken die Ikonographie der Schweiz für einen Akt – das Restaurieren – eingetauscht hat, der wiederum eine eigene Schweizer Mythologie, Überlieferungen, Geschichte und Authentizitätsansprüche hat? Neben der anonymen, die Moderne durchgeisternden Gestalt des Lumpensammlers humpelt das romantische Bild vom Schwindsüchtigen – der verträumten, jenseitigen, schwächlichen, von der Tuberkulose schwer gezeichneten Figur – keuchend vom neunzehnten ins zwanzigste Jahrhundert. In Romanen wie Thomas Manns *Zauberberg* und in Berichten von Patienten wie Robert Louis Stevenson sind es die in der Schweiz zu findenden Heilkräfte (oder zumindest Heilversuche), die den Folterqualen der Tuberkulose entgegenwirken: das Sanatorium, die Milchkur, Ruhe und eine nicht leicht zu erzielende Erholung, die Höhe und trockene Luft der Alpen, die einst als ideal für eine Gesundung des Schwindsüchtigen galten.

Indem er sich das «Wiederherstellen» als einen schweizerischen Akt zu Eigen macht, der zudem eine bildhauerische Entsprechung hat (eine elegante Weiterschreibung von Richard Serras *Verb List* aus den Jahren 1967/68), vermeidet Carron den unmittelbaren Rückgriff auf ein für Konsumenten Schweizer Kultur vertrautes Motiv oder Objekt. Dabei gelingt es ihm, einen für seine Praxis typischen Diskurs zu nationaler Darstellung weiterzuentwickeln, ohne

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

die kritisierte Sache selbst zu reproduzieren. Die Betonung der Handlung des Wiederherstellens erlaubt es ihm zudem, sich genau mit jenen Prozessen der Verwandlung – der Sanitisierung – zu beschäftigen, die sich gemeinhin mit dem Übergang eines unschuldigen Objektes in einen verschlüsselten und statischen kulturellen Signifikanten verbinden.

Es ist tatsächlich möglich, den Akt als doppelgesichtig, ja, janusköpfig zu betrachten. Im Restaurieren kann man sowohl den grosszügigen und heiklen Akt sehen, der dem gefährdeten Gegenstand die Funktionalität verleiht, um zu überdauern, als auch die verschleiernde Mechanikerarbeit, die Verschleiss kaschiert und Nutzungsgeschichte verleugnet. Das heisst, Carrons Arbeit an der Ciao macht deutlich, dass jedweder Begriff der Wiederherstellung als ein in sich geschlossener kultureller Wert genauso widersprüchlich und konstruiert ist wie jedes andere kulturelle Zeichen. Nach der landläufigen Vorstellung vom Schweizer Sanatorium ist es in der Regel der Ausländer, der kommt und jene Heilung findet, die an diesem übernatürlich heilkräftigen Ort bereits vorhanden ist. Und so kommt eben auch die Ciao, ein Produkt Italiens, in die Schweiz und wird geheilt. Sofern die von Neuem makellose Maschine den Traumzustand einer nationalen Idylle beschwört, ist dies einer, bei dem alles möglicherweise Gefährdende immer von aussen kommt und das Heilende bereits im Innern liegt. Das Angstobjekt des Nationalstaates – der Zuwanderer, der Ausländer – ist nunmehr in «Swissness» eingehüllt.

Aus diesem Grund ist die Wahl der Ciao als Gegenstand für den Carron'schen Akt der Wiederherstellung alles andere als bedeutungsneutral. Hergestellt in Italien, dem ärmsten der unmittelbaren Nachbarländer der reichen Schweiz, mit dem sie den längsten gemeinsamen Grenzabschnitt teilt, ist die Ciao nicht nur ein Produkt des internationalen Handels und das billigste Fahrzeug, das den weniger wohlhabenden Schweizern zur Verfügung steht; man kann sie sich auch als Wirtschaftsflüchtling vorstellen. Denn die bescheidene Ciao steht stellvertretend für den Tod der italienischen Industrie[4] und ist zugleich Sinnbild einer Zeit der Wirtschaftskatastrophe in Europa, die einige reiche Länder, darunter die Schweiz, zu isolationistischem Verhalten veranlasst hat. In der gleichen Woche, in der die Biennale von Venedig eröffnet wurde, kam die Meldung, dass die Schweiz zum ersten Mal Zuwandererquoten für acht EU-Mitgliedsstaaten auf der Grundlage der 1999 in das Freizügigkeitsabkommen mit der Europäischen Union aufgenommenen sogenannten «Ventilklausel» eingeführt hatte, ein Abkommen, das europäischen und Schweizer Staatsbürgern gleichermassen das Recht gewähren sollte, Arbeitsplatz und Wohnsitz innerhalb der Staatsgebiete der Vertragsparteien frei zu wählen. Die Zuwanderung wird für das laue Wirtschaftswachstum der Schweiz im ersten Quartal des Jahres (0,6% im Vergleich zu 1,1% im Vorjahr) sowie für einen überhitzten Immobilienmarkt verantwortlich gemacht. Jedweder Missstand, so scheint es, ist die Schuld der Zuwanderer.

Vor diesem Hintergrund wird die Ciao zum Symbol der wirtschaftlichen Probleme, die die Schweiz umgeben und zu ersticken drohen. Jenes zählebige Fahrzeug mit seinen 50 cc Hubraum und seinen 45 km/h Höchstgeschwindigkeit erinnert allerdings zugleich an die prekäre Lage des Fahrers, der am äussersten Rand der Strasse dahinstottert. In unserem Rückspiegel sitzt er wie reglos da, während wir Glückliche ihn im Staub zurücklassen.

(Übersetzung: Bram Opstelten)

1) Carron zit. bei Aoife Rosenmeyer, «Valentin Carron in the Studio», in *Art in America*, März 2013, S. 137.
2) Charles Baudelaire, *Die künstlichen Paradiese*, München 1925, Kap. 8.
3) Carron zit. bei Fabrice Stroun, *Valentin Carron*, Zürich, Pro Helvetia, 2004, o.S.
4) Siehe Rosenmeyer, «Valentin Carron in the Studio», S. 137, wo Carron darauf hinwies.

Breslin, David, "'Carrion': Valentin Carron's 'Restoration Act'," *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 38-51

VALENTIN CARRON, OROLOGIO III (CLOCK III), 2008, Styrofoam, gauze, wood, plaster, clock mechanism, aluminum, emulsion paint, 102 3/8 x 82 5/8 x 7 7/8" / UHR III, Styropor, Gaze, Holz, Gips, Uhrwerk, Aluminium, Dispersion, 260 x 210 x 20 cm. (PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

Valentin Carron

LIONEL BOVIER

ON THE PLASTIC SITUATIONS OF VALENTIN CARRON

A wall painted to create a grayish, roughcast effect; a bear made of polyurethane resin, but looking as though made of chopped wood; a series of modernist sculptures of the kind that might adorn a roundabout or a public square in a European country, but whose preferred materials (marble, metal, concrete) are all “translated” into painted resin; a Piaggio-brand moped (of the Ciao series) restored to mint condition: Each of these objects, brought to life by Swiss artist Valentin Carron, belongs, to a greater or lesser degree, to the category of imitation—or, in French, *simili*. The object may be something that pretends to be something else (a simulation), or it may take the place of something else (a surrogate), or it may degrade or transform the original in a manner that can be deemed, according to a predetermined ideological schema, a loss (a substitute).

Carron’s work has often been seen as presenting a dichotomy between true and false, original and copy, authentic and kitsch (in the etymological sense of the term as reductive transformation), and many critics—myself included—have viewed the artist’s body of work as a form of appropriation.[1)] Something is lacking, however, in this interpretation. One might well wonder what the work of Pierre Menard—Jorge Luis Borges’s fictional character, who has served as a conceptual fulcrum for the practice of artists such as Sherrie Levine—would have been like if he had instead attempted to write a faux *Don Quixote*.[2)]

The appropriation argument assumes that displacement alone (from context, nature, or author) suffices to grant the appropriated object a new meaning. In this way, to rewrite a historically situated text (or rephotograph an image) in a “foreign” language (that of another era or of someone else) and re-present it (as one’s own) modifies its meaning, and renders it irremediably *other*. As correct as this reasoning may seem, it presupposes an origin (of the text or the image) and a context of re-presentation (this gallery or that museum today) that are immutable, as though neutralized by digging into the delta of meaning. Of course, this is more of a laboratory situation than an empirical observation.

When Michelangelo Antonioni’s films *L’avventura* and *L’eclisse* premiered in the early 1960s, polemical debates broke out in the press as to their quality. The films were described as “observations stripped of af-

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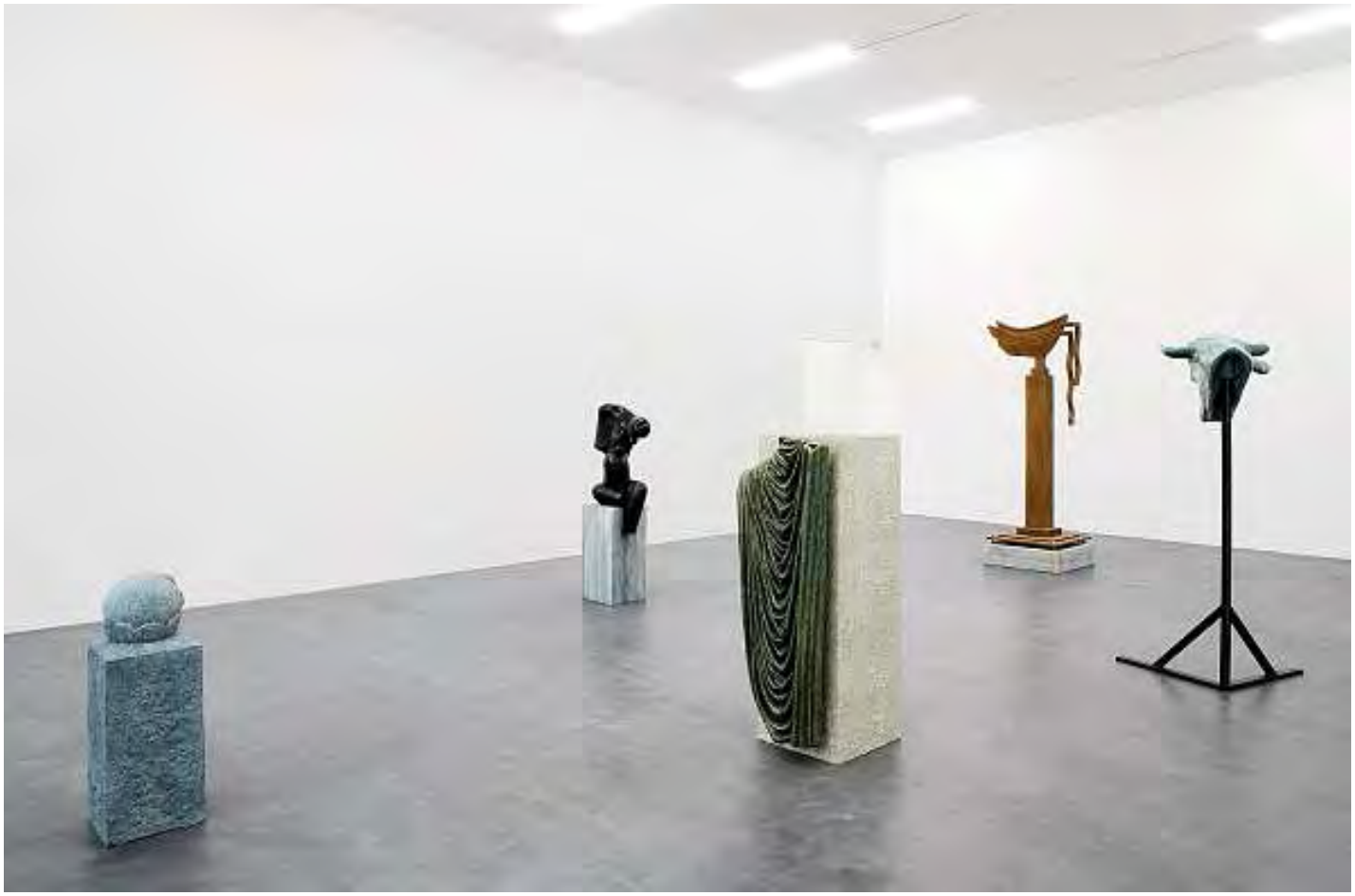
Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61



VALENTIN CARRON, exhibition view Kunsthalle Zürich, 2007 / Ausstellungsansicht.
(PHOTO: A. BURGER)

fect” and were reproached for simply presenting a person’s disappearance or a couple’s separation without dealing with the psychological repercussions. In place of the afterward of drama, the characters seem to exist in a time-out.

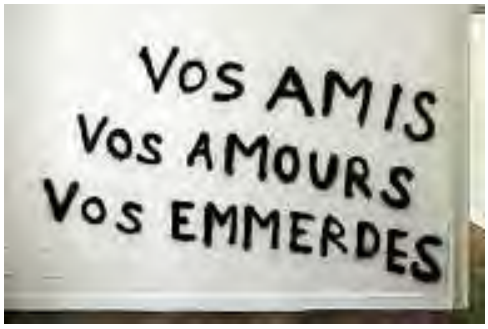
In his analysis of Antonioni’s method of presentation, Gilles Deleuze argued that the filmmaker replaced traditional drama with “pure optical drama.”[3)] The philosopher contested the cliché of Italian Neorealism as passive, explaining that it is a cinema of the “seer” rather than the agent. If the films of Antonioni can be “too much, too beautiful, or too unjust,” this is a reflection of modern society itself, which overwhelms our ability to act. We are continually placed in “optical and aural situations” where our “sensory-motor chains break … and get jammed.” In place of the “movement-image”—the cause-and-effect schema of classic cinema—Antonioni introduces the “time-image,” whereby the viewer is projected “inside time itself.”

Valentin Carron’s SWEET REVOLUTION (2002) can be described as a stack of three shapes made of faux concrete: a cube balances atop a sphere, which sits on a polyhedron. The sculpture’s elementary geometry, dimensions (six and a half feet high, two and a half feet wide), and apparent material suggest the work of an artist of the mid-twentieth century, but one who practices neither symbolic representation (as in classical sculpture, where every element would imply a relationship with the world) nor radical abstraction (as in, for example, Tony Smith’s 1962 DIE). In the

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

VALENTIN CARRON, SWEET REVOLUTION, 2002, polystyrene, fiberglass, resin, acrylic, popper bottles, 78 3/4 x 31 1/2 x 31 1/2” / SÜSSE REVOLUTION, Polystyrol, Fiberglas, Kunstharz, Acryl, Popperflaschen, 200 x 80 x 80 cm.

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61



VALENTIN CARRON, UNTITLED, 2005, wall painting, 70 7/8 x 110 1/4” / OHNE TITEL, Wandmalerei, 180 x 280 cm.

end, the work is thrust into the realm of decoration and fails at being an object as well as being a monument.[4] The imitation concrete seems appropriate for an urban location, chosen to resist wear rather than being an aesthetic decision. One could attribute it to a follower of Max Bill, for example, but one can be more or less certain that, in a typical setting, the sculpture would be topped off with a jet of water to serve as a fountain in a small public square, in some provincial town characterized by a certain “modernity”—the International Style that spread after the early modernist experimentations, a commodification much like today’s contemporary art.

When the work is installed in an exhibition, five bottles of poppers are laid on its base—evidence of a cheap way to get stoned that was particularly common in the 1980s. Thus, Carron confronts gallery visitors with more than just a copy or an expropriation of a pre-existing sculpture: The form condenses the observation of such sculptures and their uses. We can imagine a group of more or less idle youths on a Saturday night in a small town that provides little stimulation. They lean their skateboards against one of the lower edges of the sculpture and pull out their little vials of poppers, which they sniff haltingly, between laughter and casual conversation. Perhaps the summer warmth makes them want to stay outside a little longer; perhaps this is only a stop on the way to other nocturnal forays. They probably no longer even notice this monument in the middle of the small square where they are in the habit of gathering. The signs of a few closed stores illuminate and color this object to which they have become accustomed, which represents nothing in particular and spurs no “rebellion” in them.

It is this sort of “optical situation” that the artist offers us. In this sense, Carron’s art of imitation is more a copy of a moment than an object, reinvesting appropriated forms with a sense of time and a narrative dimension. As a formal analogy, compare 2 SHOES (1992) by Sherrie Levine with Carron’s BERTRAND (2010). For Levine’s work, an edition produced by *Parkett*, the artist hired a manufacturer to make a pair of shoes like those she had found in a second-hand shop and sold in an American gallery at the start of her career.[5] BERTRAND, on the other hand, shows a partial view of legs adorned with a colored pair of socks with holes in them, cast in glass. While the American artist makes reference to the history of the readymade, Carron freezes an observation and delivers it to us like a time-image, a block of time and sensations we can dive into, without drama or explanation—but whose effects we could never really feel if we limited ourselves to seeing in it nothing more than the contours of a re-presentation.

(Translation: Stephen Sartarelli)

1) Lionel Bovier, *Across/Art/Suisse/1975–2000* (Milan/Paris: Skira/Le Seuil, 2001).
2) See Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote” in *Borges, A Reader* (New York: Dutton, 1981).
3) All quotes in this paragraph are from Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma*, ed. by Claire Parnet and Richard Pinhas, 6 CDs (Paris: Gallimard, 2006).
4) See Tony Smith’s famous comments, cited by Robert Morris in “Notes on Sculpture, Part 2,” *Artforum* (October 1966); reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 229–30.
5) In 1977, Levine presented “2 shoes for $2” at 3 Mercer Street Store in New York.

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

VALENTIN CARRON, “Pergola: Monsieur,” exhibition view Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2010 / Ausstellungsansicht. (PHOTO: ANDRÉ MORIN)

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

Valentin Carron

LIONEL BOVIER

VALENTIN CARRONS PLASTISCHE SITUATIONEN

Eine Wand mit einer Bemalung, die wie grauer Putz wirkt; ein Bär aus Polyurethanharz, als wäre er mit der Axt aus Holz gehauen; eine Serie modernistisch anmutender Skulpturen von der Sorte, denen man in Europa im öffentlichen Raum und in Verkehrskreiseln begegnet, nur dass die dort bevorzugten Materialien (Marmor, Metall, Beton) durchwegs in Kunstharz mit Farbanstrich «übersetzt» sind; ein Motorroller der Marke Piaggio (aus der Serie «Ciao»), perfekt «wie neu» restauriert: All diese Objekte aus der Hand des Schweizer Künstlers Valentin Carron passen mehr oder minder «präzise» in eine Kategorie, die man mit «Simili» überschreiben könnte. Entweder handelt es sich um etwas, was vorgibt, etwas anderes zu sein (ein Simulakrum oder eine Simulation), oder das Objekt nimmt den Platz von etwas anderem ein (als Substitut oder Ersatz) oder aber es entstellt, degradiert oder verwandelt dieses andere auf eine Weise, die einem vorgegebenen ideologischen Raster entsprechend als Verlust zu beurteilen ist (als synthetischer Ersatz oder Surrogat).

Kein Wunder also, dass die Rezeption dieses Werkes sich in der Polarität zwischen echt und falsch, Original und Kopie oder Authentischem und Kitsch (im etymologischen Sinn dieses Begriffs als «Verkitschung») verfing. Und dass man im Werk des Künstlers insgesamt eine Form von Appropriationskunst zu erkennen glaubte. Ich habe mich seinerzeit selbst darin versucht. Dennoch muss dieser Ansatz zwangsläufig lückenhaft bleiben.[1)] Man kann sich tatsächlich fragen, wie das Werk von Pierre Menard aussähe – jener fiktiven Figur von Jorge Luis Borges, die für Künstler wie Sherrie Levine zum konzeptuellen Dreh- und Angelpunkt wurde –, wenn er versucht hätte, ein «Simile» des *Don Quijote* zu schreiben.[2)]

Der appropriative Ansatz geht davon aus, dass allein die Verlagerung (des Kontexts, der Beschaffenheit, des Autors) genügt, um dem angeeigneten Objekt einen neuen Sinn zu verleihen. Also verändert das erneute Schreiben eines historisch eingebetteten Textes (oder das erneute Photographieren eines ebensolchen Bildes) in einer «fremden» Sprache sowie seine erneute Präsentation (als eigenes) seinen Sinn und macht ihn zu einem unabänderlich anderen. So zutreffend dies scheinen mag, bedeutet es jedoch auch, einen Ursprung (des Textes oder Bildes) und einen Kontext der Neupräsentation (hier und jetzt, diese Zeitschrift oder jenes Museum heute) vorauszusetzen, die unveränderlich sind, gleichsam

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Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

VALENTIN CARRON, exhibition view Kunsthalle Zürich, 2007 / Ausstellungsansicht.
(PHOTO: A. BURGER)

«neutralisiert» durch den Vorgang der Unterhöhlung des Bedeutungsdeltas. Oder aber, es ist (und bleibt) eher eine Arbeitshypothese, eher eine Versuchsanordnung als eine empirische Feststellung.

Als zu Beginn der 1960er-Jahre die Filme *L’avventura* und *L’eclisse* von Michelangelo Antonioni herauskamen, entbrannte in der Presse eine Polemik über deren «affektfreie Beobachtungshaltung». Man warf ihnen vor, ein Verschwinden oder einen Bruch einfach festzuhalten, ohne deren psychologische Auswirkungen auf die Figuren zu behandeln, die in ein «Danach» gestürzt werden, das eher einer toten zeitlichen Abfolge gleicht als einer dramatischen Entwicklung.

Gilles Deleuze griff in seinen Filmvorlesungen an der Université Paris-VIII (1981–1983) diese «Methode der Bestandesaufnahme bei Antonioni» erneut auf und meinte, sie ersetze das traditionelle Drama durch ein rein optisches Drama. Und indem er ein Panorama des Scheiterns aller sensomotorischen Denkmuster (Aktion/Reaktion) im Nachkriegseuropa entwirft, tritt er den Ideen entgegen, die einer traurigen oder passiven Sichtweise im italienischen neorealistischen Film entstammen, und spricht stattdessen von einer Empfänglichkeit, einer filmischen «Hellsicht». Dem Unkommunizierbaren und der Einsamkeit in den Filmen Antonionis setzt er ein «Das ist zu stark, zu schön oder zu ungerecht» entgegen, als Bestätigung, dass die moderne Gesellschaft «uns unentwegt in rein optische und akustische Situationen versetzt», und zwar so sehr, bis «die sensomotorischen Ketten reissen (…) und sich verheddern». Und diese Errichtung einer neuen Herrschaft der «optischen Situationen» als Ersatz für die Denkmuster von Ursache und Wirkung, die uns auf ein indirektes Bild der Zeit verwiesen haben, lässt uns in ein Zeit-Bild vorstossen, ja, «katapultiert uns ins Innere der Zeit selbst».[3)]

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

VALENTIN CARRON, 3 JOURS POUR CONVAINCRE (3 DAYS TO CONVINCE), 2008, Styrofoam, fiberglass, resin, acrylic, 102 1/4", diameter 39 3/8" / 3 TAGE ZUM ÜBERZEUGEN, Styropor, Fiberglas, Kunstharz, Acrylfarbe, 290 cm, Durchmesser 100 cm.
(PHOTO: STEFAN ALTENBURGER)

SWEET REVOLUTION (2002) von Valentin Carron kann man als Polyeder bezeichnen, auf dem eine Kugel liegt und auf dieser wiederum ein Kubus, alles in Betonimitat. Die elementare Geometrie, auf der die Skulptur beruht, ihre Grösse – 200 × 80 × 80 cm – und das Material, aus dem sie zu bestehen scheint, lassen an einen Urheber aus der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts denken, dessen Praxis sich jedoch weder auf die symbolische Darstellung stützt (wie in der klassischen Bildhauerei, in der jedes Element für einen Bezug zur Welt stünde) noch auf die Radikalität der Abstraktion (im Gegensatz etwa zu Tony Smiths DIE, 1962); die scheinbare materielle Beschaffenheit deutet auf eine urbane Bestimmung, und zwar eher im Sinne einer simplen Abnutzungsresistenz denn als ästhetische Wahl. Letztlich spielt das Werk, das gewisse Leute als «missraten» einstufen würden, mit einem konstruktivistischen Vokabular, das es ins Dekorative abstürzen lässt, sodass es ihm nicht gelingt «weder Monument noch Objekt» zu sein.[4)] Man könnte es zum Beispiel einem Max-Bill-Epigonen zuschreiben, aber man darf sicher sein, dass es seiner typischen Bestimmung nach alle Chancen hätte, zusätzlich noch mit einer Wasserfontäne auf der Spitze ausstaffiert zu werden, um auf einem kleinen Platz als Brunnen zu dienen, in irgendeiner Provinzstadt mit modernem Anstrich oder (echtem) Hang zu einer gewissen «Modernität» – die sich nach den modernen Experimenten in Luft aufgelöst hat, der «internationale Stil» – in dem Sinn, wie man heute von «zeitgenössischer Kunst» spricht.

Wenn das Werk in einer Ausstellung gezeigt wird, werden jeweils fünf Poppers-Fläschchen auf die Polyederbasis gestellt – Hinweise auf eine billige, besonders in den 80er-Jahren verbreitete Art, sich zu «berauschen». Valentin Carron konfrontiert uns also mit etwas anderem als einer blossen Kopie oder Appropriation einer bestehenden Skulptur: Es ist eine Form, die das Betrachten solcher Skulpturen und ihre Verwendung verdichtet. Man stellt sich unweigerlich eine Gruppe Halbwüchsiger vor, die am Freitag- oder Samstagabend in einer Kleinstadt herumhängen, die ihnen wenig Anregung bietet; sie haben ihre Skateboards an eine Sockelkante gelehnt und ihre Poppers-Fläschchen ausgepackt, die sie ruckartig unter Gelächter und zusammenhanglosen Äusserungen einatmen. Vielleicht treibt sie eine

Bovier, Lionel, “On the Plastic Situations of Valentin Carron,” *Parkett No. 93*. Zurich: Parkett-Verlag AG, 2014, pp. 52-61

gewisse sommerliche Lustlosigkeit dazu, im Freien zu bleiben, vielleicht handelt es sich auch nur um eine Etappe einer längeren nächtlichen Spritztour. Wahrscheinlich nehmen sie dieses «Monument» gar nicht mehr wahr, das in der Mitte des kleinen Platzes steht, auf dem sie sich jeweils treffen. Einige Schilder geschlossener Geschäfte leihen dem Objekt etwas Licht und Farbe; sie haben sich daran gewöhnt, es ist nichts Besonderes und löst keinen «Aufstand» aus.

Das ist so eine «optische Situation», die der Künstler uns zurückgibt. In diesem Sinn ist seine «Kunst des Simile» eher die Kopie eines Moments als die eines Objektes: Sie gibt den appropriierten Formen ihre Zeitlichkeit und eine narrative Dimension zurück.

Rein formal ist Sherrie Levines Werk TWO SHOES (Zwei Schuhe, Edition für *Parkett* 32, 1992) eine Kopie von Schuhen, die sie im Brockenhaus aufgestöbert und zu Beginn ihrer Karriere in einer amerikanischen Galerie verkauft hatte,[5)] durchaus mit Valentin Carrons BERTRAND (2010) vergleichbar, wo Beinfragmente aus Glas in einem Paar löcherigen bunten Socken stecken. Doch während die Amerikanerin trotz des scheinbar subjektiven Charakters ihres Motivs auf das Readymade anspielt und diese Anspielung in einer Spirale von Reproduktionen Gestalt annehmen lässt, friert Carron eine Beobachtung ein (was durch das «Umfeld» des Objekts noch unterstrichen wird) und bietet sie uns als Zeit-Bild dar, ein Ensemble aus Zeitlichkeit und Empfindungen, in das wir eintauchen, ganz undramatisch, ohne Erklärung – dessen Wirkung wir aber nicht wahrhaft spüren können, wenn wir uns darauf versteifen, nur die Konturen der Re-Präsentation zu sehen.

(Übersetzung: Suzanne Schmidt)

1) Lionel Bovier, Across /Art/Suisse/1975–2000, Skira/Le Seuil, Mailand/Paris 2001.
2) Jorge Luis Borges, «Pierre Menard, Autor des Quijote», in Sämtliche Erzählungen, Carl Hanser Verlag, München 1970.
3) Gilles Deleuze, Cinéma, hrsg. von Claire Parnet und Richard Pinhas, 6 CDs, Gallimard, Paris 2006.
4) Cf. Tony Smith in Gregory Battcock (ed.), Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology, University of California Press, Berkeley und Los Angeles, 1995 (1968), S. 16.
5) 1977 zeigte Levine «2 shoes for $2» bei 3 Mercer Street Store in New York.

VALENTIN CARRON, exhibition view Kunsthalle Zürich, 2007 / Ausstellungsansicht.
(PHOTO: A. BURGER)

Castets, Simon, "'Valentin Carron: do ré mi fa sol la si do,' Kunsthalle Bern," *Artforum*, Previews, January 2014, p. 127

Valentin Carron, ***Petite Prune***, **2013**, vinyl ink on tarpaulin, galvanized steel tubing, wire, 24¾ x 19¾".

BERN, SWITZERLAND

"VALENTIN CARRON: DO RÉ MI FA SOL LA SI DO"
KUNSTHALLE BERN · January 31–March 23 · Curated by Fabrice Stroun

After his assured handling of the Swiss pavilion in last year's Venice Biennale, Valentin Carron will now explore Europe's midcentury modernist vernacular in this solo exhibition, his first to feature painting exclusively. The forty-some works included will be screenprints on industrial tarpaulin stretched across austere tubular steel frames, all executed in an idiom that suggests a kind of colloquial hard-edge, with "mistakes" left ostentatiously unconcealed. The referent? The rugged, cold material aesthetic of overland truck transport—an allusion, Carron claims, to his home canton of Valais in the country's southwest. This winter in neighboring Bern, Carron adroitly poses as the native son—a Sunday painter singing solfège, albeit one cued to the beat of a different drummer.
—*Simon Castets*

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

Kunst im Kreisverkehr

Scale to Scale

Matthias Sohr

Regionales, groß aufgezogen: Valentin Carron vertritt die Schweiz auf der diesjährigen Biennale di Venezia

Regionalism at large: Valentin Carron represents Switzerland at this year’s Venice Biennale

1
They I you he we, 2012
901 × 40 × 28 cm
Wrought iron
Installation view Art Unlimited
Art 43 Basel, 2012

2
Helvetia 100, 2013
3.3 × 2.8 cm, stamp

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

VALENTIN CARRON

Keck schaut die schmiedeeiserne Schlange am Eingang des Schweizer Pavillons drein. Soll sie die Besucher der diesjährigen 55. Biennale di Venezia einschüchtern? Sie belustigen? Diese Schlange dient Valentin Carron, der die Schweiz auf der diesjährigen Biennale vertritt, unter anderem als physischer roter Faden: Ihr Körper windet sich durch den gesamten Pavillon, sie begleitet die Besucher beim Durchschreiten des modernistischen Baus und seiner unterschiedlichen Raumvolumina. Auf der Briefmarke, die Carron aus Anlass der Biennale für die Schweizer Post gestaltet hat, findet die Schlange sich wieder – mit Getreidehalm im Mundwinkel. Im zur Biennale erscheinenden Künstlerbuch mutiert der Getreidehalm zur Zigarette. Ähnlich wie die Erscheinung der Schlangenskulptur sich wandelt, durchläuft auch deren Titel *You they they I you* (2013) Permutationen von Pronomen. Und ebenso permutativ entwickeln sich auch die einzelnen Werkgruppen: Ob Readymade, Prop oder Skulptur, bei Carron werden Themen und Motive permanent kopiert, verschoben und transponiert.

Entsprechend hat Carron für die diesjährige Biennale eine Auswahl aus seinem bisherigen Schaffen getroffen und vier bereits bestehende Serien in neuen Arbeiten aufgegriffen und fortgeführt – eine Geste von kalkuliert beiläufiger Souveränität. Der Schlange folgend, passiert man verschiedene Versatzstücke aus der europäischen Moderne, zum Beispiel *Rhapsodie, das warme Unwetter aus Acryl und Blut* (2013), eine Reminiszenz an streng-modernistische Kirchenfenster der 1950er Jahre, wie sie Carron beispielsweise schon 2009 für seine Ausstellung *Fibre fibre, austère austère* bei La Conservera in Murcia aufgegriffen hatte. Aber auch Artefakte der Industrialisierung und Lokalkultur lassen sich bei der Promenade durch Carrons Ausstellung ausmachen, zum Beispiel ein liebevoll restauriertes Mofa von Piaggio (*Ciao N° 6*, 2013). Eine ähnliche Arbeit, *Ciao N° 4 (nero)* (2012), war letztes Jahr beispielsweise in der Schweizer Generationen-Schau *La jeunesse est un art* im Aargauer Kunsthaus ausgestellt. Die Vorlage für seine acht in Bronze gegossenen, zerknautschten Blech- und Holzblasinstrumente (*Azure, Uranium, Umbrage*, 2013) hatte der Künstler wiederum in einem Café seines Heimatorts Martigny im Kanton Wallis entdeckt. In gleichen Abständen über die Wände des gesamten Pavillons gehängt, helfen letztere gemeinsam mit *You they they I you*, die hierarchische Anlage des Flachbaus

The wrought-iron snake at the entrance to the Swiss pavilion has a cheeky look in its eye. Is it supposed to intimidate visitors to this year's 55th Venice Biennale? To amuse them? Among other things, the snake by Valentin Carron, who is representing Switzerland this year, acts as a physical thread running through the show: its body winds its way around the whole pavilion, accompanying visitors as they walk through the modernist building and its various spaces. On the Swiss postage stamp designed by Carron to mark the biennale, the snake also appears – with a corn stalk hanging from the corner of its mouth. In the artist's book published to coincide with the biennale, the stalk mutates into a cigarette. Just as the sculpture's appearance changes, its title also goes through permutations of pronouns – *You they they I you* (2013). And his individual groups of works develop in a similarly transitional way: be it readymade, prop or sculpture, Carron's themes and motifs are forever copied, shifted and transposed.

This is reflected in Carron's decision to base his biennale show on a selection from his existing *oeuvre* to date plus new works that continue four ongoing series – a gesture of calculatedly casual self-assurance. Following the snake, one passes various set pieces from European modernism, such as *Rhapsodie, das warme Unwetter aus Acryl und Blut* (Rhapsody, the warm storm of acrylic and blood, 2013) that recalls the kind of sternly

3

Carron's themes and motifs are forever copied, shifted and transposed.

4

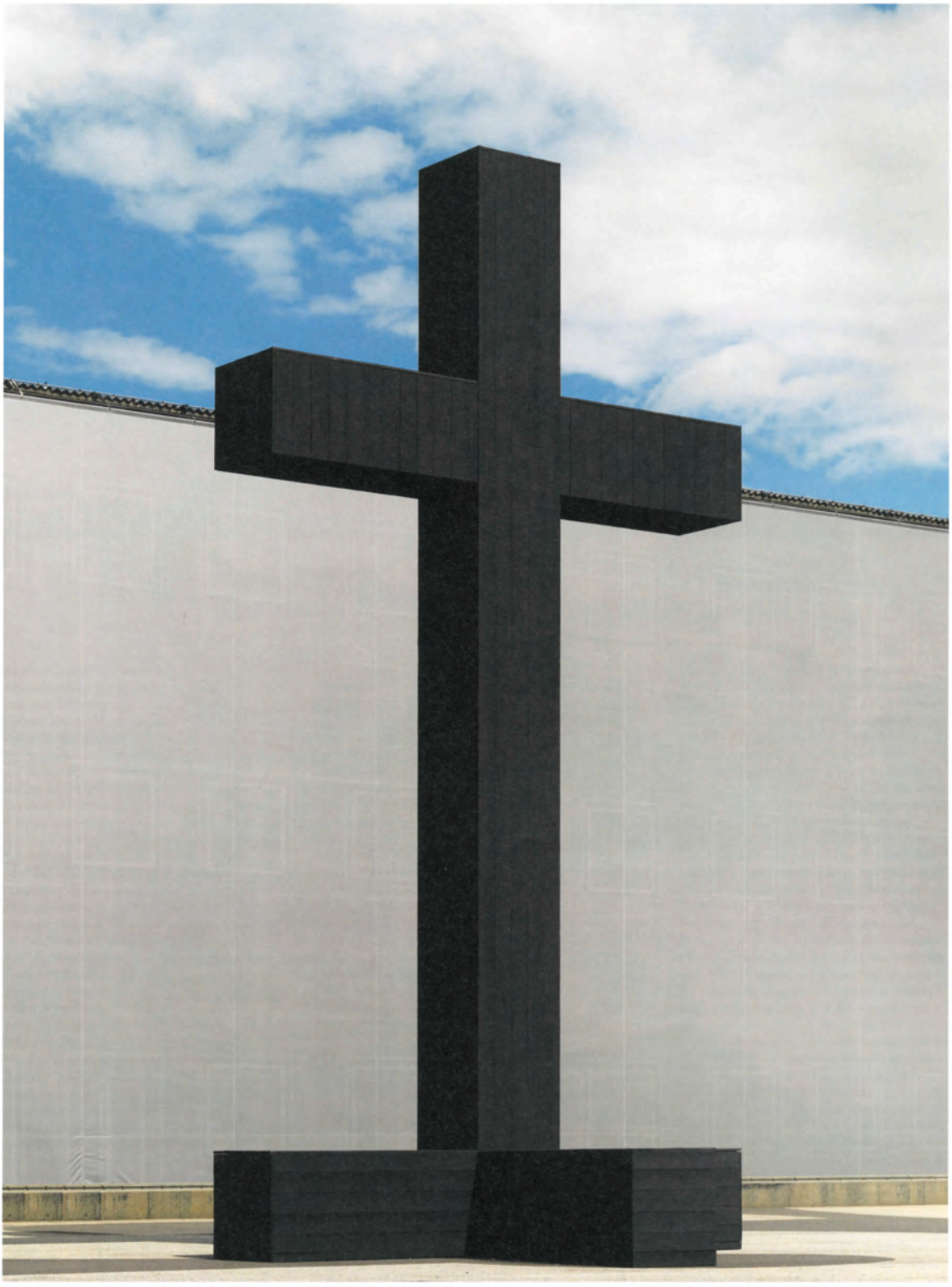
3
Ciao N°4 (nero), 2012
160 × 130 × 70 cm
Restored Piaggio Ciao moped

4
Ciao N°5, 2012
105 × 160 × 64 cm
Restored Piaggio Ciao moped

5
Untitled, 2009
Oak, fir wood, zinced steel and paint
12.1 × 6.3 × 6.3 m
Installation view
Messeplatz
Art 40 Basel, 2009

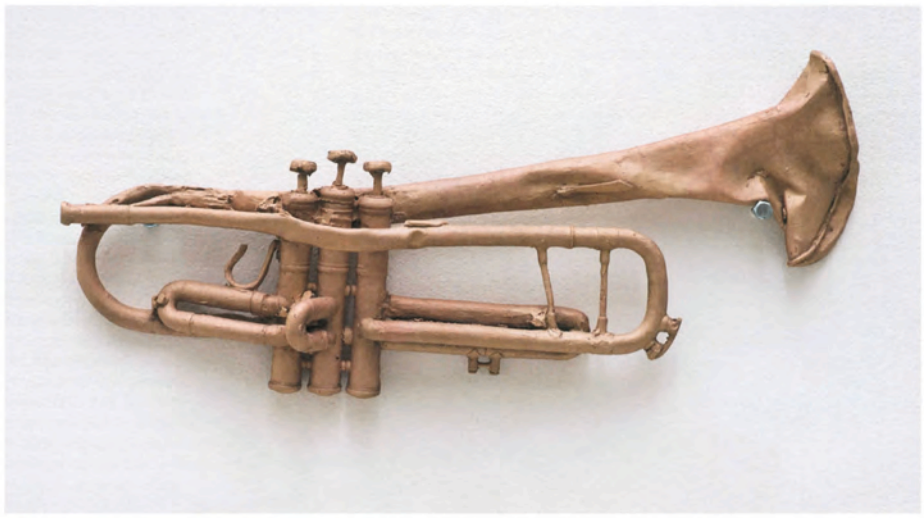
Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

VALENTIN CARRON

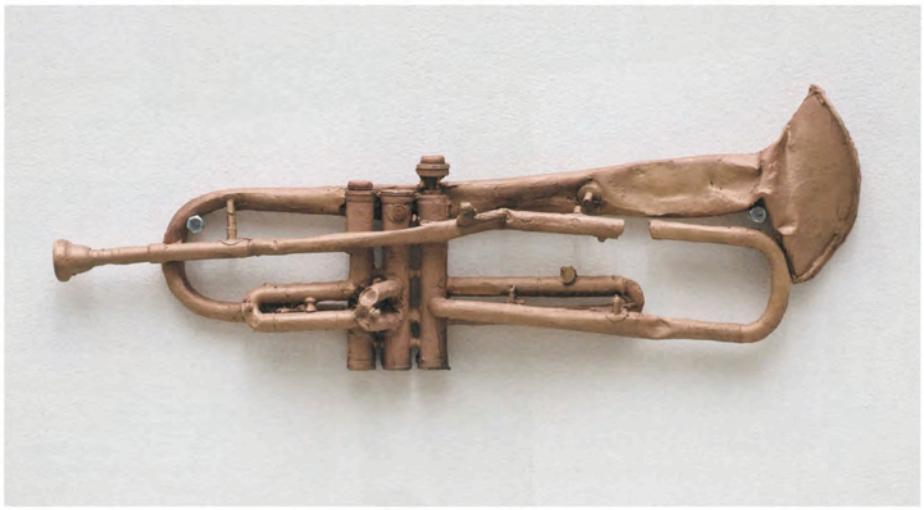


5

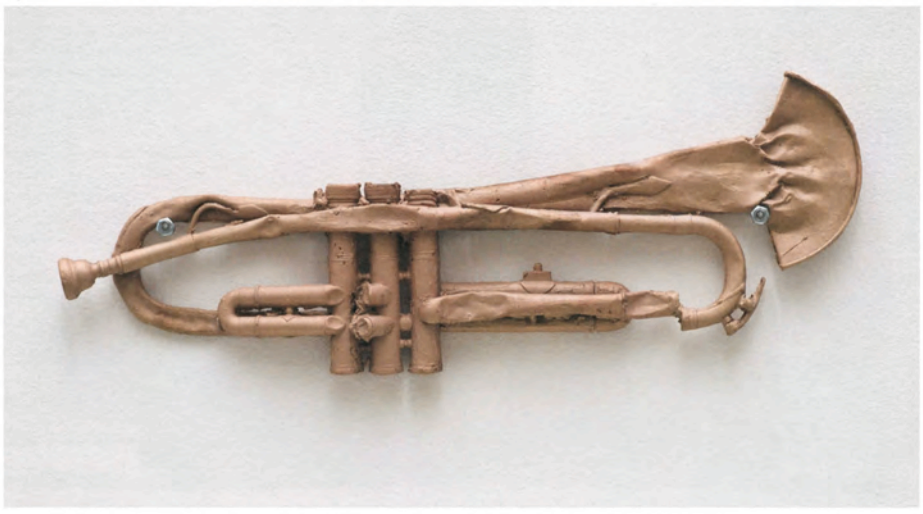
Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109



6



7



8

6–8 Fotografien / photographs: Brian Forrest

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

9

So wie Alltagsgegenstände sind religöse Zeichen und Objekte der Kunstgeschichte Carron zu Generika geworden, die vor Aneignung nicht sicher sind.

zu nivellieren. Der Innenbereich, der normalerweise für Malerei vorgesehen ist, und der Außenbereich – für Skulptur – verwischen nicht nur dank der kontinuierlichen Schlangenlinie am Boden, sondern auch durch die gleichmäßige Wandhängung der Instrumente. Dass sich im Detail die Patina derjenigen Bronzegüsse langsam verändern wird, die im Außenbereich dem Wetter ausgesetzt sind, wird im Laufe der Ausstellung das Material- und Detailbewusstsein des Künstlers herausstellen.

Bei Carron hat man es mit einem Notoriker der Maßstabsverschiebung, einem Manipulator des Status von Objekten und einem Feinmechaniker der Materialwirkung zu tun. In der Skulptur der amerikanischen Pop Art war die überlebensgroße Vergrößerung von Konsumgütern zu einem Stilmittel geworden (man denke etwa an Claes Oldenburgs überdimensionierte Haushaltsgeräte). Carrons Aufmerksamkeit gilt ebenfalls den ihn unmittelbar umgebenden Gegenständen, jedoch ist bei ihm das Spektrum der Bezüge erweitert. Religiöse Zeichen und Objekte der Kunstgeschichte – Werke von Alberto Giacometti oder Fernand Léger – sind Carron ebenfalls zu Generika geworden, die vor Aneignung nicht sicher sind. Bereits zu Beginn seiner Karriere bediente er sich des Zeichen- und Formenvokabulars der lokalen Kultur seiner Heimatgemeinde, der er stets treu geblieben ist. Auch seine Kreuze sind dem katholischen Wallis entlehnt. Ob freistehend im Ausstellungsraum (*Ohne Titel*, 2003), vor dem Eingang zur Messehalle der Art Basel (*Ohne Titel*, 2009), oder aber als Wandbehang (*Fosbury Flop*, 2006): Häufig sind diese monumentalen Kreuze – gemacht aus kunstharzbeschichtetem Polystyrol oder Polyurethan, welches die Oberfläche von Holz nur nachahmt – um einiges leichter als ihre Anmutung. So referieren Carrons Arbeiten auf klassische Medien der Bildhauerei, allerdings nicht durch ihre Materialien und deren Bearbeitung, sondern durch die jeweiligen Oberflächen, Vorlagen und Ausstellungskontexte.

Martigny – der Ort, mit dessen Artefakten und Seltsamkeiten Carrons bildhauerisches Werk stets in Verbindung gebracht wird – liegt abseits des verstädterten Westens der Schweiz, am Fuße einiger jener Gipfel, die das Bild eines Landes mit erhabener Bergnatur geprägt haben. Ein Reservat ganz eigener Natur ist der 15.000 Einwohner zählende Ort jedoch auch für Skulptur im öffentlichen Raum. Der Fondation Pierre Gianadda als Stifterin des örtlichen Kunst-, Automobil- und Gallo-Römischen Museums ist es zu verdanken, dass heute alle Kreisverkehre des Städtchens mit Skulpturen zumeist lokaler Künstler geschmückt sind. Carron gestaltete inzwischen ebenfalls einen dieser zentralen Plätze: *Huit jours pour convaincre* (Acht Tage zum Überreden, 2012) ist eine große Schraube, die sich gegen die Berge abhebt. So manche der Kreisverkehr-Skulpturen von Martigny hat Carron bereits in Form von Derivaten oder Kopien als eigene Arbeiten in die Hallen der zeitgenössischen Kunst überführt. In seiner 2007er-Ausstellung in der Kunsthalle Zürich zitierte er einen wallisischen Künstler, der

6
Burlesque esquire, 2012
Cast bronze
24 × 50 × 6 cm

7
Inca, cargo, goal
2012
Cast bronze
19 × 52 × 4 cm

8
Ghetto, tobacco, cobalt blue
2012
Cast bronze
20 × 55 × 6 cm

9
Exhibition view of Valentin Carron's Switzerland Pavilion 55th Venice Biennale 2013

modernist 1950s church windows already referred to by Carron in his 2009 exhibition *Fibre fibre, austère austère* at La Conservera in Murcia. But artefacts from industrialization and local culture can also be identified through the show, including a lovingly restored Piaggio moped (*Ciao n°6*, 2013). A similar work, *Ciao N° 4 (nero)* (2012), was displayed at last year's show of Switzerland's young generation *La jeunesse est un art* (Youth is Art, 2012) at Aargauer Kunsthaus. The models for his eight battered brass and woodwind instruments cast in bronze (*Azure, Uranium, Umbrage*, 2013) were discovered by the artist at a café in his native Martigny in the Canton of Wallis. Hung on the walls at regular intervals throughout the pavilion, they join the snake in flattening the hierarchic layout of the single-story building, blurring the distinction between the interior, usually reserved for painting, and the outside area that usually hosts sculpture. Over the course of the exhibition, the patina on the instruments that are hung outside will gradually change with the weather, underlining the artist's concern with material and detail.

Carron is a notorious shifter of scale. He is a manipulator of the status of objects and a precise engineer of material impact. In Pop, larger-than-life consumer goods became a stylistic device (as in Claes Oldenburg's gigantic household utensils). Carron, too, focuses on objects from his immediate surroundings, but his range of references is broader – taking in religious symbols and items from art history (works by Alberto Giacometti or Fernand Léger) as generic

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

10

Carron's attention has shifted to the flows of people and goods that extend across the Alpine passes between northern and southern Europe.

seinerseits in den 1980er Jahren Henry Moore zitierte (*Ohne Titel (Henry Moore)*, 2006), oder er replizierte Plastiken und gallo-römische Exponate, die in der Fondation Gianadda aufbewahrt werden (*Captain Legacy*, 2006).

Bislang war Carron bekannt dafür, viele seiner Arbeiten lokal in Martignys Handwerksbetrieben herzustellen. Hingegen wurde *Rhapsodie, das warme Unwetter aus Acryl und Blut* aus Schaumstoff, Fiberglas und Kunstharz in Basel angefertigt, und auch die als Vorlage dienenden Kirchenfenster stammen diesmal nicht aus der Schweiz, sondern aus Brüssel. Auch das klassisch italienische „Ciao“-Mofa ist kaum mehr mit dem bei Carron bislang vorherrschenden Walliser Erzählstrang in Deckung zu bringen. Wichtiger als die Auseinandersetzung mit der architektonischen und bildhauerischen Sprache des Wallis sind nun die Menschen- und Warenströme geworden, die sich über die Alpenpässe zwischen Nord- und Südeuropa bewegen.

In Einzelausstellungen in der 303 Gallery in New York und bei David Kordansky in Los Angeles hat Carron im vergangenen Jahr jenes Formenvokabular verfeinert, das er in Venedig nun als homogene Installation aus vier Werkgruppen präsentiert. In ersterer waren mit *He we you they I*, *You they I you he* (beide 2012) und anderen bereits einige Variationen des Schlangenthemas zu sehen, bei letzterer eine lange Reihe der zerquetschten Instrumente (bspw. *Lychee cheating tingly Lychee* oder *Burlesque esquire*, beide 2012).

Ob das Konzept der „Blue Banana“ bekannt sei, fragt Carron im Gespräch. Hierbei handelt es sich um eine Bezeichnung für jenen Ballungsraum, der sich von Norditalien über die Schweiz bis Nordengland erstreckt. Vom All aus gesehen erscheint dieser gekrümmte Korridor, zu dem auch Benelux und das Ruhrgebiet zählen, als hell und kühl leuchtendes Ganzes. Valentin Carron begreift diesen Raum gesteigerter Produktivität als erweitertes Aktionsfeld. Es sei nämlich in seinem Interesse, dass die Schweiz ein wenig mehr auf der Weltbühne in Erscheinung trete, gibt er ironisch zu Protokoll und erinnert an Nicolas Sarkozys berühmt-berüchtigten „Discours de Dakar“ aus dem Jahr 2007, bei dessen Gelegenheit der französische Präsident behauptete, dass der „afrikanische Mensch“ noch nicht genug in die Geschichte eingegangen sei. Das Gleiche, meint Carron, könne doch auch von „dem Schweizer“ behauptet werden. Dass dazu räumliche und zeitliche Grenzen etwas durchlässiger werden müssen, versteht sich

materials for appropriation. Early in his career, he was already drawing on the symbolic and formal vocabulary of the local culture of his home area, to which he has always remained loyal. His crosses are taken from the Catholic culture of the Wallis Canton. Whether freestanding in the exhibition space (*Untitled*, 2003), outside the entrance to the Art Basel fair (*Untitled*, 2009), or as a titled wall-hanging (*Fosbury Flop*, 2006), his monumental crosses – made of polystyrene or polyurethane coated with synthetic resin that imitates the surface of wood – are far lighter than they appear. Carron's works thus refer to classic sculptural media not via their materials or processing, but by their specific surfaces, sources and exhibition contexts.

Martigny, the town of 15,000 inhabitants whose artefacts and peculiarities are always associated with Carron's sculptural *oeuvre*, lies far from Switzerland's urbanized west, at the foot of some of the peaks that have shaped its image as a land of sublime Alpine nature. But Martigny is also a 'nature reserve' for public sculpture. Thanks to the Fondation Pierre Gianadda, which operates a museum of art, automobiles and Franco-Roman culture, sculptures by mainly local artists have been installed on all of the town's roundabouts. A work by Carron occupies one

Sohr, Matthias, “Scale to Scale,” *Frieze d/e*, Number 10, June - August 2013, pp. 102-109

von selbst: Für Carrons plastisches Werk geht mit diesem polemisch formulierten Geschichtsverständnis die Erlaubnis einher, sich „alles anzueignen, was zu Geschichte geworden ist“.

Dass Carron im Rahmen der Biennale seine Serien der letzten Monate fortführt und es keiner weiteren Gesten oder Statements bedarf, rückt am Ende nicht zuletzt den in den 1950er Jahren von Bruno Giacometti (einem Bruder von Alberto Giacometti) erbauten Pavillon in den Fokus. Die Architektur des Gebäudes und das verstädterte Europa werden für Carron zu homogenen Räumen, rhythmisiert von darin gefundenen Artefakten. Und so lädt seine schmiedeeiserne Schlange die Besucher nicht nur zur Promenade durch die Architektur ein, sondern leitet sie auch wieder aus dem Pavillon hinaus, indem sich ihre filigrane Linie über die große, den Giardini zugewandte Mauer schwingt. Von außen erkennt der aufmerksame Besucher dann ein zweites, verschmitzt grinsendes Schlangenköpfchen. Zeit, sich eine Zigarette in den Mund zu stecken.

Matthias Sohr ist Künstler und Kulturwissenschaftler. Er wohnt in Lausanne.

of these central locations: *Huit jours pour convaincre* (Eight Days To Persuade, 2012) is a large screw that stands out against the mountains, and he has made works derived or copied from some of the other roundabout sculptures and transferred them to major venues of contemporary art. In his 2007 show at Kunsthalle Zurich, he quoted a local artist's work from the 1980s, that in turn quoted Henry Moore (*Untitled (Henry Moore)*, 2006). He has also replicated sculptures and Franco-Roman artefacts held by the Gianadda Foundation (*Captain Legacy*, 2006).

In the past, Carron produced many of his works locally in the craft workshops of Martigny. By contrast, *Rhapsodie, das warme Unwetter aus Acryl und Blut* was made of foam rubber, fibreglass and synthetic resin in Basel, and this time, the church windows on which the work is based are located not in Switzerland but in Brussels. The classically Italian moped in the *Ciao* pieces is also barely reconcilable with the predominantly local narrative running through Carron's previous works. Now, rather than focusing on the architectural and sculptural language of the Canton of Wallis, his attention has shifted to the flows of people and goods that extend across the Alpine passes between northern and southern Europe.

In solo exhibitions at 303 Gallery in New York and David Kordansky in Los Angeles last year, Carron refined the formal vocabulary that he is showing in Venice as a homogeneous installation of four groups of works. The former show featured variations on the snake theme, including *He we you they I, You they I you he* (both 2012), and the latter featured a long row of battered instruments (including *Lychee cheating tingly Lychee* and *Burlesque esquire*, both 2012). In conversation, Carron asks if the concept of the 'blue banana' is well known – a term used to describe the band of densely populated zones that stretches from northern Italy across Switzerland to the north west of England. Seen from space, this curved corridor, which also includes the Ruhr Valley and the Benelux states, appears as a bright and coolly radiant whole. Carron sees this zone of elevated productivity as an expanded field of activity: it would be in his interest if Switzerland were to play a slightly more prominent role on the world stage, he states ironically, recalling Nicolas Sarkozy's infamous *Discours de Dakar* speech of 2007, during which the French president claimed that 'the African man' had not yet sufficiently entered history. Surely the same could also be said of 'the Swiss man', Carron muses. Naturally, this would require the frontiers of time and space to become rather more permeable: for Carron's sculptural *oeuvre*, this polemical view of history goes hand in hand with a license 'to appropriate everything that has become history'.

Ultimately, Carron's refraining from any new work for Venice focuses attention on the pavilion itself – built in the 1950s by Bruno Giacometti (brother of Alberto) – in its international context. For Carron, the building's architecture and Europe's urbanized core become homogeneous spaces that derive rhythm from the artefacts found within them. In this spirit, his wrought-iron snake not only invites visitors to stroll through, but also guides them out again, swinging its delicate line over the tall wall and into the Giardini. From outside, the attentive visitor can see a second snake's head, with a mischievous grin on its face. Time for a cigarette.
Translated by Nicholas Grindell

Matthias Sohr is an artist and cultural theorist living in Lausanne.

11

10
Rhapsodie, das warme Unwetter aus Acryl und Blut
2013
Polystyrene, fibreglass, acrylic resin, acrylic paint and varnish
211 × 337 × 9 cm

11
Orologio I
2006
Styrofoam, gauze, glue, plaster, clock mechanism, aluminium and acrylic paint
260 × 210 × 20 cm

Knight, Christopher, “The everyday reconfigured: Valentin Carron’s ‘Inca, Cargo, Goal’ at David Kordansky,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2012, p. D14

Los Angeles Times

The everyday reconfigured: Valentin Carron's 'Inca, Cargo, Goal' at David Kordansky

VALENTIN CARRON’S sculptural forms and wall reliefs make up his debut exhibition “Inca, Cargo, Goal” at David Kordansky.

By Christopher Knight
Los Angeles Times Art Critic

The eccentric and compelling sculptures and wall reliefs of Swiss artist Valentin Carron take appropriation art in strange directions. Existing objects remain essentially intact, but the transformation in materials makes for surprising results.

Carron's debut exhibition at David Kordansky Gallery includes musical instruments -- three trumpets, two saxophones, a couple of French horns and a clarinet -- that have been squashed flat and cast in bronze. The patina is a weird, sickly pink flesh-color; hanging on gallery walls, the reliefs have the look of flayed skin.

Look closely, and some of those walls are subtly upholstered in pinstripe shirt fabric. The room is sharply dressed.

In the center of the space, two sculptures duplicate midcentury stone carvings by Ödön Koch, a relatively obscure Swiss Constructivist artist. One is tall and rectilinear, the other squat; the latter work seems to mash together an ovoid, a cube and a pyramid –– geometries that reflect a utilitarian and idealizing Utopian spirit.

Knight, Christopher, “The everyday reconfigured: Valentin Carron’s ‘Inca, Cargo, Goal’ at David Kordansky,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 9, 2012, p. D14

Carron's versions, however, are made from carefully painted, visually detectable fiberglass. They feel as if they might float in water. Like the musical instruments and the shirt cloth, the sculptural forms are empty husks. Nothing Utopian there.

The sculptures recall the old Surrealist game of exquisite corpse in which a player draws on a sheet of paper, folds it to conceal part of the drawing and then passes it to the next player for a further addition. (The show's conundrum of a title -- "Inca, Cargo, Goal" -- does something similar, making a nonsense poem by repeating the last two letters of a word in the first two letters of the next, wholly unrelated word.) Carron plays the game with sculptural materials, however, which disembodies worn-out ideas and creates a quirky frame for new ones.

David Kordansky Gallery, Unit A, 3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Culver City, (310) 558-3030, through Dec. 8. Closed Sunday and Monday. *www.davidkordansky.com*

Jovanovic, Rozalia, “Valentin Carron to Represent Switzerland at 2013 Venice Biennale,” *GalleristNY.com*, June 15, 2012

GalleristNY

Valentin Carron to Represent Switzerland at 2013 Venice Biennale

By Rozalia Jovanovic 6/15 7:06pm

Valentin Carron, ‘L’homme,’ 2006. (Courtesy the artist and 303 Gallery)

Valentin Carron has been selected to represent Switzerland at the 2013 Venice Biennale, we were just alerted via Artnet. Mr. Carron, who has emerged in recent years as one of the most compelling of the younger-generation Swiss artists, paints, sculpts and creates installations that question the central traditions of contemporary art through appropriation and reproduction. Right, he copies, sort of.

He might reproduce a cross in coarse polyester resin, create replicas of historical cannons in cheap material or create a work that embodies the formal qualities that we’ve come to identify with another artist. For example, his 2006 sculpture L’homme, uses the expressive elements of the work of Alberto Giacometti, elements which have by now, through endless replication, been robbed of their potency.

His works have also questioned the authenticity of the Alpine aesthetic, the sentimental style of “Heidiland,” as he calls it. For a recent show at 303 Gallery in New York, he presented a five-foot stone cube made of polystyrene and a two-headed snake sculpture as part of a show in which he referenced the “ancient elements of man’s nature, physical and physiological.” That show, which closed in May, was called “The dirty grey cube (you) turns around sadly and screams at us (he) ‘ca-tarac-ta.’” We’re looking forward to his hijinks at the Bienniale.

Chaillou, Timothée, in conversation with Valentin Carron, "Valentin Carron," *Novembre*, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2011, pp. 234-237

VALENTIN CARRON

Interview by Timothée Chaillou, translation by Drame Antasylla

Timothée Chaillou — *You say that the sculptures from the Giannada foundation installed in the city of Martigny have a "tribal function" that they are "trophies symbolizing their owner 's power". While reproducing these sculptures, why do you express such an attraction for glory items that already enlighten a space (such as the traffic circle sculptures, and public parks)? I just can't tell if there is some inner disgust for power symbols, or some fascination, some kind of a delight in work about the comeback of the inhibited.*

Timothée Chaillou — **Ha! The comeback of inhibited! I actually express disgust and fascination at the same time. I reproduce these sculptures, done with really precious materials - steel, marble, or bronze - to evacuate their original materiality. I did them in resin. I weaken them. I truly and effectively lighten them of their weight, while still saving their appearance. My position on this kind of art is something borrowed from the manifesto. With time going by, my opinion regarding this question becomes more ambiguous, and I feel more and more respectful for the so-called "third-zone artists".**

On this notion of values, Jim Shaw affirms that he presents his paintings from garage sales - his Thrift store paintings - from an urge to resist any interpretation and aesthetic judgment.
Polystyrene or resin allows me to evacuate this notion of value. I use symbols of power the same way Fabrice Gygi does - to turn power against itself.

Fabrice Gygi says: "I was sometimes blamed for using the same authoritarian figures as the ones used by this society I criticise. But this is just a way of diversion, as a statement saying 'you have the nuclear bomb, so do I'".
I have the power to reproduce, the power to set a reproduced object in a space, the same as an exhibition organiser who would gather in one place his own sculptures that are in reality set away one from the others. I believe I pay tribute to those sculptures more than I criticise them.

You once said: "I spend my days reproducing in real scale objects that repulse me".
I think this is a position I tend to move away from.

Can you talk about your Monsieur exhibition[1] at the Palais de Tokyo?
I exposed reproductions of sculptures – copies in the inner sense of the term. There were lamps I saw in this brewery in Basel looking like a tavern. They looked at the same time medieval and pre-Raphaelite in appearance. I removed their figurative substance to shape it as a gestural glass painting.


1

As for the lamps with this "abstract expressionism" pattern, the journey through the exhibition, after walking along the rendered green walls, ends up with the sight of a pale snake[9] painted on the wall. Is that a metaphor for creeping power?
It's more literal, like a snake trying to get through a rendered wall. It's the figure of the Delirium Tremens. It allows, in the end, to deflate the massive aspect of the sculptures, lamps and walls. It's the only element on the wall

Chaillou, Timothée, in conversation with Valentin Carron, "Valentin Carron,"
Novembre, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2011, pp. 234-237

facing all the heavy built figures set in the space. I wanted the exhibition to close in a gentle way.

In opposition to this lightness, these green rendered walls, the window shown at the Swiss Cultural Centre (Arrangement in Black and Green)[2], the white rendered bunker,[3] playing the Partisans' hymn while bells were ringing – all had a virile side. These forms make a statement; being that massive, they dominate the space where they're lying, like an occupation of territory. In their weight lies the idea of gravitation.

Indeed, and this is on purpose. These pieces are architectural; they represent the typical materials of suburban properties. By emphasizing a masculine shape, they criticize the idea that it would be possible to subtract a production from any political or critical aspect. At the Palais de Tokyo,[4] the first rendered wall was shaped to accelerate the space perspective, to strengthen a point at which the viewer would catch an illusion. It's a wall made possible by itself - the possibility of a wall. While progressing through the exhibition I had visions of Giorgio de Chirico paintings, as a way of setting elements into spaces.

Scales and perspectives are connected?

Yes. I'm obsessed by basic shapes and colours, and the idea of territory.

Olivier Mosset likes to fail in his paintings - to make the paint,

and the materials physically more present. The rendering is a rough material, and the sensation of its substance is visually obvious. Would that be a metaphor for the bitterness and the harmfulness?

Maybe. This bitterness is in opposition to minimal art productions - smoothed, polished, chromed.

The rendering hurts when you touch it, it's an unpleasant and aggressive material. Its function was to cover houses as a quick and easy decorative solution - like bad camouflage.

Absolutely. These are the symbols conveyed by rendering that made me use it. Rendering tastes like country. My use of it is at the same time sociological, and tied up to some personal stories. I like these basic contrasts between light and shadow, smoothness and sharpness.

This harsh side of rendering evokes one of the questions Monica Bonvicini asked some workmen: "What does your girlfriend think about your dry rough hands?" Monica Bonvicini also says, "that architecture is a fundamental asset in the identification process". And "we all need a roof above our heads. There's something primal in architecture that I sometimes miss when in art. The wall, the most basic structure in architecture meant everything to me".

I definitely agree with this position, especially about the importance of basic elements and basic shapes - the basics of everyday life.

Can you talk about your music?

I used the Bolero from Ravel for its rhythmic, glorious side, played on a xylophone. The music escapes from a rock with a polecat on its top (Fer de Lance, 2004). The Bolero is world music, a colonial sound. I used Frederic François's song Laissez moi vivre ma vie (Let me live my life) for an antique sculpture reconstitution (Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita, 2005[5]), which is a structure that hangs body pieces, made of bronze. The music helps me to stage this sculpture. At the Swiss Cultural Centre I use to play a bass version of Alain Barrière's song Ma vie (Ma vie 2008). I wanted something nostalgic.

Chaillou, Timothée, in conversation with Valentin Carron, "Valentin Carron,"
Novembre, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2011, pp. 234-237

Or romantic.
Yes, it's a self-portrait.

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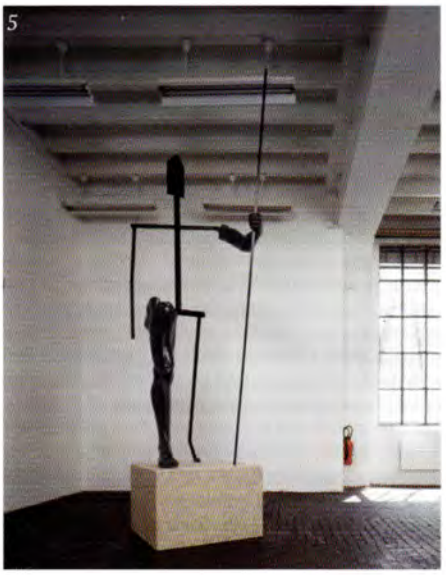


Variety is commonplace. It's a start point, an easily identifiable support. In François Truffaut's movie La Femme d'a Côté (1981), Bernard Coudray (played by Gerard Depardieu) worries that Mathilde Bauchard (Fanny Ardant) would lock herself away from the world. Fixing her radio he says: "I'm happy you show some interest toward the news, to get to know what's happening in the world." To which she replies: "No, I'm just listening to the songs, because they say the truth. The most stupid, the most true. Besides, they are not foolish. What do they say? They say 'Don't leave me', 'Your absence ruined my life', or ' I'm an empty house without you ', 'Let me be the shadow of your shadow ', or even 'Without love we're nothing at all'".
Yes these are the fundamentals, the poetry itself, and the spleen.

The melancholy - the despair - is strong elements in your production.
Yes. In a certain way art always deals with it. For example, I reproduced a piece of bread on a fake greenish wooden beam (Sans Titre (Le Pain), 2010)[6]. It represents at the same time a melancholic form of the family unit, and - as Monica Bonvicini says, a basic - the daily bread. Something essential, which is the same, we find in popular music.

There is frequently in your production this contrast between heroism and its failure. Using falsely authentic elements - materials inspiring ideas of terror, giving the illusion of a highlander authenticity, a vernacular aestheticism, as in a tavern. Do you think that's what you're producing, a genuine and honest piece?
In fact, I envy the work of the artists I exploit. I love their honesty, and I'm fascinated by the gentrification, by the Chabrolian countryside, as well as the fierceness of Jacques Chessex farmers.

6

An ambiguity we retrieve in the layout of crossed massive wood beams hanging from the ceiling – a pergola (Clair matin, 2008[7]) - and a tiny gold nail clipper (Sans titre, 2009[8]) hooked on one of the walls.
Absolutely. This clipper is an item linked to hygiene. It's a very precious and unusable object - since it's designed from pure gold.

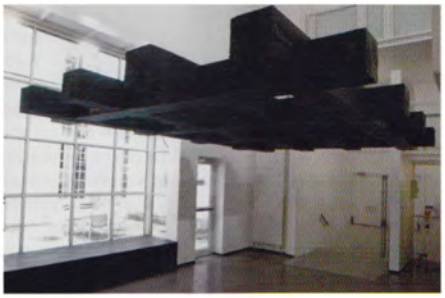
It has the same function as the snake in the exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo.
Yes. Once again it's about contrast. The pergola was a minimal and decorative piece, extremely virile and heavy. The clipper is a tawdry item, useless.

Is that pergola an upside down podium, defining a sociability space, but from the ceiling opposite to the floor?

Chaillou, Timothée, in conversation with Valentin Carron, “Valentin Carron,”
Novembre, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2011, pp. 234-237

Definitely. Staged low in the space it's still a symbol of power - a heavy figure that evokes the resting time of a warrior.

7



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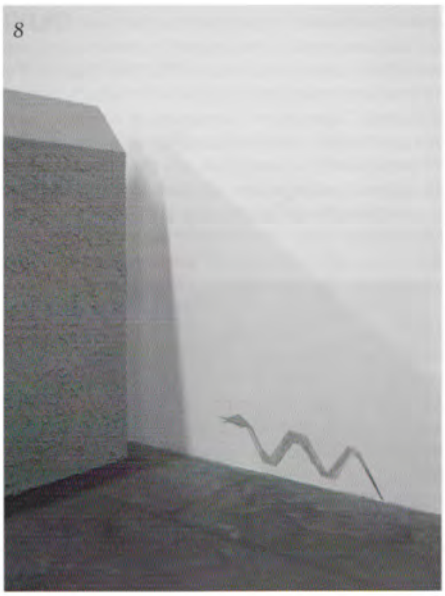

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1
Exhibition views of *Monsieur*, session Pergola, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (19 février-16 mai 2010)
All photographies by André Morin
Production Palais de Tokyo, courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich et 303 Gallery, New York

Valentin Carron, *löwEnzorn*, 2010
Métal laqué noir, verre translucide peint
Unique, 40 x 88 x 28 cm

Valentin Carron, *Rance club IV*, 2010
Mur crépi , dimensions variables

Valentin Carron, *Stark gefräßig nervös*, 2010
Polystyrène, fibre de verre, résine acrylique, peinture acrylique
Unique, 299 x 100 x 100 cm

Valentin Carron, *Erde*, 2010
Polystyrène, fibre de verre, résine acrylique, peinture acrylique
Unique
298 x 100 x 80 cm

Valentin Carron, *5, Place de Rome*, 2010
Mur crépi
Dimensions variables

Valentin Carron, *Löwenzorn*, 2010
Métal laqué noir, verre translucide peint
Unique
33 x 33 x 33 cm

Valentin Carron, *L'inavouable extase*, 2010
Polystyrène, fibre de verre, résine acrylique, peinture acrylique
241 x 123 x 81 cm

Valentin Carron, *Fructus*, 2010
Polystyrène, fibre de verre, résine acrylique, peinture acrylique
190 x 80 x 66 cm

2
Valentin Carron, *Arrangement in Black and Green*, 2007.
Wood, cement, sand, paint
Dimensions adaptable

3
Rance Club II, 2006
Wood, plasterboard, plaster, paint, sound
Installation 240 x 895 x 405 cm / 94 1/2 x 352 3/8 x 159 1/2 inches
Walls: height 240 cm, thickness 30 cm, lengths 700 cm, 328 cm, 549 cm, 545 cm

4
Valentin Carron, *L'inavouable extase*, 2010.
Polystyrène, fibre de verre, résine acrylique, peinture acrylique
241 x 123 x 81 cm
Courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich Photography © André Morin

5
Valentin Carron, *Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita*, 2005.
Metal, polystyrene, fiberglass, acrylic resin, paint
370 x 160 x 90 cm / 145 5/8 x 63 x 35 3/8 inches

6
Valentin Carron, *Sans Titre (le pain)*, 2010
Styrofoam, fibreglass, resin, acrylic paint
Installation 98 x 39 x 39 cm / 38 5/8 x 15 3/8 x 15 3/8 inches
Pedestal 85 x 45 x 45 cm / 33 1/2 x 17 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches
Bread ø 85 cm / 33 1/2 inches, Höhe 13 cm / 5 1/8 inches

7
Valentin Carron, *Clair Matin*, 2007.
Styrofoam, fibreglass, resin, acrylic paint
Object 500 x 340 x 25 cm / 196 7/8 x 133 7/8 x 9 7/8 inches
4 joists: 500 x 25 x 25 cm;

8
Valentin Carron, *Sans titre*, 2010
Peinture murale
23 x 108 cm
Courtesy Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich, Galerie Praz-Delavallade, Paris, et 303 Gallery, NewYork

9
Valentin Carron, *Untitled*, 2009
750 yellow gold
edition of 5

Fischli/Weiss, “20/20: Valentin Carron,” *Frieze*, Issue 131, September 2011, p. 130

Valentin Carron

By **Fischli/Weiss**
Cover artists, issue 102, 2006

In Valentin Carron's work, massive mock-ups of heavy signifiers emerge as true fakes, deprived of their real weight.

Valentin Carron lives in Geneva, Switzerland. He has had solo shows at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; Kunstverein Solothurn, Switzerland; and Kunst- und Kulturzentrum Montabaur, Germany. His work was included in 'Tranches de Savoir' (Slices of Knowledge) at the French Embassy, New York, earlier this year.

Valentin Carron
Greenish Light
2010
Watercolour on paper, silver suspension, clock and wooden box
42×33 cm

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Installation view: *Fink Forward*
Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus, 2003 [SWEET REVOLUTION 2, 2003]

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Valentin Carron: the re-real thing

Katya García-Antón & Beatrix Ruf

Valentin Carron makes sculptures that repeat, on a life-size scale, existing objects of vernacular significance, iconic art pieces, and public monuments. The works are cast in fiberglass resulting in a lightness and artificial texture at odds with their definite presence. And yet while Carron's sculptures may not be perceived as authentic, they can definitely be understood as "true." They propose a version of the present that combines the concreteness of everyday reality with the fictions employed in the construction of its identity. Indeed, Carron's sculptures correspond to the Coca-Cola concept of the "real thing" which, while it is a 100% artificial beverage, stands as the most real, recognizable symbol of American culture to date, aside from the national flag. It is, perhaps, no coincidence to discover that one of Carron's early works is also a pseudo-beverage with strong national connotations. Inspired by the Valais, a region that promotes itself as being the "real" Switzerland as well as being steeped in an ancient tradition of viticulture, *Château Synthèse*, 2000, was devised as a bottle of completely artificial wine made by chemical engineers of the Valais.

To invoke a cultural icon such as Coca-Cola during a discussion of Carron's work is to invite a consideration of the artist's practice as part and parcel of a contemporary tradition of Pop art. A tradition that can be used to explore how the notions of repetition, cultural banality, and consumption operate in his work. If a potted history of Pop begins with Marcel Duchamp's readymades, such a history reaches an inevitable conclusion with Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, which perfectly imitated the readymade without actually becoming one. Duchamp and Warhol operated within the aesthetics of the banal and industrial manufacture, awarding the found item with that "plus" that Pierre Restany referred to when he coined the term "objet-plus" for the Pop objects made by the French New Realists. However, more pertinent to Carron's thinking than European Pop is the generation of American artists that followed Duchamp and Warhol, and who crossed over with other artistic strategies such as appropiationism and hyper-realism.

The works of Sturtevant and Duane Hanson are a good example, as they introduced high art and social disaffection, respectively, into the heart of the so-called "post-Pop" debate. In so doing they extended the field of possibilities for what was a consumable and banalized object within the material culture of the day. Sturtevant consecrated her career to repeating iconic works by Duchamp, Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Oldenburg, among others, exploring in the process notions of the replica, the simulacrum, the original, and the fake. Hanson, on the other hand, manufactured hyper-realist sculptural copies of disenfranchised individuals from the margins of American society.

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Carron's practice builds upon this Pop lineage by referencing high art on the one hand and the notion of a cultural periphery on the other. Arguably, the hijacking of well-known artworks in Carron's œuvre may be genealogically connected to a practice of art historical Appropriationism characteristic of the 1980s. But while both Appropriationist artists such as Sturtevant and Sherrie Levine questioned ideas about authorship and originality, plagiarism and value, Carron's approach reveals a greater degree of conceptual and physical intervention that one could go as far as describing as a form of cultural re-enactment.*

On the one hand, are his "intervened" appropriations of iconic art of the 20th century. For example, Carron's *L'Homme*, 2006, recasts Giacometti's walking man, mid-stride and sporting an incongruous "up yours" arm gesture. On the other hand, the artist disrupts the concerted efforts to inscribe the Valais region within the grand narrative of history. *Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita*, 2005, is, as the artist describes in his interview with Fabrice Stroun, an unequivocal emblem of military, cultural, and historic power for the region. And lastly is Carron's hijacking of modernist iconography into a sort of Duanesque territory of marginality, such as that found in *Sweet Revolution*. This large sculpture is perceived at first glance as a sort of alpine-statuary-meets-modernist-public-sculpture. Yet on closer inspection we notice the discarded party poppers on the sculpture's base. A reference no doubt to the social disaffection encountered in suburbia, Swiss or other, and which so often leaves its traces in public spaces.

In his exhibition at the Kunsthalle, Carron goes more deeply into these aspects with installations, works displayed on walls, and sculptures which touch both on the surface and the "behind-the-walls" aspect of the "myths" described above, as they relate to his place of origin, Martigny. He does this by the repetition of public, decorative objects that are aestheticized in an ambivalent way through being displayed. For example, he exhibits the monumental installation *Rance Club II*, 2006, in which a carillon plays at regular intervals like a melody sounding from a long way off, a soundtrack that Carron compiled from the hymns sung by the French Resistance in World War II, and had played by the Martigny church bells. He locates this sound behind the walls of an inaccessible architectonic spatial construction which, with its rough plasterwork, offers us the horror of the surface aesthetics of a bygone era and concept. The Fondation Gianadda, important in attracting tourists to Martigny, plays a major role in the artist's work: it is a museum built above the remains of a Celtic temple that collects archaeological finds made in Martigny, as well as bringing whole busloads of people into the small town with temporary exhibitions devoted to classical modern art. It is an archive of originals and replicas and the deposits of historical artifacts the authenticity of which embraces the concept of both the original and the duplicate. In the objects made by Carron, the marketing of art for tourist purposes and the often dubious appropriation of its attractiveness in the equally dubious approximation to art and works of art in the local production of objects and aesthetics, culminates in a production of "art" as a multiply overlaid field of likewise dubious reputations. As well as the form of the Cross, the "public" sculptural symbol of the western

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Installation view: *Déchéance, élégance, déhanchement*
Swiss Institute, New York, 2006

Installation view: *Rellik*
Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, 2005

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Christian cultural area, but also the abstract relief formed by two intersecting lines, and hence the epitome of abstract art, Carron shows a large group of sculptures which relate directly or indirectly to works from the area of influence of this institution: *Captain Legacy*, 2006, repeats the fragment of a cast of the drapery on a Gallo-Roman marble statue held by the Foundation; *Untitled (Henry Moore)*, 2006, is derived from a sculpture by a local artist of the 1980s who was influenced by Henry Moore; while *Trikorn*, 2006, continues with the theme of repetition: the sculpture is based on a stone head by a local artist who in turn had fashioned it after a bronze sculpture at the Fondation Gianadda.

If the notion of re-enactment is to be introduced in Carron's work, it is by arguing that the activity of making art is itself a form of cultural production, and therefore a kind of historical re-enactment. In other words, Carron's methods, as those of other contemporary artists today employing re-enactment strategies, should be perceived as an activity that re-casts heritage through ritualized behavior.

UNTITLED, 2004

*In his introduction to the volume of essays *Excavating Modernism*, Bernard Tschumi writes: "Ex-centric, dis-integrated, dis-located, dis-juncted, deconstructed, dismantled, dis-associated, dis-continuous, reregulated ... de-, dis-, ex-. These are the prefixes of today. Not post-, neo-, or pre-." With regard to the work of Valentin Carron, one should add "re-" to this list of prefixes from ten years ago: recycle, re-look, re-stage, re-think, re-build, re-turn, re-make, re-invention, repetition, or as Sturtevant said, "Remake, reuse, reassemble, recombine— that's the way to go."

García-Antón, Katya, and Beatrix Ruf, “Valentin Carron: the re-real thing,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 2-7

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRP|RINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

A Conversation with Valentin Carron

Fabrice Stroun

This interview was conducted at two different moments: first, for a publication by Pro Helvetia, in 2003, then for this book, in 2006. The authors have slightly modified the first part of the text for this new publication.

FABRICE STROUN In your work, you create ersatz from Alpine imagery: artificial wine, fake old wood or dry stone walls, etc. Why are you interested in these “traditional” forms? And why do you need to produce copies of it?

VALENTIN CARRON Let’s take the example of a piece like *Château Synthèse*, 2000: I was interested in chemically producing a wine from start to finish. A wine with no certificate of origin, with no AOC, that wouldn’t carry any regional pride. Valais, the region where I live and work, is supposed to be the incarnation of romantic, natural, and wild Switzerland. A country of tradition. But this tradition was actually completely fabricated at the end of the 19th century, at a time when a political desire to create a national cultural identity emerged. Slowly, people started fabricating pseudo-authentic objects and drawing up rules for the proper design of chalets. In the National Exhibition of 1896, African “savages” were put on display alongside “Schwitzer Hüsli” (little Swiss chalets).

FABRICE STROUN What is your view on this process of cultural fabrication?

VALENTIN CARRON The irony in my work isn’t so much about passing judgment on this pseudo-authenticity, but about trying to show what complex negotiations actually go into shaping these things that appear to be natural and self-evident. In a piece like *Authentik*, 2000, authenticity arises from the relationship to a craft-based economy. I took no decision concerning the look of the piece. I simply went to see a blacksmith who makes signs for storefronts and chalets. The word signifies its function because it has been fabricated by an artisan who wanted it to look this way: “authentic.” My only real input was to ask him to spell it with a “K,” as in the title of the first album by NTM, the famous French hip-hop band of the 1990s.

FABRICE STROUN Why this mix between signs from an everyday rural culture and a specialized urban one, like French hip-hop?

VALENTIN CARRON French hip-hop is actually more of a suburban culture, and the Valais is in way a kind of huge suburb! The area could be best described as a kind of urban periphery. There are no universities, no big industries apart from tourism. It’s a long valley with a highway at the center that sends you off towards various small towns, villages, and ski resorts. Each of these zones is like a neighborhood.

FABRICE STROUN Sounds like you’re talking about Los Angeles ...

Installation view: *Mai-Thu Perret versus Valentin Carron. Solid Objects*
Centre d’art contemporain, Geneva, 2005
[UNTITLED, 2003]

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

VALENTIN CARRON Well, it's true, on a small scale of course! It's true that you can't survive without a car here. Last weekend I started the evening with some friends in a bar in my village, Fully, before going to a party in Sion, the biggest town in the valley. In the morning we drove up for breakfast to Chamonix, a French ski resort, before going down to Aosta, in Italy, to spend the afternoon. We came back to Switzerland through the Grand Saint-Bernard tunnel, to finish ourselves off at the Martigny train station buffet. We do this type of drive all the time. But the fundamental difference with any city, even a totally decentralized one like Los Angeles, or with the French suburbs, is that the Valais produces no indigenous culture apart from its conservative craft tradition.

FABRICE STROUN Do these traditional signs have the same value everywhere? In other words, does a bench carved out of a tree trunk signify the same thing on the main square of a fancy ski resort and on a street corner down in the valley, in your village?

VALENTIN CARRON In both cases it's meant to be reassuring. The real boundary in Switzerland is not language. On the one hand you have the plain, which runs from Geneva to St. Gallen, going through Lausanne, Fribourg, Bern, Basle, and Zurich. This is the urban, industrial Switzerland, the land of business. And then there is everything else, "Heidi Land." This balance is what makes the country. People come from abroad to launder their dirty money in Geneva and Zurich and after that they holiday in some luxury ski resort. These two Switzerlands completely feed off each other. The bestselling postcard in Zurich is a photomontage showing the city with the Alps in the background. Since some sociologists started writing about it, there's nothing hipper for city folks than to go watch a cow fight. Recently I went to visit a friend in the high pastures, and in his fridge he had a milk carton from Coop (a leading national supermarket chain), manufactured god knows where. He has a hundred cows in the barn, yet and my friend drinks the same milk as people in the center of Zurich. It's not so much business Switzerland or authentic Switzerland that interests me, but those power relations that benefit everyone.

FABRICE STROUN But your work isn't simply about economic relations.

VALENTIN CARRON It is primarily a symbolic issue. For as long as anyone can remember, Bischofberger's been on the back cover of *Artforum* with these postcard views of primitive Switzerland, and he's really onto something there. This is primarily an iconography of complete submission to private property, to narrow self-interest, and petty-bourgeois morality and values. The Swiss vision of happiness, what else can I say! In the local tabloids, showbiz and political personalities are always pictured standing in front of a dry stone wall or a pergola. It's just a cheap way of buying themselves an "authentic" local legitimacy. When these signs are used in the Swiss Hotel in Geneva, a place calibrated for Russian and Japanese tourists, they take on the quality of a décor. When they're set up at the center of my village, they appear "natural." But in both cases they're supposed to incarnate the security-obsessed and conservative dimension of national identity, the stultifying and pacified image that the community desires to project.

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

CHÂTEAU SYNTHÈSE, 2000

UNTITLED, 2002

FABRICE STROUN How can your work avoid re-inscribing this dominant ideology?

VALENTIN CARRON It's a complicated question. When I started using this iconography, I felt it was going against a certain type of Zurich art that was fashionable in the 1990s and which was selling a positive, "cool," and almost sexy vision of Switzerland to the outside world. And although I found this image really attractive just like everybody else, it really didn't have anything to do with my everyday experience. So I started turning towards local models of "artistic production" that seemed to counter the dominant aesthetic of the time. When I first thought about carving a bear out of a tree trunk, I originally thought I was going to do it for real. This type of object is not specific to Switzerland. You see them in every forest country. It's a kind of hobby for lumberjacks, it enables them to show that they can do something else with their tools than mechanically cutting down trees. So I went to see some lumberjacks to learn how to use a chainsaw. I was intimidated by the labor it implied. At the same time, nobody out there really sees it as real work, and this activity is only tolerated insofar as it can be recuperated to commercial and, more importantly, ideological ends. Very often these craftsmen, out of some kind of pride, end up giving a piece to their town. These end up on the main square or at the bottom of a ski slope. Very quickly I felt the need to separate myself from this system of exploitation. So I ended up accepting to make "art" after all, adopting a language which, through my choice of materials—resin and fake acrylic wood—comes down from Pop art and produces an immediately visible critical distance. Of course, I'm highly conscious that by reworking such highly conservative tropes within the field of contemporary art I'm also playing some perverse kind of game.

FABRICE STROUN In the sense of contributing to their reification?

VALENTIN CARRON Because I spend my entire days making live-size replicas of the objects I abhor.

FABRICE STROUN As you said, mountain culture is fashionable today. Not only do trendy sociologists write about it, but design magazines like *Wallpaper* put out special issues on the "New Mountain Attitude." Isn't your work also part of this recuperation?

VALENTIN CARRON I sure would hope so! That's actually the main goal. My sculptures are for sale! More seriously, I think the kind of recuperation you're talking about only goes so far, because it primarily operates on the level of nostalgia and glamour. Of all my work, the most reproduced pieces were the *Ski-bobs*, 1999, a type of mountain bicycle fashionable in the 1970s that has totally disappeared today. They weren't very practical, and were principally designed for tourists who didn't know how to ski. In order to find vintage models I placed an ad in the paper. Afterward I went to different tradesmen to get them restored: saddlers, locksmiths, etc. I even called up the Porsche factory that used to build them, so that they would send me drawings of the original hardware. Along the way I removed all the logos and labels, in order to streamline the chromes, to make them more abstract, before displaying them like

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Fetish-Finish sculptures. Later, I also called up Roger Moore who lives around here, and took a picture of him riding one of the sculptures. Apart from this particular piece, most of the time I am dealing with objects that come from a social and cultural reality that is way too depressed and claustrophobic to generate this kind of nostalgia. As I told you, there's nothing in the Valais. There are almost no career opportunities whatsoever. It's a primarily working-class population. In school we were all pushed toward technical training. They wanted my friend Balthazar Lovay, an artist who now lives in Geneva, to become a window-blind installer ... Finally we managed to get into the art school in Sion. Most of the young people only dream about leaving. And if they do come back, even if they've acquired a much better economic situation than if they had stayed, they see it as a failure. Most of them can never connect with the local population again. When they need to get a picture taken to demonstrate their social position within the community, they'll pick the pergola or the dry stone wall again, to buy back some kind of lost identity. But to close off the topic of "recuperation": I once was invited to a "favela chic" party in the Paris art world ... So there's still some hope!

FABRICE STROUN Can you give me an example of an object that the artworld still has a hard time recuperating.

VALENTIN CARRON Frankly, I was surprised to see how violently people reacted to the Christian cross in fake concrete and cinderblocks I recently showed at the Basel Art Fair. After all it was built using classic minimal proportions ...

FABRICE STROUN Right now you're working on pieces for Paris and Vienna that use Nazi symbolism ...

VALENTIN CARRON The piece for Paris will be called *No Logo*, in reference to the Naomi Klein book I just finished reading. It's a hanger with five identical jackets that have a little red embroidered swastika hidden under the armpit.

FABRICE STROUN Does the piece refer to the ambiguous role Switzerland played during the Second World War?

VALENTIN CARRON No, not directly. It's not about the current rise of neo-Nazi movements either. Here hatred of the other is expressed in much more mundane and sly ways. Here's a little anecdote: last year I was working for a real estate agent. Before purchasing an apartment, clients go through the names on the letterboxes to see how many foreigners live in the building. Nobody ever talks about it openly, but everybody knows about it. In fact, beyond a certain ratio, the value of the building goes down. For this piece I used the kind of jacket that office clerks or people working at smaller levels of state administration usually wear. I removed every single label, all the signs that might reveal their original make, before re-branding them. I felt the armpit was the least obvious place for a logo. You could wear the jacket normally, and nobody would notice anything. It's only revealed through the gesture ...

FOSBURY FLOP, 2006

UNTITLED (TRIBUTE TO ROBERT WADLOW), 2000

DEATH RACE 2000, 2000

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

Installation view: *Mai-Thu Perret versus Valentin Carron. Solid Objects*
Centre d'art contemporain, Geneva, 2005 [UNTITLED (PAVILION), 2003]

Installation view: *Turbo*
CAN, Neuchâtel, 2000 [TURBO, 2000]

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

Installation view: *Kontext, Form, Troja*
Secession, Vienna, 2003 [ORIFLAMMES, 2003]

Installation view: *Fer de Lance*
Galerie Francesca Pia, Bern, 2005 [PUZZOLA, 2004]

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

FABRICE STROUN I'd like to go back to pieces such as *No Logo* or *Oriflammes*, 2003, three banners using the symbol referencing a Nazi swastika imagined by Hollywood decorators for Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, 1940. Last year you showed a wall painting entitled *Zorro*, 2005, at the Galerie Francesca Pia in Bern, which covered all the walls of the gallery with an S-shaped lightning bolt, as in the "SS" sign.

VALENTIN CARRON *Oriflammes* is a faithful copy. Although color bonuses have recently been released for movies fans, the original film was shot in black and white, hence I executed the piece in grayscale, which heightens the ghostly and slightly unreal quality of the object.

FABRICE STROUN This piece was produced for an exhibition at the Secession, in Vienna. Wasn't there some intent to provoke on your part?

VALENTIN CARRON No, not really ... although, yes, maybe a little, but not more than that ... At Francesca Pia's, the abovementioned wall painting was part of a bigger installation, entitled *Fer de lance*, the centerpiece of which was a skunk perched on top of a rock, emitting a recording of Ravel's *Boléro*, which I had asked a musician to replay on a xylophone.

FABRICE STROUN Why Ravel's *Boléro*? What does all this have to do with the "SS" sign?

VALENTIN CARRON The skunk originally incorporated a smoke machine and was intended to spew out dry ice through its anus, but I had some technical problems and so, at the last minute, I replaced the smoke machine with a CD player. The *Boléro* is a cliché, possibly the first example of what would latter be called "world music," an immensely popular tune which in many ways is as vulgar as a skunk, or the special effects in a little provincial nightclub. There's no value judgment in what I'm saying, I'm actually extremely fond of those kind of places. This is where the painting came from, like a musical score, a G key, a motif scanning the entire space with a kind of rhythm. At the time, this font felt like the most brutal I could find, a way for me to try out the worst, not as a fantasy or a regression, but in a naturalistic manner. I used a spray can to make something like those tags you find in cities all over Europe. Its displacement in an art context only removes about 1% of its "awfulness," and yet it seems to be enough. The same "S" on a synagogue would be real trouble, but suddenly here, as a sequence, in a gallery, it becomes almost acceptable, at least enough to be exhibited and sold ... The title (*Zorro*) softens the blow as if by miracle, it turns everything into a big stupid joke. And yet the displacement I make is really slight, not enough to be any kind of "critical" recuperation. In the end this piece was not simply a technical failure. There were real problems at the level of its reception. Maybe it's better this way ...

FABRICE STROUN Why do you say that?

VALENTIN CARRON I think that the iconography somewhat covered up my intentions. This painting plays on a register that is infinitely more pathetic than "critical." I was thinking about all the drunken kids bored on the

Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRP|RINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

weekend with a spray can within reach, but also about the kind of geometric wall paintings made by some of my friends. I've actually recently remade some crosses, as wall sculptures this time. It's a sign which used to be as profoundly inimical to certain Left-wing thinking as the swastika; for a long time they saw anticlericalism and antifascism as two sides of the same coin. In the end these religious signs are today much more ambiguous than those of German National-Socialism.

FABRICE STROUN I'd like to talk about the issue of the cultural reception of your work. You work with a regional iconography that is instantly legible in Switzerland. What happens when your works travel beyond our borders?

VALENTIN CARRON Nothing is more global than local issues ...

FABRICE STROUN In general I'd tend to agree with you, but I think that some subtle points of your work might pass unnoticed outside of a specifically Alpine cultural context. Taking as a counter example the work of an artist with whom you have exhibited before, Gardar Eide Einarsson, a Norwegian artist living in the US, one could say that his pieces have as much to do with a "local" culture (Scandinavian Death Metal, for example) as with a global one related to American social and political history, and therefore familiar to everyone in the West. Hence it would seem that his works are potentially legible, in all their finer points, by a much larger audience than yours.

VALENTIN CARRON After spending nine months in Paris (for an artists' residency), I made an exhibition for the Eva Presenhuber gallery in Zurich, in which I showed an alignment of cannons in the main room. The model for these works came from the Invalides in Paris. Don't ask me why, but I ended up going to the Invalides every three days. In some sense I did a classical exhibition of contemporary minimal art in this room, as a distant homage to the art of the 1960s. It was geometric, serial, elegant, and played simultaneously on two types of institutional conventions, those of the exhibition of historical objects and those of the avant-garde. The fact that the provenance of these objects was French, that they came from the museum of the Invalides, had little actual relevance. Everybody got it. It was about the centralization of power, the violence intrinsic to these kinds of symbols, and the fact that we were in Zurich, a financial center, was also heightened ... Actually I don't think American history is as transparent and self-evident as you say. Gardar, even in the US, always provides critical texts to accompany his shows, he inscribes his works in a "narrative." I won't do this; my works have the ambition (maybe it's naive) to exist in themselves, as autonomous objects. What we are discussing in this interview are my personal recipes, and as far as this is concerned, I have no desire right now to try to fit in somewhere else. First, I don't feel entitled to speak about cultural particularities which I don't share, and second and most importantly, I'm far from having exhausted my fascination (in many cases it has been going on for years) with artifacts scattered in a ten mile radius around my home.

FABRICE STROUN What do you mean by "autonomous"? You always discuss your fascination for these objects in terms that are culturally and historically

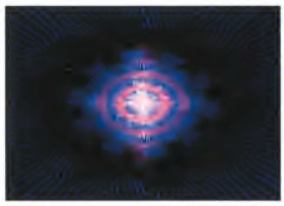
Stroun, Fabrice, “A Conversation with Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 24-33

BACK IN THE DAYS, 2005

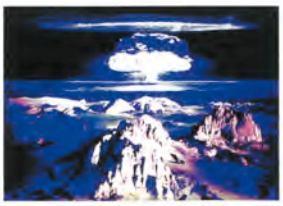
LOUD, 2005

ENGINE SWING, 2005

RUDE, 2005



PRELUDE, 2005



THE BOOGIE, 2005

determined. Although I'm ready to believe that this context does not function as a unifying "narrative" for you, it nevertheless provides a context for the reading of your work.

VALENTIN CARRON In Zurich, in the second room, I rather haphazardly piled up a dozen works, as a reserve of ideas containing everything I'm potentially capable of. One of these pieces was called *Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita*. The model for the piece, which I again reproduced at a one to one scale, is kept at the Gianadda Foundation in Martigny, an extraordinary place which has attracted about seven million visitors since it first opened in 1980 (that's 270 000 visitors a year, in a town of 15 000 people) thanks to its exhibitions of classical modern art, its automobile museum, and its museum of Gallo-Roman artifacts! The original sculpture is a metal skeleton representing a soldier, set on a 80 cm high pedestal, on which have been grafted an arm and a leg from a Roman statue whose remains were found a few miles from the city. For the base they used stone from the Gard, in the South of France, to get a more authentic feel. As for the skeleton, it was commissioned from a local neo-modernist sculptor. It's a completely incongruous and bastardized object; I attached a title from a Mike Brandt song ("Laissez moi vivre ma vie"), translated from the French and meaning "Let me live my life!" to my replica of it.

FABRICE STROUN And who is Mike Brandt?

VALENTIN CARRON He was an Israeli Pop singer, discovered in a Tel Aviv nightclub by the variety singers Dalida and Carlos in the 1970s. Apparently he was a charming and beautiful guy, and they brought him to France. He didn't know a single word of French and they dressed him up like an American and made him sing songs in French that sounded like Italian variety. He ended up killing himself. It's a rather sad story. His song "Let me live my life!" is something I could also imagine myself humming. Or it's the statue that could be bellowing it, as a kind of "fuck you" to the alleged autonomy of modernist sculpture. Only by corrupting the program can some kind of freedom be found, as in this Hollywood movie I just saw: "perfect" robots, also intended to be "autonomous," are programmed to work as our slaves, but it is only through the discovery of their own heterogeneous and corrupted nature that they acquire their true autonomy; they end up leaving to live their own life and, finally, leaving us in peace ...

Bracewell, Michael, and Orson Welles, “Some notes on the art of Valentin Carrron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 44-46

Bracewell, Michael, and Orson Welles, “Some notes on the art of Valentin Carrron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 44-46

Some notes on the art of Valentin Carron
from Michael Bracewell and Orson Welles

Harry Lime: "Don't be so gloomy. After all it's not that awful. Like the fellow says, in Italy for thirty years under the Borgias they had warfare, terror, murder, and bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the Renaissance. In Switzerland they had brotherly love—they had 500 years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock. So long Holly."
—*The Third Man*, screenplay by Graham Greene, 1949

Explosions of paint on pristine gallery walls; carved mountain animals; "Ski-bobs"; a tricycle with blades attached to its wheels; a man's suit jacket with a scarlet swastika concealed under one armpit; some designs that appear to be in the style Fernand Léger; a huge model of an axe embedded in a tree stump; some cartoon Alpine scenery; some spooky looking transparent tubes attached to some kind of tank; more explosions of paint; some cheerful letters spelling out an angry "GRRR."

To someone coming to Carron's work with no prior expectations, and no personal agenda on what they would like his work to achieve, there is the immediate sense that here is an artist doing three specific things. Firstly, he is playing with notions of national identity—or to be more precise, he is turning unconsidered perceptions of the Swiss Alpine landscape into a violent cartoon. Secondly, within this translation there is no small amount of exasperation, astute historical awareness and a touch of genuine anger (" ... I spend my entire days making life-size replicas of the objects I abhor ... " Carron has said to Fabrice Stroun). And thirdly, within the considerable breadth of media that Carron employs, he is rounding up the movements of modern Western art since Duchamp, and in a way which is at once curatorial, postmodern and healthily satirical.

Looking at the work of Carron without trying to weigh it down with any cultural historical baggage—rather like listening to a record solely as a piece of music, as opposed to a signifier within an evolved lineage—you feel to be experiencing a deeply felt, teasingly assured and potentially volatile expression of a particular landscape, and the temperament pertaining to that landscape. The impact of the different pieces, in all of their different media (although there are many common denominators of sensibility between them) lies in the tension they embody between moderate, genteel, affluent respectability, and violent, heretical, self-scrutiny. In short, this is an art which seems to pay homage to the traditions of a culture, while simultaneously usurping and re-positioning their values.

In one way, I am reminded of the art of David Shrigley—there is a similar deftness to the way in which the works declare themselves, almost as sentient presences, but representative of a crazed intensity. In another, I could think of Carron's art as being a curious, slightly disturbed offspring, created by a union between Duchamp's belief in the necessity

NO LOGO, 2003

Bracewell, Michael, and Orson Welles, “Some notes on the art of Valentin Carrron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, pp. 44-46

of art's "hilarity" and the postmodern appropriations of American Pop art by Jeff Koons or Mike Kelley.

In terms of feelings, however (and Carron, like Gilbert & George, might well be an artist who is more concerned with feelings than ideas) it seems to me that Carron is interested in temper—which is another quality his art might share with that of David Shrigley. In interviews, Carron has often been asked about his home in Valais, and about the relationship of his work to the way in which Switzerland has been perceived by tourists no less than cultural commentators.

If Switzerland is at times perceived (with or without justification) as a kind of eternally pure, European California—a glorious, pre-Lapsarian fusion of wealth, peace, prosperity, health and breath-taking scenery—then Carron is attempting to describe what might be Switzerland's "shadow" or reverse—the dark or skewed side of all that comfort, tradition and prosperity.* Such a role as Carron's, however, is more exposed and responsible than becoming an exquisite court jester to an audience of the culturally sophisticated. In the art of Valentin Carron there is an edge of genuine anxiety—it could perhaps be described as the artistic equivalent of imminent claustrophobia. His works make use of humour, shock, surprise, irreverence; but it does not seem as though they are happy or able to simply luxuriate, with Swiss ease, in the warmth of their undoubted effect.

Rather, the art of Carron seems to forge a link between a distinctly European sensiblity and the darkly ambiguous neurosis of much contemporary American culture—not least America's contorted relationship with the iconography of its own landscape, as a sacrificial wilderness, alternately feared and enshrined. In his working relationship with the indiginous culture in which he has grown up—with its traditions, craftspeople, regional specialities—Carron seems less concerned with debasing or destroying those values and attainments, and more interested in their mirroring qualities.

In the modern age of a luxury consumer mono-environment, what passes for a "real" culture anyway? And what emotional investment do we maintain in authenticity? Beginning his replies with a certain necessary violence, Carron opens up these questions, and offers a response to Harry Lime's cuckoo clock.

* On a recent trip to Geneva, I saw only two policemen during my three day stay in the centre of the city. They were admiring a Ferrari.

Mosset, Olivier, “Valentin Carron,” *Valentin Carron*, edited by Katya García-Antón and Beatrix Ruf, Zurich: JRPIRINGIER, 2007, p. 47

Valentin Carron

Olivier Mosset

UNTITLED, 2003

My mother, who spent her whole life waiting for me to get a serious job, used to love bears. Now, one of Valentin Carron's emblematic works is a sculpture of a bear that looks as though it has been carved out of a tree trunk. But is that really what it is and who exactly did what? We are told that Valentin Carron systematically delegates the actual making of his pieces to skilled craftsmen; and that his works play on simultaneous levels of reality, sometimes using false wood, sometimes false marble, to give the sculptures the appearance of being at once the "real thing" and "anything but it." I might as well make myself clear from the outset: I am not interested in these problems of fake, imitation, or authenticity. Like Ryman, I think that what counts is not what you do, but *how* you do it. And, I hasten to add, *who* does it.

I asked myself these questions way back, at a time when my two colleagues Toroni and Buren had launched out in producing works made by others. Of course, anyone could do what we were doing, but you still had to *do it* ... And the whole point is that a Buren made by Toroni is not really a Buren. Painting (or the bear) transcends its technique: the presence of the object (or the animal, as with Jeff Koons' puppy for instance) is powerful enough for technique to take a back seat and the rhetoric of the materials to fade away. The artist himself is just one variable in this process—what remains is art or, here, the bear. And, while in Duchamp's famous equation it is indeed the spectator who makes a place for the picture within the art system, nonetheless it is the maker who produces the picture—unless it produces itself.

I obviously have a liking for Valentin Carron's "abstract" sculptures and I like his use of "paintball" for wall painting. The fact that his position may be seen to contradict those of a young (French-speaking) Swiss scene with which I feel some affinity in no way lessens my appreciation of a monumental cross in white roughcast, or an unlikely space from which the *Partisans Song* played on church bells seems to be coming. Because ultimately aesthetic decisions are not the privilege of the artistic field: what Valentin Carron's work shows is that there is such a thing as a *formalism of everyday life*, an inner need to be constantly making aesthetic decisions, whether it is picking an iridescent color for the car, repainting the bathroom, or choosing a tie.

In this sense, if the way that Valentin Carron looks on whatever craft production interests him results from a particular historical possibility (the designation of readymade objects), the artistic approach behind this personal view (its "re-constructive" capacity, vernacular aspect, or technical specialization) is something all his own. It is what he does, and this style of his is a part of the story.

Jasper, Adam, “Valentin Carron: Alpine aesthetics and Modernism; Imitation and a boar’s head,”
Frieze, Issue 107, May 2007, p. 136

frieze

Valentin Carron

FOCUS

Alpine aesthetics and Modernism; imitation and a boar’s head

‘I spend entire days making life-size replicas of the objects I abhor…’
Valentin Carron

In his book The Invention of Tradition (1992), Eric Hobsbawm argues that many of the symbols and rituals Europeans hold most sacred are not proof of the unbroken continuity of culture, but rather the opposite; the more stridently a craft or rite stakes its claim to authenticity, the more it demonstrates a need to conceal the deep anxieties associated with industrialization, mass immigration and all the rifts that the 19th and 20th centuries perpetrated.

The ramifications of this thesis are deftly demonstrated in the work of Swiss artist Valentin Carron, many of whose pieces play explicitly on the conventions of Alpine aesthetic traditions. As the artist points out, Valais – the area of Switzerland in which he lives and works – is actually a region whose traditions were fabricated at the end of the 19th century: ‘At that point, a political desire to create a national cultural identity emerged. Slowly, people started making pseudo-authentic objects and formulating rules for the proper design of chalets.’ The endemic Swiss Style that

Jasper, Adam, “Valentin Carron: Alpine aesthetics and Modernism; Imitation and a boar’s head,”
Frieze, Issue 107, May 2007, p. 136

is seen today is actually the result of a perverse evolutionary process that selects objects whose original design was wholly determined by the pragmatics of scarcity, and miscegenates them with redundant symbols of Swissness – from edelweiss to the Swiss Cross. Holzschnitt furniture and carved balconies, dry stone walls and festive dirndls all become artefacts (and therefore evidence) of an imaginary Switzerland that never was.

Carron’s work Château-Synthèse (2000) is aimed squarely against this sentimentality. It’s a bottle of wine synthesized from start to finish by Valais chemists, thus lacking an official certificate of origin and unable to carry any sort of regional pride whatsoever. For Carron ‘nothing is more global than local issues’, since it is at the local level that the effects of globalization are most immediate, most clearly felt. His taxidermied boar’s head in After The Hunting Rush (2002), severed from its body and planted on a wall, stands not just for Swiss culture, but for the fate of culture in general. What distinguishes the Swiss Alpine Style from the more arbitrary symptoms of the international trade in tourist kitsch is that, in a curious redoublement, it also appears in Swiss provinces – ‘Heidiland’, as Carron dryly refers to it – as a sort of reassuring décor, a local means of asserting identity.

Kitsch, as Clement Greenberg defined it, is the opposite of culture, a formulaic imitation of genuine cultural products that infects the healthy body of a society and replaces the good with the bad. In pieces like Authentik (2000) – in which the artist commissioned a local blacksmith, who specialized in signage for storefronts and chalets, to create a sign for him specifing only the letter ‘k’ – Carron undermines Greenberg’s model by demonstrating that it is precisely the search for authenticity that drives it away. Greenberg notoriously hated Pop art, but it is the only genre that evades this process, for by being intentionally inauthentic, it becomes (as Susan Sontag observed) camp. In Carron’s realm, irony is the only inoculation we have left against kitsch.

Had artists continued to make art according to Greenberg’s dictums, they would produce nothing but kitsch. It stands to reason that, in recent times, Carron, both in his collaboration with Mai-Thu Perret at the Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva (2005) and in his solo shows at the Kunsthalle Zürich (2007) and Galerie Eva Presenhuber (2005), has turned to mining the archives of 20th–century art, subjecting it to the same awful alchemy that turns treasure into trash. L’homme (The man, 2006), a version of Alberto Giacometti’s original Walking Man (1947) – once an emissary of High Modernism but now, through overexposure and imitation, degenerated to an aesthetic refugee – flips the bird at

Jasper, Adam, “Valentin Carron: Alpine aesthetics and Modernism; Imitation and a boar’s head,”
Frieze, Issue 107, May 2007, p. 136

his audience. Pop reinterpretations of Ferdinand Léger’s paintings, such as Fruits et Légumes (Fruits and Vegetables, 2006), are printed on tarpaulin strung on a galvanized frame, and look as if they were stolen from a café’s outdoor décor. Malicious parodies of banal, Modernist, Henry Moore-ish bronzes abound. Sculptures like Hate Eternal II (2006) are blatantly fake, made in Styrofoam and cast in a resin that advertises their lightness and transience.

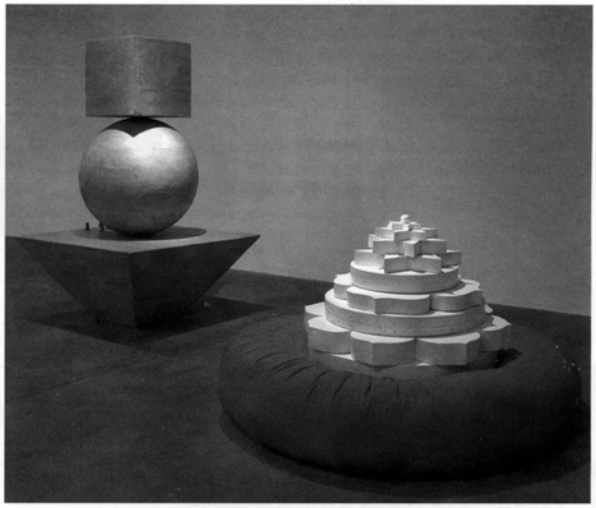
Via his knock-off pieces, Carron has placed himself in a lineage that includes Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol and Elaine Sturtevant. Like Warhol’s Brillo Box works of the 1960s, Carron’s objects look mass-produced but are in fact handmade. The twist is provided by the addition of another layer; for kitsch objects are designed to look handmade but are in fact mass-produced, and so Carron’s appropriation of them brings us full circle, from art to trash to art again. It’s an act of necromancy that can only be partially successful, because it succeeds by being insincere, and so Carron’s objects sometimes seem almost ghoulish, haunting their prototypes for their failure to fulfil the promise of high culture to improve the taste of the masses.

Is Carron a cynic? The question cannot be answered outright. His work blocks the possibility of catharsis at every turn, and radiates a disenchantment that is contagious. At the same time, there is a sense that the frustration he induces in his audience is no different to the frustration he experiences: a genuine exasperation at the emptiness at the heart of contemporary culture.

(All quotes taken from an interview with the artist by Fabrice Stroun in the exhibition catalogue: Valentin Carron, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2007)

Adam Jasper

Verhagen, Marcus, “Reviews: Valentin Carron, Mai-Thu Perret, Chisenhale Gallery, London,”
Art Monthly, Issue 296, May 2006, pp. 41-42



l to r
Valentin Carron
Sweet Revolution 2002
Mai-Thu Perret
They Made no Attempt to Rescue Art from Ritual 2002

Valentin Carron
Mai-Thu Perret

Chisenhale Gallery London March 29 to May 14

This is at first sight a disappointing show. The layout seems bitty and cramped, and many of the pieces struggle to stand out or look naked and unimposing under the gallery's high ceiling. But it soon becomes clear that this sense of flatness and deflation is what holds the show together; more than that, it gives it, perversely, a certain urgency. 'Solid Objects' is a dialogue between Valentin Carron and Mai-Thu Perret, two young Swiss artists who share an interest in figures and forms that embody elevated sentiments, and in watching them come unstuck. Many of the pieces in the show speak in visionary tones, sketching feelings for wholeness and commonality, patriotic feeling or utopian longing, but the artists are careful to remind us that the heroic past is more often than not a self-serving conceit and that shining futures have had their day. They describe collective hopes and identities but go on to stage the downsizing of the hopes and the fracturing of the identities.

Carron is drawn to objects that are puffed up with a sense of their own purpose, to memorials, trophies and relics. Here he reproduces an 18th-century cannon and a monument in the shape of an eagle on a high stone base, phallic emblems of armed power as the bedrock of national or regional allegiance. But the confidence they project is disturbed by their positioning in the gallery and undone by their materials. The cannon sits in a corner, its barrel pointing to the wall, while the eagle stands opposite the entrance but faces the other way. The cannon is made out of polystyrene, and the eagle out of painted fibreglass. The weight of a monument is a measure of its durability and its connection with a given place; light as they are, these pieces give the lie to their own symbolism. They become the vehicles of a kind of generic bombast, a phallic assertiveness without purpose or content. As if to drive the point home, a seam is clearly visible in the eagle's base; the piece can, it would seem, be dismantled for easier transport. Hilariously, the artist has created a strident monument to local feeling that can be moved around at will. This is how Carron operates: he takes a monument and lifts it out of context, letting its rhetorical forms stand out in all their tiredness and pomp.

On the far side of the gallery Carron shows *Sweet Revolution*, 2002, a pseudo-modernist sculpture that is made out of polystyrene and fibreglass but given the look of poured concrete. On its base is a collection of poppers, and the drugs effectively dismiss the sculpture as an aesthetic proposition, turning it into an insignificant prop, the backdrop to an imaginary party or romp. Here Carron traces the trajectory of an ideal of pure form that once animated Modernism and now informs the kind of sculpture that sits unnoticed in dark corners of parks and housing estates. He suggests that you may have to get high before you can see anything in such pieces beyond the skewed priorities of the bureaucrats who

Verhagen, Marcus, “Reviews: Valentin Carron, Mai-Thu Perret, Chisenhale Gallery, London,”
Art Monthly, Issue 296, May 2006, pp. 41-42

commissioned them. (Much of the work in this show is funny, but you never get the sense that it is appeased by its own wit – and that sets it apart from the work of many of the artists who treat the same issues.)

It is in *Sweet Revolution* that Carron's concerns dovetail most clearly with those of Perret, who regularly looks back to Modernism in works that express both a longing for its experimental thrust and a bitterness at its failures. Among her pieces in the show is *A Uniform Sampler*, 2004, a group of five papier mâché women who lie on the floor in a line, wearing clothes that were realised for Perret by Ligia Dias and modelled on the Constructivist textiles and costumes of Varvara Stepanova and Liubov Popova. Of the figures, two raise their legs; the group is apparently practicing a yogic or gymnastic exercise, some collective rite that will prepare them for the rigours of a new world. Below their wigs they have coloured dots in the place of faces, the dots looking faintly like targets and so giving the women an air of vulnerability that is confirmed by their slender, parched arms and legs. The figures are at once pioneers and corpses. What they embody is not a utopian project as much as a utopian desire, and one that is already shot through with disappointment – one that is, in effect, mummified.

In other pieces Perret looks to the western enthusiasm for eastern religious practices. Another papier-mâché figure sits in the lotus position, wearing an old military uniform and a noose around her neck. Next to Carron's *Sweet Revolution* is one of the show's most effective pieces, a white ceramic construction made out of superimposed round and star-shaped forms, surrounded by a soft red cloth-covered ring. The structure in the middle looks like a three-dimensional mandala and the ring like a peculiarly impractical meditation cushion, the matt white glaze giving the raised mandala the handsome sheen of an expensive lamp or vase. The piece conjures a hypothetical owner who has a keen but indiscriminate interest in eastern spirituality, conflating Buddhist and Hindu practices, and views it as a seamless part of a finely honed lifestyle. Perret seems to see New Ageism as thoroughly penetrated by the pressures it set out to deflect.

Carron and Perret seize on ideals and their material expressions only to hollow them out. While Carron's bantamweight monuments siphon the relevance and belief from the commonplaces of local pride, Perret's totemic furniture and embalmed figures sap the promise of novel lifestyles. Running through all of the work is a sharp, hollowing rage at the eclipse of Modernism's radical aspirations and at the shoddiness of the dreams that have taken their place. ▮

MARCUS VERHAGEN is an art historian and critic.

Scharrer, Eva, "Valentin Carron, Galerie Eva Presenhuber," *Artforum*, March 2006, p. 307

ARTFORUM

ZURICH

Valentin Carron

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

"Rellik," the title of young Swiss artist Valentin Carron's debut, refers to the English word "relic" with its span of connotations, from disdained leftover to religious veneration. Reading it backward, however, it becomes "Killer." Apparently, "Rellik" is also the nickname of the first graffiti tagger from Martigny, Carron's hometown in western Switzerland. The pun is typical of Carron's practice, which draws on symbols of cultural identity—always with an awareness of their complex (sub)cultural recoding. Carron comes from the canton of Valais, typically thought of as the most authentic, "wild," and traditional part of Switzerland—though these traditions turn out to have been fabricated in the nineteenth century out of a need for national identity. Carron makes copies of symbolically charged objects, not only from his own culture but also from many others, always questioning the meaning of tradition and authenticity. His hybrid, deeply ironic sculptures often have a martial character. Fetched from the abysms of cultural heritage and reformulated in synthetic materials, they slowly unveil their highly ambiguous symbolic meanings.

Eight replicas of eighteenth-century French cannons were displayed in the gallery's first room. Made of painted polyester, they bear such titles as *Le Conquérant* (The Conqueror), *Le Souffleteur* (The Boxer of Ears), and *Le Dédain* (Contempt; all works 2005). Two leaned against the wall, six others rested on pedestals—unadorned, immobile, and functionless. The presentation was clearly in a museum-like minimal aesthetic, but the objects themselves, with their individual greenish faux-bronze patina, recall more the cheap replicas sold in souvenir shops or sitting on mantelpieces in certain living rooms.

A second room was divided by a structure made of rows of black imitation iron stakes with dangerously sharp teeth, resembling a dark sci-fi vision of a Gallic defensive rampart. This fence, titled *Rance Club*, obscured the other objects displayed in the room. Locked between the last row and the rear gallery wall stood the sculpture *Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita* (Let Me Live My Life), a reproduction of a Roman warrior from the Fondation Pierre Gianadda in Martigny—or rather, his sparse remains: one arm and a leg, fitted together by iron rods to reconstruct a human figure in the form of a cartoonlike modernist sculpture. The walls around the fence were decorated with psychedelic computer prints—not exactly the kind of art you expect to see in that kind of gallery. The prints were made by a friend of Carron from Martigny, an outsider artist. Gathering such heterogeneous objects moots discordant understandings of what defines art. Carron plays the role of a patron here, representing his hometown via its most diverse artistic wares.

Valentin Carron, *Lasciatemi vivere la mia vita* (Let Me Live My Life), 2005. Polystyrene, fiber, resin, metal rods, and acrylic paint, 12' 1⅛" x 5' 3" x 3' 9".

Between the two rooms a little robot, *Gloria*, wandered like a funny outer-space creature. In truth, it was an automatic vacuum cleaner. While the cannons are fakes, this one was real, a readymade—and a winking quotation of various art-historical moments, from Duchamp to Jeff Koons.

—*Eva Scharrer*

Perret, Mai-Thu, “Valentin Carron, CAN, Neuchâtel, Switzerland,” *Frieze*, Issue 60, July-August 2001

frieze

Valentin Carron

CAN, NEUCHATEL, SWITZERLAND

It seems that a generation will always idealize and hark back to the period just before it was born, that last moment before its members are able to recall the past with their own eyes. Valentin Carron’s series of sculptures ‘Skibobs’ (1998-2000) plays with the generational nostalgia for the 1970s also evident in such revivals and current fetishes as blaxploitation and gore movies, or the seminal electronic sounds of Kraftwerk and Giorgio Moroder. An impractically designed snow bicycle, the Skibob was a short lived and expensive winter holiday fad from the 1970s. Since you rode it sitting upright it looked more dignified and cool than the childish sleigh, and, unlike proper skis, it enabled you to pose while sliding down the slopes without going through the trouble of actually learning a more difficult technique.

Collected from garage sales and personal ads in Carron’s native region, Valais in the Swiss Alps, Skibobs were the focus of this recent exhibition. Two of them - Skibob 6 (Authier), (all works 2000) and Skibob 7 (Authier) - were lined up side by side, slouching on their front runners like desirable boyish toys in an upmarket store, to the soundtrack of a breakbeat looped on a cheap drum machine. Lovingly restored and sometimes customized (with the help of local craftspeople) to erase logos and brand names, the most interesting thing about ‘Skibobs’ is the way they function as formalized and opaque sculptures yet remain found objects pregnant

with links and relationships to the real world. Beautiful and desirable commodities - a 1970s-obsessed skate kid’s wet dream - but also visibly inadequate, Skibobs combined an improbably new ‘fetish finish’ aspect with a rather uncanny feeling of obsolescence, in effect crystallizing qualities of vintage objects in general.

If ‘Skibobs’ hinted at the rather cool, removed figure of the artist as collector and restorer, the only other piece in the show, Untitled, revealed Carron assuming a much more ‘warm’ and involved stance. Ironically collapsing Jackson Pollock’s famous penchant for liquor and his gestural and expressive painting style, Carron stained the entire exhibition room, from floor to ceiling, with all-over drippings of red wine. Although the ‘performance’ was not documented, I couldn’t avoid imagining the scene of a drunken caricature of an artist spilling wine around in a hilariously pathetic spoof of the creative drive at work, in the style of Paul McCarthy. However, rather wisely perhaps, all that Carron actually chose to leave on view was this activity’s suggestive trace, its leftovers in the form of a smelly yet pretty drip pattern wallpainting which took on a greyish tinge as the wine oxidized.

There is an added twist to the work’s clever parody, something that makes it both closer to home and more interesting than a simple deconstruction of the greatest macho myth in art history. Valais, frequently alluded to in Carron’s work, derives most of its income from two sources: the exploitation of its mountain resorts for the tourist industry and the production of wine. Its inhabitants are also famous throughout Switzerland for their hard drinking. In this context, it is obvious that Carron’s wallpainting actually collides two different histories, an artistic one and a regional one. In fact, this is what I like best about Carron’s work: not so much its slick international, post-Conceptual veneer, nor the artist’s ease in suddenly shifting positions to play the expressive primitive, but the fact that he is driven by something altogether different and more bizarre: his love for the local and the vernacular. ‘Skibobs’ literally came from somewhere close to home - some house in the valley not far from Carron’s small town. After all, if one can make art from Las Vegas, why not from the Swiss Alps?

Mai-Thu Perret

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McDermott, Emily, “Deconstructing Classicism,” *InterviewMagazine.com,* February 8, 2016

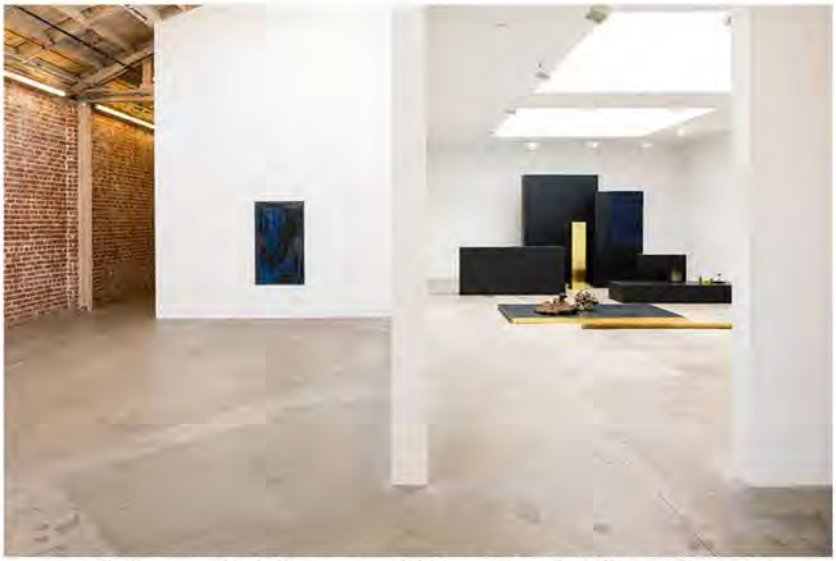
Interview

ART

DECONSTRUCTING CLASSICISM

By EMILY MCDERMOTT

Published 02/08/2016



Installation view of Isabelle Cornaro exhibition at Hannah Hoffman Gallery, 2016.

Trained as an art historian, artist, and curator, Isabelle Cornaro deconstructs classical landscapes through minimal and immersive forms. Each piece, made for a series of large-scale installations, consists of pedestals ranging in size, arranged to form a landscape

when seen from afar. To create perspective, the rectangular structures become taller as the installation becomes deeper. Moving through the installation separates the plinths, however, refocusing the viewer's gaze upon the decorative objects they support. Many of the objects evoke notions of a man-made society (jewelry) and the natural world (wood). They also lend themselves to Cornaro's attention to perspective, as smaller objects are placed at the furthest point of the installation and atop the higher bases, while larger objects appear toward the front, closer to the ground. Currently at Hannah Hoffman Gallery in Los Angeles, the Paris-based artist presents her latest development within the series, simply titled *Landscape*, which incorporates rolls of velvet fabric and metallic gold paint amongst mostly black, alluding to her exploration of fetishism.

"Since classical landscape paintings are built in the same way, there are rules to build an equilibrated image," the artist says of her process. Cornaro doesn't begin with specific source imagery, but rather takes the established rules and applies them to her minimal concepts. Alongside *Landscape* at Hannah Hoffman, Cornaro also presents works from her "Orgon Doors" series, which mimic the overall visual effect of the installation but on a 2-D plane. The wall-based rubber castings reference 16th- and 17th-century Mannerism, yet this is done through decidedly industrial compositions. Another pair of works, categorized as "drawings" by Cornaro despite their lack of graphite or any material traditionally used for drawing, present thin bands of human hair wrapped tightly around painted wood. The works' simple, grid-like formations and geometry at once reflect their neighboring *Landscape*.

In addition to her show in Los Angeles, Cornaro currently also has a solo exhibition at La Verrière (an art space at the Hermès boutique in Brussels) and was just named the 2016 Curator at the Ricard Fondation. We spoke with her over the phone, just after she returned to Paris from L.A.

EMILY MCDERMOTT: What drew you toward gold for this installation?

ISABELLE CORNARO: One of the paintings I started to work from was a landscape that included water. I was interested in the notion of reflections, in regards to the notion of fetishism, which is quite important in all of these installations. I thought it would be interesting to have a mix of matte surfaces and very shiny, reflective surfaces. To me, the reflective surfaces give a sort of liquidity to the work and also comment on the notion of fetishism.

The velvet plays a bit on the same idea of fetishism because it has something very optic—you want to look at it, you want to touch the surface. It's very tactile, but it's also quite matte. It comes as a sort of opposition. With the very shiny reflection, it absorbs the light.

MCDERMOTT: Can you also tell me about the casts, especially the one with the blue abstract pattern? I don't recall seeing anything that abstract in your castings before.

CORNARO: For the first time in this series, indeed, I introduced a color that's strong as a splash. It was a way of adding an expressionist gesture, but very fixed, very frozen, inside something that is composed. I play with a lot of different moments in artists' stories and objects from common popular culture. I like the idea of mixing different references—or images or patterns or archetypes—I have in mind in order to recreate a new comment on it.

MCDERMOTT: Regarding the hair drawings, why do you refer to them as drawings? Traditionally speaking, they aren't exactly drawings...

CORNARO: I often go beyond the traditional terms we give to artworks. For instance, a large installation, it's a sort of drawing in the space. But in the opposite way, the drawings with the hair did use Plexiglas and drawings, but they are composed like lines and have something very graphic. It all starts from really abstract lines that I put together and it's really abstract minimal work, so that's why I call it drawing. Actually, these drawings were sort of prototypes for the installation because they are built in the same way. You have an abstract minimal grid, a geometric grid, and inside this grid, there are figurative or emotionally charged elements. For the drawings, it's the hair, and in the installation it's the objects.

MCDERMOTT: Why hair?

CORNARO: Because all these works are about the relation we have to objects as extensions of ourselves, with feelings, memories, emotions or so on. So the hair is one of our first extensions of ourselves, because it's both organic and very like an object when it's cut or out of the body.

MCDERMOTT: Where did you get the hair?

CORNARO: It started incidentally because someone gave me hair that was quite old and I used it for drawings. After, I collected it from shops for people who want extensions—you know, you can buy

human hair in these shops for extensions. It's a very popular part of pop culture. You want to get your extensions and you go to these shops.

MCDERMOTT: It circles back to the idea of fetishism.

CORNARO: Exactly, and also the representation of the self and how you show yourself.

MCDERMOTT: How do you see yourself in these works? Do you even see yourself in these works or is it more a reflection of society?

CORNARO: In the first place, especially for the large installation, it was very much to relate to society, specifically thinking of the colonial history of European countries. There were a lot of references to colonialism, for instance to the colonialism of Africa by the French, Belgian, British, and so on, and to the notion of imperialism. After that it moved to something more personal and kind of existential—this idea that yes, the consciousness of your own death or the will to grab things with the gaze. All these optic and sub optic feelings are very personal, emotional, and existential things, more than social.

MCDERMOTT: What drew you to the African colonies as a starting point?

CORNARO: I actually was raised in post-colonial Central Africa. I was also, with art historians, tracing the notions of landscape and how you build a landscape and how this is a kind of ideological setup, the representation of the landscape. At some point it mixed with things regarding the colonial historical frame that I was also interested in.

MCDERMOTT: Switching topics, I know that you were also just named the 2016 curator for the Ricard Foundation. What are your plans for that?

CORNARO: I actually don't know yet. I'm just starting now. At the beginning I thought that it would be a rather long list of 12 people and now I'm looking at the precedent edition and it seems like it's good when it's a bit smaller. In the preceding editions it was six to eight people, so I know the amount of people but I don't know who yet...

MCDERMOTT: And you also have a show in Brussels at the Hermès Foundation that has a lot of bright colors and involves the use of spray paint. Can you tell me a little bit about that show and what

some of the starting points were for it?

CORNARO: The installation is also part of the landscape series, such as the one that's at Hannah Hoffman, but I wanted to reduce the amount of objects in the installation. In this installation there's a perspective created with both the sizes and arrangements of the pieces, but also with the objects. You have a big object in front and a small object in the back. At the Foundation Hermès there are less objects; I thought it would be interesting to build atmospheric perspective, so to say, with the colors. I was hoping that the spray paint applied to the prints would blur the geometric edges of the installation.

MCDERMOTT: You also reduced the number of objects for the Hannah Hoffman show. What made you want to do this?

CORNARO: I think that I try to reduce it to play more on the minimalistic aspect of the installation, on the geometric construction basically. Since I've been doing it for a few years, I try to be more precise than I was in the beginning. I think it's stronger if you have fewer objects that are more carefully presented. Also, it's easier to make links in between them. They are more precisely chosen and it allows me to have less of them.

MCDERMOTT: As they say, less is more.

CORNARO: Somehow, yes. It's funny.

"ISABELLE CORNARO" WILL BE ON VIEW AT HANNAH HOFFMAN GALLERYIN LOS ANGELES THROUGH MARCH 19, 2016.

Rosenmeyer, Aoife, “Isabelle Cornaro,” *Frieze*, February 2015, issue 169

frieze

2

ISABELLE CORNARO
Galerie Francesca Pia, Zürich

After her orderly, light-flooded exhibition at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2013, French artist Isabelle Cornaro's recent show in Zürich came as a surprise. Visitors to Galerie Francesca Pia were plunged into a dark room full of competing, urgent filmic impressions from 1941 to 1969 in the midst of which were three works by Cornaro herself. The films not by Cornaro – all but one from a programme curated in collaboration with Jonathan Pouthier and recently screened at the Centre Pompidou, Paris – were from the American cinematic and artistic avant-gardes that reflect the artist's own interests. For example, Jack Smith's *Song for Rent* (1969), in which a figure in a wheelchair, in drag, leafs through a scrapbook filled with Sarah Bernhardt clippings to the tune of 'God Bless America', or a 1949 reel demonstrating how Technicolor films illustrate goods like foodstuffs or carpets. Each of these films operates in relation and counterpoint to cinematic norms – mocking, disrupting or, as in the case of the Technicolor reel, using saturated colour to render its content almost unrecognizable. Francis Lee's *1941* (1941) has the most in common with Cornaro's films visually. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor – before he could have known its consequences – Lee filmed streaming red, white and blue paint, broken light bulbs and flames: minor events made catastrophic in close-up. A similar drama takes place in Cornaro's *Choses* (Things, 2014) in which a collage of spray-painted objects is engulfed by dripping viscous white, black and yellow pigment.

All three of Cornaro's looped films shown here are less than two and a half minutes long. Like *Choses*, *Figures* (2011) and *Amplifications* (2014) focus on small objects in close up and convey the artist's ambivalence to her found media. *Figures* pans and cuts over a selection of bric-a-brac: buttons, lighters, compacts, jewellery and torn money lined up on a grey surface. Occasionally these objects are bathed in bright, unseen lights; some of them are also subjected to an unexplained shaking. *Amplifications* features cut-glass ornaments and bangles lit by a range of filters, turning them blue, red and purple. In both films, Cornaro uses colour as an oppressive mask; the lighting rendering the objects even less comprehensible. In place of the repetition of sculptural casting she is best known for, duplication here comes via the looping of the films, an endless circuit petrifying them just as readily.

Sculpture also featured in the exhibition, with Cornaro using a rarely used, low-ceilinged space in the building to show eight black reliefs. Made in coloured elastomer, a rubber-like substance, from three casts, the works employed the artist's customary technique of creating a mould from assorted objects: the portrait format 'Orgon Door I' series (2013) showed petrified ropes, chains, coins and wooden battens; the landscape format 'Orgon Door III' series (2014) featured horizontally arranged lines of rope and chain and 'Orgon Door IV' (2014) was a baroque frieze of jewellery, stones, printing blocks and trinkets that looked like beetles and rulers. 'Orgone energy' – a pseudoscience developed in the 1930s by Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich – is supposedly a life force that can be harvested in 'accumulators'. Cornaro's accumulation of junk into the language of decoration, in a material that renders it sumptuous, suggests her faith in the innate, extraordinary power of things to endure and withstand the vagaries of how we look and see.

AOIFE ROSENMEYER

2
Isabelle Cornaro
Amplifications, 2014, digitized 16mm film still

Galvez, Paul, “Suspended Animation,” *Artforum*, February 2015, pp. 210-217

ARTFORUM

Suspended Animation

PAUL GALVEZ ON THE ART OF ISABELLE CORNARO

View of "Isabelle Cornaro," 2013, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland. Three works from the series "*Homonymes I*," 2010–12.

Galvez, Paul, "Suspended Animation," *Artforum*, February 2015, pp. 210-217

Left: **Isabelle Cornaro**, ***Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (version VI)* (Landscape with Poussin and Eyewitnesses [version VI]), 2014**, wood, paint, brass sheet, log, stone, marble, brass urn, opaline, velvet, terra-cotta, bronze, brass chain, velvet. From the series "*Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires*," 2008–. Installation view, M Museum Leuven, Belgium. Photo: Dirk Pauwels.

Right: **Isabelle Cornaro**, ***God Boxes (columns)*, 2014**, steel, resin. From the series "God Boxes (columns)," 2014. Installation view, High Line, New York, 2014. Photo: Guillaume Zicarelli.

ON NEW YORK'S HIGH LINE, between Gansevoort Street and the Standard Hotel, a black monolith encrusted with strange paneled reliefs rises from the disused railroad tracks that run through this elevated park. There seem to be objects embedded within the reliefs, but on closer inspection, it turns out that these are not actually lengths of rope or bricks, but casts of them fossilized in a tar-like rubber. Their ornamental arrangement suggests a message written in code, like the indecipherable hieroglyphics of some alien civilization emerging from the wreckage of our own. Thus arises the paradox that the obelisk seems to speak both a common contemporary parlance and a lost tongue.

Such reconfigurations of quotidian objects are typical of the work of the French artist Isabelle Cornaro, who has in recent years established herself as one of the leading younger artists working with diverse kinds of assemblage and installation. Like many of her generation, she is as at ease in painting and sculpture as she is in digital imaging and video. But unlike many in her cohort, she is rigorously consistent in her approach across media and in her choice of materials, which often come from a specific period of postwar industrial production. Her process invariably involves taking cast-off detritus—things like old pieces of metal, five-and-dime ceramics, vintage carpets, used lightbulbs, discarded tools, and other anonymous bric-a-brac—and reassembling it according to a simple system or set of categories.

Sometimes Cornaro borrows her logic from another artist: The High Line piece is premised on instructions detailed in an unrealized project by Edward Kienholz; the installations titled *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* (Landscape with Poussin and Eyewitnesses), 2008–, are groupings of objects and plinths that reconstruct in 3-D the systems of perspective found in Nicolas Poussin's paintings, with mass-produced items standing in for toga-clad figures and temples receding in space to a distant vanishing point. Usually, however, the organizational system is of her own design. In a 2013 interview, for example, she described the methodology by which she divided the objects cast in gray plaster to form the series of sculptures "*Homonymes* I," 2010–12. "I identified three distinct families of objects: naturalistic objects (even when streamlined) in the shape of a duck, a flower, etc.; objects carved with decorative motifs, repeated and stylized; and objects sporting geometrical form. . . . In other words, my categories were naturalism, stylization, and abstraction."

Within the collections that are the primary locus of her work, Cornaro tends to use rather colorless kitsch (not the over-the-top, campy kind), and she avoids the psychosexual imagery one associates with fashion and advertising. She has stated on numerous occasions her aversion to shopping, despite the necessity of doing so to find things for her work. She

Galvez, Paul, "Suspended Animation," *Artforum*, February 2015, pp. 210-217

Clockwise, from left: **Isabelle Cornaro, *Homonymes I*, 2010**, dyed plaster, 47 ¼ × 23 ⅛ × 13 ⅜". **Isabelle Cornaro, *Homonymes I*, 2010**, dyed plaster, 47 ¼ × 23 ⅛ × 14 ¼". **Isabelle Cornaro, *Homonymes I*, 2010**, dyed plaster, 47 ¼ × 23 ⅛ × 6 ¾". All from the series "*Homonymes I*," 2010–12. Installation views, Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris, 2010. Photos: Guillaume Zicarelli.

also has described the experience of flea markets as "slightly pornographic . . . half-sentimental, half-lecherous." In other words, there is a deep resistance within Cornaro's work to the irrational fetishism that Marx famously argued lay at the heart of our relationship to the commodity, even while her charged wording seems to concede the inevitability of such projections, and perhaps even her own susceptibility to them. It might be useful, then, to think of her collections as a form of counterdiscourse. They mimic the way the modern world imposes a system of order—a taxonomy that purports to bring some kind of rationality to the disorienting phantasmagoria of consumer capitalism—on its products, whether in the supermarket aisle or in the museum. But by submitting those products to another logic, the work unhinges or upsets the dominant system, however briefly. It's notable that the systems Cornaro marshals against consumer systems are often explicitly linked to art, whether based on the ideas of artists (Kienholz or Poussin) or on stylistic categories (naturalism, stylization, abstraction). If she militates against fetishism and spectacle, she doesn't militate against the aesthetic—to the contrary, she attends to style, form, the composition of a frame of film or the contours of objects with what might almost seem rapt fascination, as if in secret acknowledgment that the anti-aesthetic has run its course (and has been irrevocably co-opted by the market). In Cornaro's hands, the aesthetic is not so much the classic antagonist of consumer culture; it is rather that culture's shadow and double.

CORNARO'S ENIGMATIC INSTALLATIONS distance her work from that of a slightly earlier generation of French artists. It was painfully clear in the recent Paris double bill of Pierre Huyghe at the Centre Pompidou and Philippe Parreno at the Palais de Tokyo that critical practice, in order to function at all, is increasingly obliged to adopt the baroque scale and blockbuster scenography of mass entertainment. It is against the background of this recent history—not unique to France, of course—that Cornaro's deceptively unassuming work must be read.

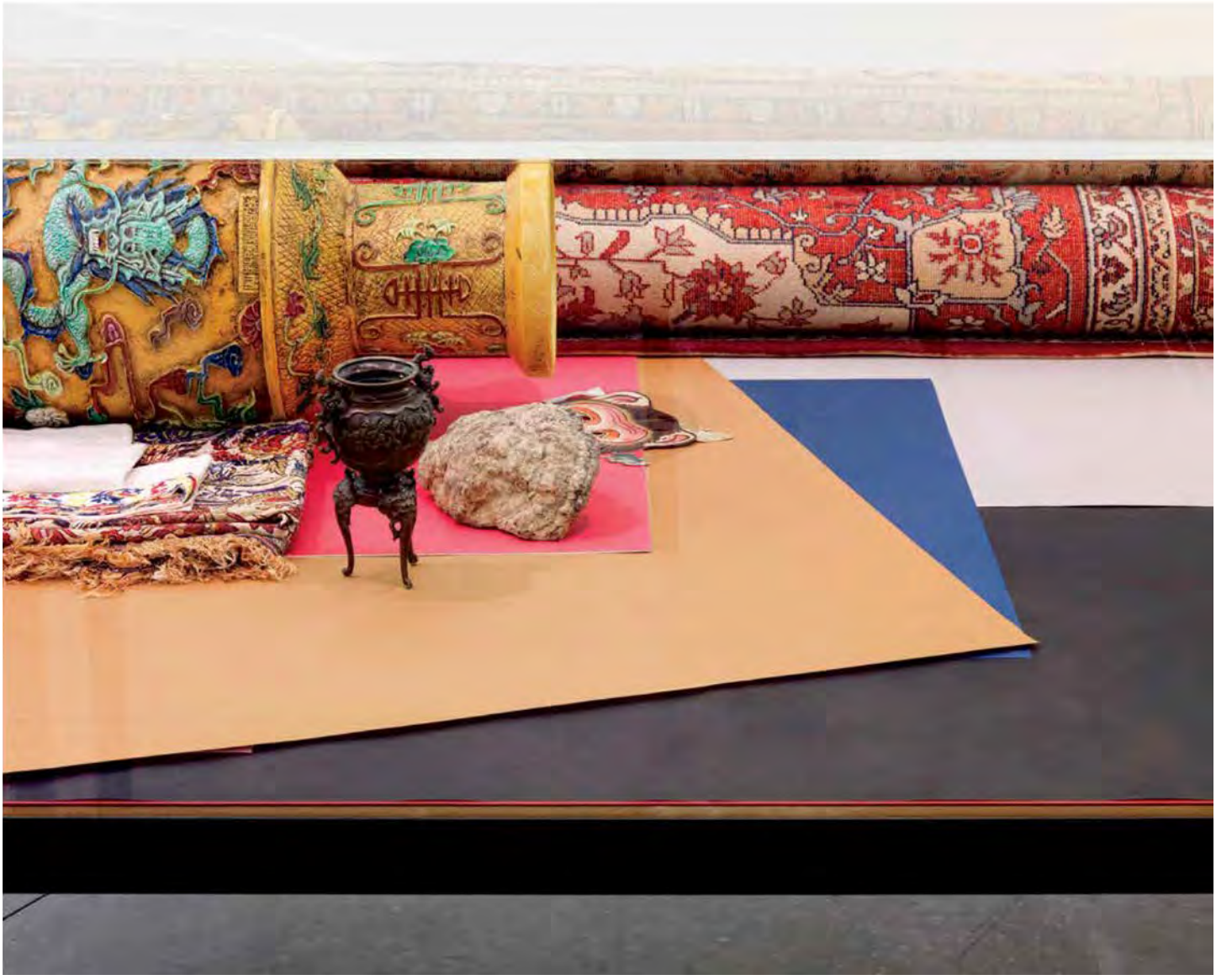
Perhaps the most literal example of Cornaro's antispectacular attitude is *Le proche et le lointain I* (The Near and the Distant I), 2011, a set of six table-height vitrines housing various configurations of the artist's usual defunct objects, grouped according to their degree of abstraction and verisimilitude. In one glass case, a stack of simple wooden blocks laid on red paper looks horns with a motley crew of faded bibelots, while a blue-and-white Oriental carpet serves as intermediary. The blocks themselves clearly allude to the geometric, constructive nature of modernist abstraction, though here filtered through a child's eyes, as if a five-year-old had built a Suprematist architectural model. The adjacent tchotchkes appear as the blocks' decorative, debased other. The two strands—avant-garde and kitsch—are literally interwoven in the form of the carpet, here simultaneously color field and ornament.

Since gaining traction in the late-1990s era of archive fever, the faux museum display has become such a well-established trope as to have lost all power to surprise, threatening to devolve into the kitschiness of curatorial navel-gazing. Cornaro, however,

Galvez, Paul, “Suspended Animation,” *Artforum*, February 2015, pp. 210-217

Isabelle Cornaro, *Le proche et le lointain I* (The Near and the Distant I) (detail), 2011, six vitrines, colored paper, found objects, found fabrics, dimensions variable.

In Cornaro’s hands, the aesthetic is not so much the classic antagonist of consumer culture; it is rather that culture’s shadow and double.



Galvez, Paul, "Suspended Animation," *Artforum*, February 2015, pp. 210-217

Left: **Isabelle Cornaro, *Homonymes II (#1, grey monochrome)*, 2012,** dyed plaster, 70⅞ × 47⅛ × 7 ⅛". From the series "*Homonymes* II," 2012–13.

Right: **Isabelle Cornaro, *Le proche et le lointain I* (The Near and the Distant I) (detail), 2011,** six vitrines, colored paper, found objects, found fabrics, dimensions variable.

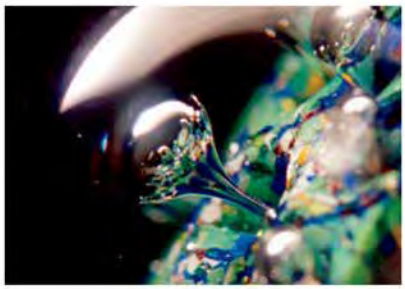
chooses *not* to overdramatize the vitrine's historicizing function. Her colorful, oddly elegant displays have little to do with the deliberately grimy, old-fashioned vitrines of Marcel Broodthaers's fictive museum or Christian Philipp Müller's display cases. *Le proche et le lointain I* completely banishes photography and text, Conceptual art's classic tools for laying low the primacy of painting and sculpture.

But this does not mean that Cornaro is simply reversing Conceptual art's initial reversal; just because photo-text disappears does not mean that painting-sculpture returns with a vengeance, bringing the spectacularity to which it is proximate along with it. The playing field is still leveled, just without the prompting of figures, numbers, and labels. One can see this tendency toward equivalence at work particularly in Cornaro's attitude toward abstraction, which is manifest in her habit of nonchalantly inserting monochromes and nonrepresentational forms into her collections. Having come of age in an era when it goes without saying that naturalism is never really natural and abstraction is never really abstract, Cornaro privileges neither.

IT WOULD BE TEMPTING to situate Cornaro in a critical lineage of object gatherers running the gamut from Walter Benjamin's book collector to Claude Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur. But unlike the bibliophile and the do-it-yourselfer, whose relationship to things is one of passionate acquisition and makeshift reconstruction, respectively, for Cornaro collecting is merely the beginning of a process of continual permutation and transformation. Many of the props used in *Le proche et le lointain I*, for instance, reappear in the series of large gray plaster panels called "*Homonymes* II," 2012–13, while the objects in "*Homonymes* I" similarly appeared initially in other works. Housing the ghostly remnants of earlier pieces, these reliefs are as much mausoleum as collection. Due to their utterly matte texture and dull, monochromatic tone, they take the shine off of the commodities assembled in Cornaro's other installations, as if in response to Freud's famous comparison of the fetish to a glimmer of light glancing off of one's nose or to Benjamin's idea, as characterized by Theodor Adorno, that "everything must metamorphose into a thing in order to break the catastrophic spell of things." If a similar strategy appears to inform Cornaro's vitrines, which freeze objects into aestheticized stasis, the ultimate fate of her tableaux, disarranged in these colorless masses, suggests a flux that is always at least potentially poised to shift things from one context to another—or even to liquidate things entirely. The systems or structures that sustain the commodity can never really be considered finished, total, or absolute. For instance, the "*Homonymes*" subvert Cornaro's earlier systems and perhaps, ultimately, their own, literally dissolving them into a pool of gray matter (with a historical assist, of course, from the equally deadening example of Jasper Johns's Sculp-Metal paint cans and lightbulbs). If this is a dramatization of how the reduction of objects to sheer exchange value obliterates difference and therefore meaning, just as physical decay will, it doesn't foreclose the possibility that some kind of new object or new meaning will reconstitute itself from this homogeneous matter.

Cornaro's work suggests a flux that is always poised to shift things from one context to another—or even to liquidate things entirely.

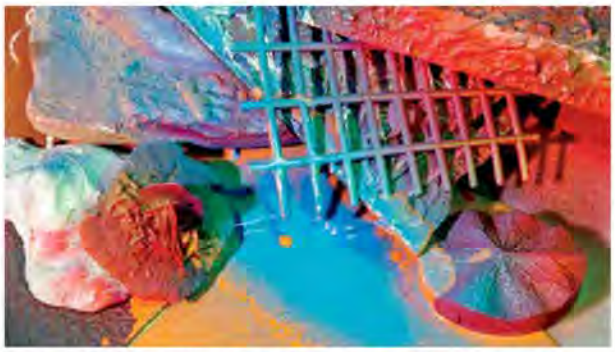
THE HIGH LINE PIECE has its origin in a series of earlier sculptures by Cornaro, each titled *God Box* and dated 2013, three of which were first shown in Switzerland at the Kunsthalle Bern that year. At the opening, I immediately saw them as a curious reaction to Minimalism, such was their elegant spacing in the kunsthalle's neoclassical galleries. To my surprise, the work stemmed from an unrealized project by an artist not normally associated with so restrained an aesthetic. In 1963, before becoming famous for his Pop tableaux, the California-based Kienholz drafted a list of works to be realized, including "*The God Box #3*," which called for a "box numbered



Above and left: **Four stills from Isabelle Cornaro's *Premier rêve d'Oskar Fischinger* (Oskar Fischinger's First Dream), 2009,** two 16-mm films transferred to two-channel HD video, color, silent, 1 minute 48 seconds and 1 minute 33 seconds.

Left: **Isabelle Cornaro, *God Box #4*, 2013,** steel, rubber, 58¼ × 42½ × 35⅜". From the series "God Boxes," 2013.

Right: **Isabelle Cornaro, *God Box #5*, 2013,** steel, rubber, 58¼ × 42½ × 35⅜". From the series "God Boxes," 2013.



Three stills from Isabelle Cornaro's *Choses (Things)*, 2014, 16 mm transferred to HD video, color, silent, 2 minutes 6 seconds.

three in a series of boxes in size somewhere between Reich's Orgone Accumulators and a Western outhouse [whose] sole purpose is to stimulate thoughts on organized religions and what they have done to and for civilization."

Using Kienholz's voice from the grave as her template, Cornaro dutifully decorated her "God Boxes" with motifs cast, like the High Line piece, in black rubber. In order to "stimulate thoughts on religion," objects are organized according to different approaches to spirituality. For example, talismanic mandalas composed of coins and chains encapsulate for Cornaro the single-minded, repetitive, almost obsessive belief structures of monotheism. Whether this is an accurate picture of monotheism is beside the point. What is crucial is how Cornaro rereads the project through her own aesthetic, reanimating the productive tension between Minimalism and Pop by resurrecting a forgotten '60s moment of confluence between the readymade and the specific object, to which Kienholz's boxes are at least morphologically akin. The project points up a salient difference between Cornaro's practice and those of many other contemporary artists, whose work engages assemblage and recombination. If such practices often seem to address technology (via the types of artifacts they present, for example) without taking up the question of how digital technology could or should inflect insistently material art, Cornaro again adopts a different strategy, highlighting and critically activating the anachronism of assemblage, and accessing history in the process.

CORNARO'S HISTORICAL AWARENESS is an aspect of her practice that is lost on some of her critics. I'm thinking especially of certain New York cognoscenti who, expecting bells and whistles or maybe just a USB stick added on somewhere, were fooled by the High Line piece's sobriety and superficial resemblance to the sculpture of Louise Nevelson. For a corpus of work that deliberately eschews the wow-factor of fake novelty, this dismissal might be considered a badge of honor. The negative reaction highlights another important attribute of Cornaro's work: that its depth and range are best appreciated across media, not only in painting, sculpture, and installation but also in film. When I saw her recent solo exhibitions in Bern and at Le Magasin in Grenoble, France (reviewed in these pages in 2012), the importance of that medium was plain to see.

At first, this might seem strange. After all, film is the spectacular medium par excellence. However, Cornaro's films continue the investigation of object relations previously pursued in her plastic work. Just as in her sculptures and installations, things are organized into ensembles, only to eventually succumb to

other operations. Sometimes this process is achieved via technical means, such as when a tabletop version of *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* is unsettled by a simple camera pan, close-up, or change in selective focus. At other times, the film captures the changes as they happen; in *Choses* (Things), 2014, an unsuspecting mass of objects is attacked by a blob of paint. And sometimes the transformation is more suggested than explicit: A deliberately unslick, nonprofessional look gives Cornaro's shorts a certain perceptual "matteness"—the antithesis of HD. It is the cinematic equivalent of her nullifying rubber and plaster casts.

Celebration, 2013, a triptych of films shot on 16 mm and combining outtakes from some of the artist's other moving-image works (such as *Premier rêve d'Oskar Fischinger* [Oskar Fischinger's First Dream], 2009) with slo-mo clips of classic Disney movies, is symptomatic of Cornaro's work as a whole. One sequence comes from *Beauty and the Beast*. The narrative elements of this fairy tale are of no interest to Cornaro, who focuses instead on the supporting cast of anthropomorphic housewares, really the Beast's cursed royal entourage transformed into clocks, door handles, and so forth. What for Disney is an occasion for saccharine comic relief is in Cornaro's hands an almost painfully slow dissection of the way in which objects acquire the anthropomorphism that is also one of the defining traits of the commodity fetish. In Marx, the process by which commodities replace human beings, practically becoming persons themselves, was hidden, almost magical. *Celebration*, then, is a kind of miniallegory of object relations under capitalism, in which dead things substitute for real people. At an earlier moment in the history of modernity, it was possible for Sergei Eisenstein to think of Disney cartoons as a kind of slippery, unruly resistance to mechanization. But shortly thereafter—and subsequently—large-scale animation was revealed to be an extension of, not an obstacle to, the commodification of everyday life. For as the history of advertising attests, animation is even better at selling products than it is at visually transforming them into living entities ("Celebration," after all, is also the name of an entire town under the aegis of the Disney brand). In *Celebration*, Cornaro uses slow motion and rewinding to delay and thus expose the process of metamorphosis, just as her vitrines and casts delay the displayed object's promise of immediate gratification. Her oeuvre as a whole is fundamentally about demystifying this process, debunking both its uncanny anthropomorphisms and its totalizing petrifications. It is not concerned with the *presence* of objects so much as with calling our attention to their transient *passage*. □

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Three stills from Isabelle Cornaro's *Celebration*, 2013. three 16-mm films transferred to HD video, black-and-white and color, sound, infinite duration.

Schum, Matthew, “Isabelle Cornaro Interview with Matthew Schum,” *This Morbid Round Trip from Subject to Object (a facsimile)*, Los Angeles: LA><ART, 2014, pp. 39-45

Schum, Matthew, “Isabelle Cornaro Interview with Matthew Schum,” *This Morbid Round Trip from Subject to Object (a facsimile)*, Los Angeles: LA><ART, 2014, pp. 39-45

Fig. 45

Schum, Matthew, “Isabelle Cornaro Interview with Matthew Schum,” *This Morbid Round Trip from Subject to Object (a facsimile)*, Los Angeles: LA><ART, 2014, pp. 39-45

Isabelle Cornaro Interview With Matthew Schum

MS: How did the *Homonyms* slip-cast sculptures begin? What set the series in motion?

IC: The idea was to put something together without order – as a heap, something *informe*, or as a set of accumulated objects of a similar typology. You may notice the objects share the shape of a flower, an animal, etc. and that the objects in *bas-relief* posses stylized patterns, such as laces, decorated metal, ceramic qualities and so on. Along with the geometric shapes found in the other objects, I named them generally under the categories of naturalism, stylization and abstraction, each of which stood for different ways of interpreting a natural model. To put it another way, I wanted to register different grades of resemblance, in that sense, the casted objects are submitted to a double system of resemblance in that they resemble the real objects that have been cast and they serve as abstract ideas or categories. As for the chosen shape and using plaster material, it is important to me that the castings are made in one chunk or block so that the form of the objects appear to be the solidification of a liquid. Additionally, in making the *Homonyms series,* I thought very much about sixteenth-century Mannerist grottos in which characters were designed and cast out of shapeless stone-like backgrounds.

MS: There is something Baroque about your plaster casts.

IC: I was always more interested in the Renaissance and most of all, Mannerist art.

Schum, Matthew, "Isabelle Cornaro Interview with Matthew Schum," *This Morbid Round Trip from Subject to Object (a facsimile)*, Los Angeles: LA><ART, 2014, pp. 39-45

This last phase came right before the Baroque and announced it, in fact. Yet Mannerism remained much less narrative in its structure to my mind. Along with Mannerists grottos, I was very interested in buildings like the Medici Chapel of Florence and in the baptistery in which Ghiberti realized his sculpted door, The Gates of Paradise. I even went back to this work while working on the *God Boxes* series (2012).

MS: Yet even if your sculpture incorporates ornamental fragments, the way you cast objects silences them. Instead of form vibrating, as a Baroque fountain might take on organic qualities meant to be visible from beneath falling water, or how a profiled sil-houette appears to be lifelike upon a cameo, your casts really entomb things. As a whole, the objects you envelop in the sculptures look more like ossuary than privileged objects. Maybe it is bizarre, but I wonder if you think of the objects being more dead than alive after you have made one of your casts?

IC: I agree with your description of Baroque as having a quality of vibration and expansion, as opposed to the silent aspect of my work. The objects are muted by being fixed as an image in a material that makes them more generic—they are the image of a face, a stone, a snake and so on — and by possessing the same consistency they seem to belong to the same kingdom and era once they are cast. It is also true that there is a funerary aspect to them as signaled in the title of the show at LA><ART—*This Morbid Round Trip from Subject to Object*, quoted from a previous interview with Quinn Latimer. Reflecting on our tendency to anthropomorphize objects and qualify them with feelings, whether it is due to memories and emotional value, or to hard work and financial value, I understood this movement as an extension of our own physical experience of objectification and death: namely, the transition from being a subject / animated person, to being an object / inanimate corpse. In my works, I connect this with my interest in the transition from shapelessness to formal properties and with an appreciation for chance and combinatorial processes.

MS: I ask about the "life" of the objects you collect because your working method employs and updates early twentieth-century found art. In Surrealism the found thing extracted from the marketplace has to do with unlocking the potential of the *démodé*. Breton's writing, for example, envisions revolution in everyday things. An artist is defined by his or her power to recast the discarded object as a talisman or

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dream image. This alchemy is elemental to a movement that rewired art history to make for the avant-garde and, concomitantly, presented an alternative to the economizing of every imaginable thing as capitalism progresses. I wonder how you see your work with found objects relating to these tactics.

IC: In this tradition, the found object was employed in various ways with very different meanings. Breton and the Surrealists gave it a magical and revolutionary potential, whereas Fluxus artists like Spoerri used it in a more conceptual way, embodying notions of process and time. The Nouveaux Realists followed a rather Pop tropism. I'd say that within all of these tactics, the use of found objects is linked to society. It is either a vehicle for collective symbolism, the factual evidence of a process or it points towards contemporary forms and notions of an era. I'd rather look at forms such as Duchamp's and Morris' and Levine's later on. These artists incorporate randomness and something arbitrary that questions the 'nature' of the creative act, while they also express very personal mythologies linked to the existential question of being, which leads us back to your previous question.

MS: I am glad you brought up Spoerri. His work employed the tradition of still life, painting to disengage from the game playing that has often plagued Pop Art as a sometimes bland means of provocation that was self-consciously ironic and therefore academic and commercial at once. Spoerri addressed this impoverishment of visual art with everyday life. His readymades confront us with our own mortality: he shows time elapsing not in minutes, hours and days, but in dirty ashtrays, coffee stained cups and saucers, dirty knives and all the forgotten meals that have come and gone before us upon worn tabletops. Among other things, mounting a dinner plate on the gallery wall somehow pointed to the despondence of the readymade. Yet Spoerri's realism also goes back to sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century still life, which drew the eye with crafty compositions but, also, located the viewer's body within the visual field of the objects radiating realistically, as though in a window display. Conversely, there is little idealism in Spoerri and I see that as relevant to the images you make in sculpture. That is the charm of this darker brand of found art you pursue. This is the heroism of modern life that finds the everyday object living out its final days in a dirty sink or a flea market free bin just like the bohemian lives in the dive bar cafe. I think your work channels this healthy negativism where

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many of your contemporaries would seem to shy away from it in favor of irony or simple calculations blending the high and low.

IC: I guess it's the way I understand a deconstructive approach. I love this idea of showing time elapse not in minutes, hours and days but with the dirty ashtrays, sad cups and saucers—it's a very detailed and materialistic approach to showing time. With an early work I made titled *Savannah Surrounding Bangui and the Utubangui River*, which was a sort of prototype of the large installations *Paysage avec Poussin et Témoins Oculaires*, I was representing schematic somewhat naïve-looking landscapes with jewelry belonging to my parents. Somehow it was the same idea—something very materialistic and highly detailed about the irreducibility of the objects (necklaces, bracelets, pendants, so on), with their very specific qualities juxtaposed to their function as schematic even childish signs, for a common representation of space, such as a horizon, mountains and other features that compose a landscape.

MS: How do you see the found objects functioning, not in the medium of the plaster cast object, but as moving image?

IC: The films are to me the exact equivalent of the castings: a record or a mechanical print, of real objects arranged sometimes in a composed way presented as accumulations. With the films a recording has less materiality, because it is made of moving images. Whereas the castings are still, by comparison, and possess strong materiality as volumes in space. There is also something very performative and childish in the films that occurs in the act of making. Objects are quickly arranged just before being shot and even while filming. Colored lights, spray and liquid paints are projected or poured in real time. It's a playful process. In the same way the editing is extremely simple, almost schematic, and employs a very simple early-film grammar with successive fixed plans, panning, wide shots and close-ups.

MS: Perhaps because you are focused intently on the distributing objects in your work, it avoids being busy. Meanwhile, your videos and sculptures quietly contextualize each other. It's visual art without being a big production. There's no siren song with the refreshing quality of silent film.

IC: The point is I find it always very difficult to insert a sound that doesn't work only as a commentary of the images and has its own plastic "objective" and, let's say, autonomous dimension.

from

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MS: Who were some artists who attracted you to making video?

IC: Apart from Jean-Luc Godard whose film I was always a big fan and whose experimental practice can be linked to video art, I looked a lot at Marcel Broodthaers and Bruce Nauman film and video installations. The space and context they setup provided for the screened image to be ex-perienced and understood in a larger constructed kind of thinking. And I have been very interested by artists such as Dara Birnbaum, Michael Snow, Rodney Graham, all of whose films and videos have a very strong and often repetitive structure. I also appreciate more accumulative or disordered kinds of films by artists such as Jack Smith and Bruce Baillie.

MS: What about favorite film directors?

IC: Oh that's tricky. As a teenager, my first intimate relation to art (meaning the sudden discovery of a world or a language that may indeed be yours, which you understand and eventual-ly could speak) came with movies and becoming a cinephile at a young age. For several years with my father, during every college break, we would watch 3 or 4 films a day, which I then continued to do less intensely but as a weekly practice for another couple of years. So, there are so many of them I love.

MS: What film do you suppose you watched more than any other?

IC: Movies like "The Devil, Probably" by Robert Bresson or "Sauve qui peut (la vie)" by Jean-Luc Godard, which was translated by "Every Man for Himself."

Fig. 46

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (Version III), 2010 (details)

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms

Vivian Sky Rehberg

The first, and perhaps most obvious, questions that arise when embarking on a writerly journey into Isabelle Cornaro's mixed media artistic production have to do with perspective, point of view, and position. Where and how do I situate myself (both figuratively and literally) with respect to the intricate and multilayered formal structure of her work as a whole, and in relation to the individual drawings, photographs and films, paintings, installations and sculptures that comprise it? Where do I stand, what do I privilege, and what will I necessarily, if inadvertently, neglect to notice at this particular juncture in her career?

Mulling over such concerns is not only a matter of course when writing about contemporary art. These are questions generated by Cornaro's specific materials, processes, and aesthetic approach to date, which oblige one to heed Yve-Alain Bois' claim that "concepts must be forged *from* the object of one's inquiry or be imported according to that object's specific exigency."[1] Bois' ideal critical method is especially relevant to Cornaro's work. As an object-centered outlook, it underscores an artwork's conditions of production, the conjunction of its material components and aesthetic properties, and its location in a field of continually proliferating objects. And, like Cornaro's artistic practice, it considers the position and place of the subjects, namely the artist and viewers, interacting with and within that field.[2]

1 Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990, p. XII and XIX.

2 A comprehensive analysis of Isabelle Cornaro's staging of the relationship between the spectator and the artwork would require tracing the historicization and theorization of the place of the spectator in 20th- and 21st-century art, via the work of Michael Fried, Rosalind Krauss, and Jonathan Crary among others. That genealogy is beyond the scope of this essay.

With all this in mind, the most convenient place to depart from is Cornaro's installation *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* (*Landscape with Chick and Eye Witnesses*), of which there are currently four versions (made in 2008, 2010, and 2011). This series of installations can be seen as an aesthetic matrix, but not as the chronological or conceptual point of origin, from whence her ongoing engagement with the aesthetic and ideological features of systems of representation emerges distinctly. Taking as its referent classical pastoral landscape painting, best exemplified by the work of 17th-century artist Nicolas Poussin, each *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* reinterprets the two-dimensional surface of a picture into a spatial arrangement of ordinary plywood plinths upon which are placed different objects. In all versions, the installation is loosely organized according to the principle of linear perspective, with the foreground, middle ground, and background signaled by the increasing height of the plinths, the rapprochement of the plans, and the decreasing size of the objects as we move further into the composition. In the first three versions, imitation oriental carpets, which are rolled into tight cylinders placed parallel to the front edges of the plinths or fully unfurled beneath them like an ornate woven terrain, pace the eye as it travels through the scene. At the back of the installation more carpets, hung vertically alongside similarly-scaled wood panels, serve as the eye's final resting place.

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

The objects atop the plinths in *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires I-III* all refer in some way to representations of nature. In addition to cloisonné urns and other decorative domestic objects, like bulbous glass lampshades or baking molds of different sizes, the plinths host objects for measuring space and vision—varied rulers, magnifying lenses, volumetric measuring tools, binoculars, frames—and what Cornaro metaphorically refers to as “tautological” objects. A tautological object’s form and function are locked in a self-reinforcing semantic embrace: a ceramic vase in the form of a bunch of tulips or a cooking terrine in the shape of the rabbit that will be cooked in the recipient, or an egg cup in the image of a chick (a *poussin*).

Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires IV maintains the geometric perspectival structure of the previous versions, but veers radically toward abstraction. The plinths and freestanding walls that structure the space are iced with a thin coating of concrete, steel rods replace the rolled carpets, and the objects dispersed throughout are machine and engine parts as well as the industrial molds used to cast them. Beguiling patterns and surfaces are neutralized here into a lean, quasi-cinematic *grisaille*, punctuated with green and a spot of red. Unlike the other versions, this one is not composed in a solely frontal manner; we can pass behind the background. Scrim-covered windows in the furthest distance bring to mind the rectangle of a movie screen and also hint at a possible escape route. In all cases, we are the “eye witnesses” that enter into the space of the scene and provide a sense of scale to a new viewer that encounters it.

Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (Version II), 2009

When classified and distributed within Cornaro’s “landscapes,” these found objects, whose debt to the Duchampian readymade is avowed, rouse the concept of mimesis, issues of resemblance, and techniques of reproduction, all of which have been integral to artistic expression since Prehistory and to the sphere of philosophical aesthetics since Antiquity. Representations of nature, especially imitations of an empirically observed and copied or an idealized thing or scene, were long considered to be inherently inferior to the “real” world. The appeal of artistic, scientific, and even social accuracy in representation has since ceded, in part thanks to the readymade’s implicit critique, to the belief that there is no distinction between the appearance of things and some fundamental essence or truth about them: all reality is mediated via representation.

Cornaro stages the temporal and spatial complexity of this mediation under the guise of highly articulated presentations in order to underscore a chain of relations that are at once formal, representational, and social. One senses that Guy Debord’s critical revision of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, whereby images come to supplement commodities in the mediation of all social relations is latent throughout her work, which explores the relationship between a representation of an “outside reality” (in this specific case a painting, itself a representation absent to us, but which we can imagine), how that representation is constructed, and what we project onto and into it.

Without attempting to compose an accurate portrayal of a specific landscape, wholly mimetic and more abstract or decorative regimes

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

of representation cohabit and jockey for our attention in the space delineated by the *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* series. Further, the illusionism provoked by their perspectival display posits an ideal viewing position and a fixed spectator that is in essence a fiction, and an ideologically over-determined one at that, which is completely unsettled and undermined once the viewer begins to wander into the space and approach the objects on the pedestals. The intrusion of the mobile body in time tampers with the alleged integrity of the depiction of rationalized, timeless, pictorial space. While the perceiving subject and the perceived object are fundamental to the very conception of perspective, as well as to the understandings of space and the formations of knowledge that materialize from it, Cornaro engages with this history only in order to expose and subvert it.[3] The popular notion during the Renaissance that a two-dimensional picture should give the viewer the illusion, via the use of perspective, of entering into a three-dimensional scene is first enacted and then completely turned on its head thanks to the dynamic interplay of the initially conjectural image and the simultaneous material presence of the objects that are used to build it.

3 For a useful, critical overview of conceptions of perspective see Margaret Iversen, “The Discourse on Perspective in the Twentieth Century: Panofsky, Damisch and Lacan,” *Oxford Art Journal* 28 (2), June 2005, p. 191–202.

With her *mise-en-scènes*, Cornaro emphasizes that regimes of representation are historically and culturally determined constructs that influence our ways of seeing and our temporal and physical modes of access to the visible world, but also that these can serve as the setting for much internal experimentation. Similarly, the art historian T.J. Clark, writing about perspective in Poussin’s *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* (1648) and *Landscape with a Calm* (1650–1651), notes that “Part of the appeal of perspective to painters, surely, lies in the way the bare linear structure involved sets up the promise, or illusion, of systematic determination, all the better for painting to play its coercive and generative games with. All the better to show the powerlessness of mere structure against the play of metaphor, of materials—format, physical size, light, touch, ‘grounding,’ orientation of surfaces, shock of color, opacity and transparency of atmosphere.” He concludes: “Of course it is these that put viewers most powerfully in relation to imagined worlds.”[4]

4 T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2006, p. 141.

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The references to theories, traditions, and technologies of representation—painting, sculpture, the decorative arts, as well as the mechanical modes of casting and lens-based media—that abound in Cornaro’s work are nearly always tethered to depictions of space. But the constant cohabitation of different media, along with Cornaro’s enmeshing of the mimetic or figurative in the abstract or schematic, destabilize any lingering opposition between these modes and terms. Take the series of “drawings” *Le Parc de Sans-Souci* (*The Grounds of Sans-Souci*, 2005), which minimally renders the structure of manicured gardens “à la française” into a sequence of vertical strips of white paper through which wispy curved tendrils of human hair have been tucked at intervals to simply mark elements of the cultivated, codified landscape, such as a statue or a tree, that were visible in the photographs. The soft and tactile materiality of the locks of hair contrasts sharply with the crisp

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

precision of the sequential cuts in the landscape-format page. Like swirling hand-annotated musical notes on a partition, the locks in themselves are mute. Yet they evoke sensuality, and even sentimentality, and thus resist the sheer objectification proposed by the system in which they are confined.

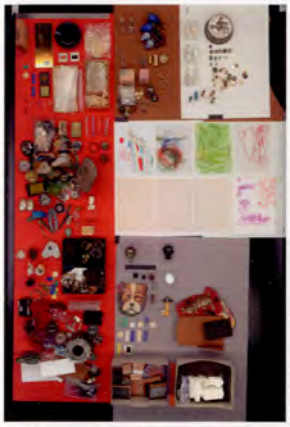
Landscape with a man killed by a snake, 2007

Figures, lines, and frames converge in *Black Maria (Phenomena Overwhelming Consciousness)* (2008), a slide installation based on an original artist's book made by Cornaro, the title of which refers to Thomas Edison's Kinetographic Theater, the first cinema production studio. It is comprised of photographs of a landscape whose focal point is progressively telescoped to reveal a woman standing therein, the projection of which is accompanied by a series of line drawings (in fact, digital reproductions of pencil drawings) that reduce the transparent images of the figure in the landscape to opaque diagrams on paper. Cornaro's figures in a landscape are consistently seen from an abstract point of view. One naturally tends to read the photographic images in *Black Maria* as prefiguring the drawings, as the original "text" in a translation whose final outcome is a barebones rendition of a pictorial source. In truth, the relation between original and copy, composition and decomposition, or of the construction of an image and its deconstruction is shown, as in any translation, to be a mediated relation of interdependence in which the quest for equivalences involves possible misreadings and misinterpretations, as well as a conversion of meanings.

Black Maria (Phenomena Overwhelming Consciousness), 2008

The potential for the found objects that populate Cornaro's work to be transformed by their contexts and invested with multiple meanings is continuously stressed via their use and nimble transfer across different mediums, classificatory systems, and modes of display. Like readymades, the objects are merely selected by the artist not made by her, and function here as formal components that participate in the construction of a picture. She likens them to motifs or graphic elements, void of any deliberate affective charge. In the series *Moulage sur le vif* (*Vide-poches)* (*Life Casts [Catch All]*, 2009–2011), a variety of small objects (including tools, molds and stamps, poker chips, vials, a seashell) were gathered and arranged on colored backgrounds, either haphazardly or according to a typology based on their use and function or their symbolism. Cornaro scanned the collections to produce a flat, true-to-scale, two-dimensional replica of the three-dimensional objects, then repeatedly framed and cropped and printed those images, as if in the pursuit of exhausting all of their possibilities. However, Cornaro's objects serve other purposes and live other lives when captured in one frame, or when they are recomposed, lit, and filmed or photographed from a different point of view. This is the case with her 16mm films *Premier rêve d'Oskar Fischinger* (*Oskar Fishinger's First Dream*, 2008), which prefigure the *Moulage sur le vif*. In the former, the tiny figurines, lenses, perfume bottles, and decorative glass paperweights that appear frozen in the later *Moulage sur le vif* are grouped together and filmed according to specific cinematic conventions—the close up, the panoramic shot, the static shot—to explore representational codes and their effects, and the passage from a single perspective to a montage.

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167



Matrix for the series of *Moulage sur le vif (Vide-poches)*, 2009

The vexing issue of narrative in Cornaro's work, which is never literally resolved but merely evoked through the ongoing processes of making, framing, composing, and recomposing, is raised in works like *Savane autour de Bangui et le fleuve Utubangui* (*Savanna around Bangui and the Utubangui River*, 2003–2007). These are landscapes based on family photographs and composed out of jewelry arranged on plywood boards, which are displayed in horizontal vitrines and as photographs taken from above. The articulated gold links of a watch bracelet form the peaks and valleys of a distant hill, while a grouping of chains can indicate a horizon or the winding course of a river. A loose pendant of precious turquoise stone and pearl serves as some sort of landmark, as do a diamond and a ring. Although these are landscapes in the barest sense of the word, like the schematic directions you may get from a stranger asked on the street, the nature of the materials—jewels inherited from Cornaro's mother, reminiscences of an upbringing in post-colonial Africa—offer a rare autobiographical glimpse into the artist's personal life via the vectors of habitually fetishized objects and the longstanding association of photography with memory.

If the autobiographical interpretation is entirely secondary, the question of authorship and ownership of the objects she employs in her work is overwhelmingly elided. While the multitude of objects that figure there are generally not grouped according to artistic or stylistic conventions of historical progression (as they would be in a museum for example), the underlying art historical significance and meanings of her materials still cannot easily be dismissed. Her penchant for taxonomical organization and presentations of collections; her careful attention to traditions in modes of display and the place of the viewer; the presence of the landscape as privileged referent; and her recourse to reproductive technologies of photography, film, and casting as a means of de-emphasizing the role of the artist's creative hand, are all supported by and generative of discourses about their aesthetic and social uses and values. Drawings are associated with construction and knowledge, photographs indelibly linked to souvenirs, casting and imprints with the mark or trace. Such materiality plays an undeniable role in the construction of meaning.

Matter and meaning reconverge in the cast sculptures titled *Homonymes* (*Homonyms*, 2010), after words that resembles each other when spelled and pronounced, but share different meanings (such as the word *left*), or in Cornaro's case, things that bear the same name but do not refer to the same object. Here, objects related to representations of nature, as in the *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires* series, are selected and grouped according to kind: objects with geometrical forms linked to image-making; objects decorated with ornamental forms or repeating patterns; and objects taking the form of something found in nature. Heaped together and cast in gray plaster, the objects are fixed in time and space through a mechanical procedure that leaves no room in the process for artistic intervention beyond their selection and arrangement.[5] This produces a fundamental, structural tension between the presence, or absence, of the artist's subjectivity and the *formalization* of the work of art. The initial “aura” of the objects, their purported “authenticity” as commodities, domestic utensils, scientific implements and tools, is

5 See Georges Didi-Huberman's “La resemblance par contact: Archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte,” in the exhibition catalogue *L'Empreinte*, Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1997. He writes: “The making of the form escapes the caster because it is an invisible phenomenon, internal to the technical system which consists of the contact of the mold with the material.” p. 26.

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

neutralized into a homogenous gray mass of shapes and patterns set on tabletops. Nonetheless, it could be argued that any “aura” those objects once contained, thanks to their individual pre-histories *and* their afterlives as elements in Cornaro’s artistic production, is at once destroyed and secured, subterranean, in the form of the relic or trace. Walter Benjamin famously described “aura” as that “unique phenomenon of distance however close [a natural or historical object] might be” and the decay of “aura” as the desire to “get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.”[6]

The *Homonymes* seem to confront this problematic head-on. The casting process can be seen as fixing what were once mobile, transient objects into a more or less stable and immutable sculptural form. The parallels between casting and photography, where the mold and the negative allow for further reproduction, but the imprints still hold us in thrall, are made abundantly evident here. Yet in her first presentation of these works, at Galerie BaliceHertling in Paris in 2010, Cornaro worked against the grain of any such correspondences by surrounding the *Homonymes* with three films that projected cinematic modulations of color and light into the space and onto the sculptures. The formless sprays of bright and muted pigments on white backgrounds in *Floues et colorées* (*Blurry and Colored*) contrasts with the highly symbolic representation of coins and banknotes in *De l’argent filmé de profil et de trois quarts* (*Money filmed in side and three-quarter profiles*), while *Film-lampe* (*Light-Film*) focuses on the bulbs and flashes of light that make cinematic experience possible. The reticent and static multi-dimensional *Homonymes* rest on their tables as if beckoning to be revived, while the films endeavor to work their own particular brand of magic, flickering over surfaces, concealing and revealing details in the casts.

Premier rêve d’Oskar Fischinger, 2008

6 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” (1936) in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 3: 1935–1938*, Harvard Belknap Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2002, p. 104–105.

These objects previously cast, or objects similar to them, are once again set into circulation in one of Isabelle Cornaro’s most recent site-specific installations, *Le Proche et le lointain* (*The Near and The Distant*, 2011), which entreats the viewer to explore the surfaces and volumes of their forms by meandering through the 14th-century vaulted space of the sacristy of the Paris Collège des Bernardins. Arranged on sheets of vividly colored paper inside vitrines, the colors, textures, and forms of the objects are caught in the play of verticals and horizontals at work in the principle of perspective that regulates the *Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires*. One looks into and enters the space by descending a small staircase, and proceeds through it by looking across and into the set of vitrines that house the objects, which can be confronted from any angle or side. The colored paper creates a distancing, even theatrical effect. The accessibility of different viewpoints, coupled with the characteristics and features of the medieval edifice, disturb the rational precepts of that principle.

Exhibition view, galerie Balice Hertling, Paris, 2010

Isabelle Cornaro’s constant negotiation of the synthetic view from afar and attentive close examination repeatedly clarifies how we see what we see. But just when one thinks one has grasped and taken hold of an image or idea produced by a particular compilation and composition of objects in space, a seemingly minor adjustment of our bodies or of the objects causes a shift in register, a transformation of the interior

Rehberg, Vivian Sky, “Vanishing Points and Emerging Forms,” *Isabelle Cornaro*, Zurich: JPRIRingier, 2011, pp. 161-167

geography of a space, and ultimately, what we thought was fixed reveals itself to be unstable. Paradoxically, my attempt to synthesize Cornaro's artistic production here reveals that the only narrative that might emerge from it is decidedly non-linear in nature. Her relentless exploration of those elements that structure our perception and divide our attention keeps us on the move too, in search of secure interpretations that may never appear on the horizon.

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Wagley, Catherine, “5 FREE ART SHOWS YOU SHOULD SEE IN L.A. THIS WEEK,” *LAWeekly.com*, December 16, 2015

LA WEEKLY

5 FREE ART SHOWS YOU SHOULD SEE IN L.A. THIS WEEK

By Catherine Wagley | December 16, 2015

Karin Gulbran, *Splendor in the Grass* (installation view) (2015). Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.

Funny fairy tales

The pots in “Splendor in the Grass,” Karin Gulbran’s exhibition of ceramics at China Art Objects, all have straightforward titles, for instance Pigs in the Woods and Fish Bowl. On her pots, pigs do play in woods and a cat falls down in the rain. The animals have elongated limbs and googly eyes and the pots themselves are clumpy; the imperfection is clearly intentional, but it’s also not beautiful in the controlled way modernist design objects often are. The sweet messiness of Gulbran’s show recalls novelist Michael Cunningham’s recent retelling of the Rumpelstiltskin story, in which a conniving hobgoblin with an inferiority complex manages to be endearing.

Horst, Aaron, “Karin Gulbran at China Art Objects,” *ContemporaryArtReview.la*, November 18, 2015

Contemporary Art Review .la

Karin Gulbran at China Art Objects

By Aaron Horst | November 18, 2015

Karin Gulbran, *Splendor in the Grass* (installation view) (2015). Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.

Pottery occupies the realm of discrete objects moreso than sculpture, its umbrella genus. As objects, Karin Gulbran’s pots in *Splendor in the Grass*, currently on view at China Art Objects, are marked by the ghost of functionality—recalling, perhaps, the sacred and often mysterious functions of ancient ritual containers.

The works in *Splendor in the Grass* are formed from strips cut from a rolled slab and worked up the three axes of desired shape. As a technical choice, hand-building is both intimate and self-consciously crude, adding an extra sheen of earliest technique to the easy weight of pottery’s historical form. The exterior of each piece picture cartoonish, bewildered land and sea animals, their three dimensions folded and creased along a roughly cylindrical two. The distorted picture plane seems both an homage to the time before perspective began to transform visual narratives, and a consequence of material limits.

Gulbran’s approach proposes a number of questions—primarily, how do we evaluate pottery within a contemporary art context? At what point does work in the lineage and language of pottery come to be evaluated as *sculpture* rather than *sculptural*? Is Gulbran’s work a send-up, questioning the contemporary potential of an ancient form of narrative communication? Or is narrative the entire point, pottery merely a backdrop for its figuration?

Karin Gulbran, *Splendor in the Grass* (installation view) (2015). Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.

Form in ceramics alludes to long-forgotten rites and customs, its figurations telling portions of tales distorted by history’s long-arc game of Telephone. Grecian vessels, with their overlapping snapshots of myth and lore, had the compliment of oral tradition to give context to images fleshed out along their faces. Narrative, suspended and mysterious, waits for its oral counterpart which, perhaps, we, the viewer, are to fill in. But perhaps also, Gulbran’s empty vessels aren’t meant to be filled, freezing form in the moment between becoming and being.

Karin Gulbran, *Splendor in the Grass* (installation view) (2015). Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.

Karin Gulbran, *Family of Boar* (2015). Stoneware, 21 x 17.5 x 15 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.

Karin Gulbran, *Sardines and Anchovies* (2015). Stoneware, 15 x 20 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.

Karin Gulbran, *Fallen Cat in Rain* (2015). Stoneware, 17.5 x 17 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.

Karin Gulbran, *Fallen Cat in Rain* (2015). Stoneware, 17.5 x 17 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.

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Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY
NATSUKO UCHINO

KERAMIKOS

EDITED BY NICOLAS TREMBLEY

VERLAG DER BUCHHANDLUNG WALTHER UND FRANZ KÖNIG

Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

Granada, August 2019:

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy and Natsuko Uchino set up a workshop at Cerámica Los Arrayanes in Spain. This family owned factory specializes in traditional Andalusian tableware, recognizable by its blue and green Fajalauza designs.

Over the course of the month, the artists painted more than three hundred thrown and press molded items including dinner plates, dessert plates, bowls, large platters, pitchers and oil jars. This book presents front-and-back photographic records of each of these pieces.

The Granada series is the third iteration of *Keramikos*, a collaborative project that Lutz-Kinoy and Uchino began at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam in 2010 and which they have pursued alongside their personal interdisciplinary artistic activities, including painting, drawing and performance.

The *Keramikos* project consists of a traveling series of ceramic collections which celebrates local culinary cultures and collaborative practices. *Keramikos* has been presented in numerous exhibitions and activated through dinner events and performances at various locations, each time featuring different protagonists: artists, curators and friends.

The *Keramikos* dinner parties began in 2012 at Elaine, a space in the courtyard of the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel that was curated by Tenzing Barshee, Nikola Dietrich, Scott Cameron Weaver and Hannah Weinberger. The tablecloths were silk-screened with a text by curator Vivian Ziherl highlighting the role of the letter format in historic international feminist practice, which the guests took turns to read aloud.

The next dinner took place at the Villa Romana, Florence in 2012, and was organized by Hannes Schmidt and Dennis Oliver Schroer as part of the group exhibition “Foreign Figs For Florence”. This dinner was followed by further events at Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in 2013, curated by Roos Gortzak, at Chambre des Canaux, Amsterdam in 2013, curated by Siebe Tetero, and at Miart, Milan in 2014 in the form of a solo show with Freedman Fitzpatrick’s gallery.

The latest dinner took place in September 2019 at Mendes Wood DM in Brussels on the occasion of Matthew Lutz-Kinoy’s solo show at the gallery.

Granada: In the silence of the factory, the artists repeat the same gestures day in, day out: sanding the plates, preparing the different glazes, searching for references on styles and techniques in the historical books that they have collected over the years, painting the objects, drying them and finally firing them once they have enough material to fill the gas kiln.

Their collaborative project has led them to travel the world in order to research various histories and traditions alongside potters in ceramic studios in Europe, the United States, South America and Asia. Through this process, they have developed unique collective artworks using techniques and styles based on the relationships they have forged and their experiences in these diverse locations, each of which is endowed with its own singularly rich ceramic traditions.

They have explored historical works and moments, drawing motifs and inspiration from Hispano-Moresque, Byzantine, Islamic and Korean ceramics. While they play with these styles and mix them without hierarchy, the “local” has been a decisive element throughout the project. In Granada, they were influenced by the syncretism of the Mediterranean region from the Middle Ages through to the age of modernism, embodied in the 20th century in work by artists such as Matisse in Tunisia or Picasso in Vallauris, France.

“Those artists were looking at the past and referencing ancient ceramics, and making copies of them just as we do. We locate our practice not only within a realm of modernism and contemporary art but also in the materials and origins of ceramic works.”[1]

Previous editions of the *Keramikos* project have also been inspired by contemporary moments, such as the working relationships and techniques deployed in Judy Chicago’s iconic feminist artwork *The Dinner Party* in 1974, the approach to the body in Yvonne Rainer’s choreographic practice, or the techniques of mass production and advertising as explored by Barbara Kruger in the 80s.

The Barbara Kruger set produced for the *Keramikos II* series features red, white and black glazed texts, which are drawn from a series of graphic artworks by Kruger and from street posters. This work was first presented at the Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in 2012 with a reading conducted by the artists Calla Henkel and Max Pitegoff. The music was performed by the artist Dena Yago and produced by Alex Field. Other performers included Matt Moravec, Mia Goyette, Anina Trösch, Roos Gortzak, Patrick Armstrong, and Tenzing Barshee.

At its re-enactment in 2019 at the Frac Nouvelle-Aquitaine MÉCA in Bordeaux as part of the new site’s inaugural exhibition, “Trans”, curated by Anne Dressen, the plates were used as scripts that were read by local actors and set to music by SOPHIE.

The present book has been conceived of not only as a catalogue but also as a new installment of the *Keramikos* project. With an extensive index, it presents images of all of the objects that were produced in 2019 in Granada. A selection of these objects are printed in three different formats which correspond to the different diameters of the plates (37 / 27.5 / 20 cm). The front of each plate is printed on the recto side with its reverse shown in the same position on the verso side of the same page.

This book was designed by Dimitri Bruni, Manuel Krebs and Ludovic Varone, who together make up the Zürich-based graphic design studio NORM. Some objects are accompanied by quotes or narrative descriptions written by the artists that present some aspects of the duo’s vast and complex research exploring notions of society, religion, politics, style and technique through the long history of ceramic and art production.

Nicolas Trembley

1 Matthew Lutz-Kinoy and Natsuko Uchino in conversation, Paris, 2020

Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

THE GENEALOGY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Nicolas Trembley [NT] in conversation with Matthew Lutz-Kinoy [MLK] and Natsuko Uchino [NU]

NT *How did you the two of you meet?*

MLK We met as students in New York in 2002 at The Cooper Union. Natsuko was arriving from Paris and she had such a different look, and I was arriving from Brooklyn, so I got to see the city from a new vantage point, with the new kid on the block.

NT *How, why and when did you initiate the* Keramikos *project?*

MLK It started off as a skill share project in 2010, when Natsuko visited me at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam where I was in residency. She taught me how to make ceramics and I taught her how to make silkscreens. There was a proliferation of prints and functional ceramic objects which eventually led to a craft table sale to disseminate all the things we had made. It was successful, and it pushed us to think about other formats to pursue in order to share our productions.

NT *At that point, what was your knowledge of ceramics and ceramic techniques?*

NU It wasn't very developed. I had learned a little bit in New York at Greenwich House,[1] where I took pottery classes for about a year. Later, I set up a ceramics studio at Old Field Farm/Art and Agriculture, a site founded by the artist Peter Nadin.[2] There, I made vessels for the produce of the farm: head cheese jars, honey jars, etc. That was also the spirit of early *Keramikos*: it was about transmitting the joy of working to make things for our everyday lives. The more technical side would come later.

MLK I had zero experience at the time. I had access to this amazing studio at the Rijksakademie and I didn't know where to begin using it. I thought that if Natsuko came, she could share with me her knowledge of the basics and help me to get a foot in the door. Pieter Kemink, who founded the studio and was running it at the time, had a deep understanding of ceramics from many years of experience in the scientific study of glazes, firing and mold making, among many other technical skills. He played an important role in helping us find our way to production.

NT *Natsuko, you were also trained in Japan?*

NU Yes, After *Keramikos II*, I went back to Japan to undertake more intensive training. I worked in Sanda, a very old traditional ceramics village in the mountains of Hyogo, north of Kobe. Their production is known as Tamba ware and considered as being amongst Japan's Six Ancient Kilns.[3] I trained with Masafumi Oonishi, a fourth generation potter. In Sanda, they work with native clay that is gathered and shared communally in the village, and they fire their ceramics in multi-chamber climbing kilns called "noborigama". Their specificity lies in the way in which they load the wood directly on top of the pots. The temperature in there is so high that the wood immediately disintegrates, and the ash drops directly onto the pots, giving these incredibly beautiful brutal ash glazes.

NT *What interested you at the time in this medium?*

MLK I hoped to combine my interest in performance documentation with the creation of ceramics. I was into the idea of an indexical object that could be representative of some kind of event.

NU If the performance was to be about merging art and life, it seemed like making cups and posters was a good way to start.

1 Greenwich House was founded as a settlement house to help New York's immigrant population, and opened a pottery department in 1909. Famous ceramic artist Peter Voulkos was a teacher there in the 70s.

2 Peter Nadin (b. 1954) is an American artist. In 1992, he stopped exhibiting his art and acquired a farm in the Catskills of New York, where he explores the interaction of art and agricultural practices.

3 The Six Ancient Kilns is a category developed in the post-war period to describe the most outstanding ceramic kilns of Japan.

Trembley, Nicolas, "The Genealogy of the Mediterranean," *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

NT *And what does this ancient medium represent for you today?*

MLK We were drawn towards making and using functional ceramic wares. The relation to the food being served on them, the ways in which they function as a vehicle for a sensory experience, the patina of touch: all these are essential to us in our joint ceramic practice, and tie us to the history and use of objects and to vernacular crafts. The possibilities of expressing ourselves through common forms such as cups, plates and pitchers has been a freeing experience in terms of the reorganizing of hierarchies of traditional fine art techniques and formats.

NT *Why did you choose the title* Keramikos*?*

NU We were working in the studio in Amsterdam, where everything was labelled in Dutch, and we were really into the "k" that they pronounce very loudly to say "*keramic*". We noticed that the Greek term for ceramics also begins with "k" – *κεραμικός*, or *keramikós* – and so we adopted it. Thinking about it now, it's interesting that it has this Hellenistic lineage, because *Keramikos III* is about expanding the genealogy of the Mediterranean to a much more mixed and dynamic world of influences.

NT Keramikos *also engages with social, political and ecological concepts. Can you tell us more about this aspect of the project?*

NU *Keramikos* takes form in one thing: a set of ceramics. But it's also an event, a dinner, a production, a distribution, a presentation, and, more broadly, a reflection of land-based politics. By this I mean an image of the landscape, what we grow on it and how we inhabit the world. Ceramics are made of clay, which always comes from the land and is evidence of the proximity between places and practices. The set, comprised of several hundred ceramic elements, is part of a holistic project, a continuous entity that contains, that carries. It is a vehicle for our relationship to the land.

NT *Can you describe your first dinner with the plates in 2012?*

MLK It was initiated through a friendship with the curator (now turned gallerist) Scott Cameron Weaver and the excitement around his new collectively run exhibition space "Elaine", which he had created at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel with artists and curators Hannah Weiberger, Nikola Dietrich and Tenzing Barshee. During the production phase, we were in close dialogue about what was needed for the event, but we had no idea what we were doing organizationally. It came together really well, though, and this synergy was key. We asked Tenzing's father, Swiss-Tibetan chef Losang Tseten Barshee, to collaborate with us on developing the menu, which was infused with our pastoral projection on the nature of the Alps. We had ice cream made with raw milk and alpine herbs, for example. We were also inspired by chefs Fergus and Margot Henderson from the London restaurant St. John.

NT *What did you eat at this meal?*

MLK The chef sourced a lamb and was so excited about the dinner event that he made his own fanzine all about the story of his lamb cooked head to tail, which was fully laminated for proper greasy-fingered sharing around the table. Serving one animal across a dinner table, using all the different cuts, cooking them with different recipes, passing the dishes around, serving family style, sitting next to someone eating in a different way... then it becomes all about sharing... very pre-covid, actually.

NT *This book focuses exclusively on your last collective production, the third of its kind, which was manufactured in Granada in 2019. Why did you choose this city?*

NU We chose Granada because of the factory Cerámica Los Arrayanes. It was introduced to us through Datcha studio, a Parisian brand that commissions new productions that use traditional crafts. The factory in Granada is one of those incredibly rare and precious places still thriving on actual pottery and producing traditional local ceramics. It's family-run, and in the suburbs of Granada in a neighborhood that looks like Broadway Junction. They work insane Spanish hours, have a boutique in the city center, and fulfil special orders such as wedding plates for the royal family of Monaco. Our initial intention wasn't to go to Spain: we were actually just searching for someone who could throw these very large Spanish bowls, and we just didn't come across anyone who could throw things that big until we encountered Los Arrayanes. Their artisanal skill is almost sacred these days.

NT *What did you learn there in this Granada factory?*

NU We dived deep into its culture, picked up some brushstroke techniques and learned some secret glaze mixes. It was the type of immersive experience that is truly transformative in the sense that it is so full-on: the production, the salt, the dust, the heat, and working with Víctor, his dad Manuel, his mom, wife and brother-in-law. Beyond the formal and ornamental traditions that we explored and developed, the production of *Keramikos III* in Granada was also about reconfiguring our relationship to the production of objects and setting up working relations at different scales of possibility and diffusion.

Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

NT *Were you aware of Andalusian style prior to this project?*

MLK My exposure to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean motifs was quite limited, and my initial passion for this type of material arose from a very American perspective, namely the literary history of Tangiers that I visited two years ago as seen through the eyes of Jane and Paul Bowles.[4] I think that through the Bowles' literature and the mixture of their lived realities and printed fictions, I was able to take my first steps into these ceramic histories.

NT *You often mention clay in the Mediterranean basin. What interests you in this specific geographic area?*

NU I live in the south of France, near a large Roman aqueduct. The Mediterranean identity and the ways in which it is modelled by cultural politics are quite visible. As we were drawn to look at different motifs of ceramics, we came to feel that there was a kind of syncretism between the decorative traditions and the different mineral trades. For example, you can trace the use of cobalt blue pigment from its origins in Persia through its variations across the different ceramics of Delft in Holland to Sèvres in France or Jingdezhen in China. The same goes for copper, which was used from the 16th century in Japan for the Oribe visual style and which you still find today in ceramics in Granada. The wealth of motifs we found in Mediterranean ceramic traditions appeared as so many traces of cultural porosity and evidence of circulations from the Middle East to the Iberian Peninsula by way of North Africa. It was fascinating to explore this through the study of ornamental designs. I particularly like the syncretism in the motifs that you can see in the Mediterranean basin, because it relates to writing, scribbling, calligraphy, and cultural crossovers, all the things that led to certain patterns being called “arabesque”.

NT *And what about Asian influences?*

NU We also looked at a lot of Korean Buncheong ceramics, especially pieces with decorations carved into white slip. This is usually carried out on stoneware, before firing when the clay is still soft. In fact, it's a very different technique to those we studied elsewhere, and one that we readapted. Mediterranean pottery is mostly earthenware, and for this series, we were working on bisque, so with glaze only. What we made is also a testimony to the trade routes that we were looking at through the history of ceramics. Eastern and Western influences merging. Like the slipware in Japan that readapts a British low firing technique to high firing. And of course, as with “Japonisme” or “chinoiseries”, the styles tell you as much about who they're made for and who is trading them as they do about their place of origin.

NT *Can you tell me about other examples of cultural porosity that inspired you?*

MLK We were particularly inspired by the social exchanges between the British potter Bernard Leach[5] and the Japanese philosopher Sōetsu Yanagi.[6] The friendship between the great Mingei figures is so well-documented through photos, private collections of objects, museums dedicated to the craft movement, and many printed essays and books by Yanagi and Leach. All this makes it an accessible origin story of intercontinental motifs and the development and exchange of forms and techniques between Japan and England/Europe. The possibility not only of discovering this exchange through letters and texts but also through the objects themselves, which continue to exist in the world, is a continuous source of inspiration.

NT *How is the way in which you exchange with one another shaped by the fact that you come from different cultures yourselves?*

MLK Producing such a large series of works is a kind of test of endurance for the body and mind, with long hours spent in the workshop and thinking on your feet until the end of the day. Natsuko and I were both intuitively drawn to variations and combinations of decorative techniques, rather than a limited, repetitive use of glazes or decoration. Because our work thrives on diversity, we need to support one another with a lot of stimulating ideas. This meant that both of us conducted our own research into art history and into ceramic techniques, imagery and motifs in advance of the project. We would go to ceramics museums in nearby cities to photograph the objects we were attracted to, flip through books at the library and research ceramics from southern Spain. We would bring novels to read at night, watercolors, pdfs of essays, films to watch together. By sharing this material, the two of us ended up in a layered conversation that gave rise to the decorations for the ceramics; in this they are ultimately both a form of research and of discourse.

4 Paul Bowles (1910 –1999) and his wife Jane (1917 –1973) were American writers, eccentric characters, bisexuals, and settled in Tangiers in 1947.

5 Bernard Leach, (1887 – 1979), is regarded as the father of British studio pottery. He founded the legendary Leach Pottery in St. Ives, Cornwall and became world-renowned through the publication of *A Potter's Book* (1940), based on his encounters with artists, craftsmen and thinkers in Japan.

6 Sōetsu Yanagi, (1889-1961), was a Japanese philosopher. In 1925 Yanagi, together with potters Kanjiro Kawai and Shoji Hamada, founded the concept of “Mingei”, literally meaning “Folk Crafts”.

Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

NT *Would one of you start a plate the other finish it? What was the actual process?*

MLK Sometimes, one of us might get tired of working on, say, the “Byzantine series”, and the other would finish decorating all the backs of those plates. I would watch Natsuko glaze a plate by swiftly throwing a cup of glaze on it and making a splatter, which I would then imitate. Or perhaps I would be stuck in a repetitive rut making the same tapas plate with an amphora painted on it, seven times over, and so then I would ask her what she thought of this plate idea and her reply would lead me to alter it. Or there would be a very large platter, that we would want to cover in ornate details and, to maintain our enthusiasm, we would paint at the same time.

NT *You invoke references from contemporary art, including Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Barbara Kruger, Judy Chicago and Yvonne Rainer. Can you tell us more about these choices?*

MLK Many of these more modern or contemporary references relate to the performative nature of particular works. Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party*[7] was an important starting point for us: from the manifold meanings in her work, the collective production of its elements, and the use of various crafts, to the presentation of the work as a traveling exhibition and sculpture, to the catalogue of the project in the book *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of our Heritage*. The catalogue shows each plate and tells the story behind its symbolism celebrating a historic woman in history. I was interested in the possibility of this type of multifaceted, collaborative sculpture, which could create an utopian frame through a performative, platform-based presentation with food – a means of developing what I understood as the more static or frozen position of *The Dinner Party*.

NU We are interested in patina, in the sense of repeated touch and memory, which could also be thought of as a kind of living archive. Through our interest in *The Dinner Party*, we were drawn to a lot of women in contemporary art as further reference points. I’m not sure if this was entirely intentional but we wanted to highlight those influences on our work and in the case of Barbara Kruger,[8] we were drawn to her series of posters for bus shelters across New York for The Public Art Fund from ‘91. It features a series of black and white photos of male figures of various ages, colors, and professions. The texts are variations on the following: “HELP! Graduation is coming and I’ve got a good job lined up. I want to get my life together. But my girlfriend is seeing other guys and I just found out I’m pregnant. What should I do?”

NT *And what about modern artists?*

MLK In regard to Picasso’s work, we focused on his production in Vallauris with the Madoura pottery studio. His work in the professional ceramic studio of the couple Suzanne and Georges Ramié seemed to have the same burst of energy Natsuko and I share. In their first year spent working together back in 1947 they completed more than 1000 unique ceramic pieces. This serial quality of production was relatable to us. There is this quote by Picasso in which he says: “I would like my ceramics to be found in every market, so that, in a village in Brittany or elsewhere, one might see a woman going to the fountain to fetch water with one of my jars.” Natsuko and I were drawn to his anthropomorphic vases and pitchers with animals such as owls and birds painted on them, as well as his round plates which have crude simple faces carved into them. Also, Picasso used deliberate references to ceramic traditions from all over the world, which is something we have been elaborating on quite a lot.

NT *Since the development of conceptual art, certain generations of artists rejected not only classical artistic categories but also notions of making and technique. They were ideologically opposed to the idea of craft. How do you integrate the heritage of such a contemporary art movement as you reactivate the gestures and materials of craft? Is this a new transversality, or a rejection of conceptual doxa?*

MLK The *Keramikos* project is one which folds these layers of more recent history into the longevity and timeless form of ceramics. Our education came from many teachers who passed on their experiences with conceptual art practices but in a way that was infused with affect and the body. Our education was steeped in the many self-sufficient methodologies of those practices and their sustainable nature. Within many conceptual practices, style also has meaning, and incorporates elements of craft and materiality, and so the interweaving of form and content is always at play. Our work looks at tradition, but it is not backwards: it exists in the ecosystem of ecologies between food and body; we digest and transform tradition to draw energy from it, like a kind of cultural compost.

NU At Cooper Union, some of the most memorable projects in which we took part were those organized by Doug Ashford[9] in his Public Art class, where he took us to the historic East Village Russian & Turkish baths, and we set up a barbeque on the street in front of a subway entrance. Ashford’s early art practice was mainly with Group Material, a collaborative project that used exhibition design and social practice in museums and other public spaces to imagine new political forms. This experience was very important for us.

7 *The Dinner Party* is an important icon of 1970s feminist art by American artist Judy Chicago (b. 1939). It comprises a massive ceremonial banquet, arranged on a triangular table commemorating important women from history. The settings consist of china-painted plates. It is on permanent display at the Brooklyn Museum.

8 Barbara Kruger (b. 1945) is an American conceptual artist known for her combination of type and image that conveys a direct feminist cultural critique.

9 Doug Ashford (b. 1958), was born in Rabat, Morocco, and lives and works in New York. He is an artist and Associate Professor at The Cooper Union in NYC where he has taught design, theory and public art since 1989.

Trembley, Nicolas, “The Genealogy of the Mediterranean,” *Keramikos*, Zurich: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2020, pp. 161-167

NT *Do you set out to challenge the cultural constructs and classical categorizations that can be conveyed by ceramics?*

MLK There are certainly historical connections between craft movements and nationalistic identities. However, our own research into the exchange and the development of decorative/functional wares between the historic ceramic and economic centers provides insight into the expanded and shared development of cultural symbols. These not only de-centralize certain narratives of power but also reveal their shifts and fluxes over time.

NT *While historically, arbitrary divisions have been drawn between head and hand, practice and theory, craftsman and artist, and our society suffers from this legacy, Richard Sennett proves that “Doing is thinking”![10]*

MLK When discussing Irving Penn’s photographs of trades, Sennett talks about small tradespeople and how they hold up a mirror to ourselves. The image of the craftsman is loaded with political value. They are the people who modern capitalism has doomed, and the artisan worker is seen as a kind of victim – but is this actually true? In the 1700s, the encyclopedia of arts and crafts was developed and published by Denis Diderot,[11] and it offered numerous depictions of the dignity of craftspeople. Diderot sought to place labour and artisanal labour on an equal footing and accord them the same degree of dignity. The craftsman rather than the gentleman – who lives off the labour of others – was presented as the true citizen of the Republic.

NT *How do you think the art world could resuscitate living craftsmanship?*

NU This is a quote from Yanagi more than half century ago that still resonates today: “It would be most difficult without a change in the social system. Under present conditions folk crafts are dying, bad factory products are increasing, and the artist-craftsman works for the collector. Here and there pockets of traditional crafts can be found, a thin trickle from a healthy past. Whenever I see them, the desire rises in me to help them, but it is a difficult task as things stand. I am keenly aware of the urgent need for a social change.”

NT *What system do you consider necessary for folk art today?*

NU In terms of what I can do to promote this way of making and thinking, I believe it’s important not just to make ceramics in the studio, but also to collaborate with other artists, and extend the network to encompass various factories and industries. For example, with the art school where I teach, the ESAD TALM,[12] I have organized visits and work sessions at a nearby brick factory. We have also travelled to visit ceramic factories in Romania in order to discover the ways in which things are made and circulate at different scales.

NT *The last decade has seen a major resurgence in interest for ceramic not just as a material but also as an artisanal and artistic process. Why do you think this is?*

NU Pottery shards are amongst the oldest artefacts in existence, partly because other organic materials like textiles or basketry have decomposed. But you can find pottery all over the world. Humans everywhere have been making ceramics for a very long time: there is a universal quality to them. So making ceramics today feels like participating in something eternal.

10 In his famous essay, “The Craftsman”, Yale University Press, 2008, the American sociologist Richard Sennett proposes a definition of craftsmanship much broader than that of “skilled manual labor” and argues that the computer programmer, the artist, and even the simple parent or citizen are craftsmen.

11 L’Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts) was a general encyclopedia published in France between 1751 and 1772 by philosopher Denis Diderot.

12 École Supérieure d’Art et de Design, Tours, Angers, Le Mans, France.

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

PORTRAIT DE FAMILLE : MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY

POUR *NUMÉRO ART,* LE JEUNE AMÉRICAIN INSTALLÉ À PARIS A RÉUNI SA FAMILLE ARTISTIQUE AUTOUR D'UN GRAND BANQUET. UN DÎNER AU MILIEU DE SES CRÉATIONS BAROQUES ET HÉDONISTES, DONNÉ QUELQUES JOURS AVANT LE VERNISSAGE D'UNE EXPOSITION PARISIENNE TRÈS ATTENDUE. PAR TENZING BARSHEE. PORTRAITS PAR LEILA HEKMAT

FR

ÉCOUTEZ LES ENFANTS, écoutez les garçons, les filles et les autres, écoutez bien, c'est l'une des nombreuses histoires sur Matthew Lutz-Kinoy, un très beau Juif de Brooklyn. Son histoire n'est ni brève ni simple. Suivre son travail revient à plonger dans une histoire d'amour très forte, riche de paillettes et de tourments. Son art est composé de nombreuses voix et c'est pour cela qu'il nous titille à de nombreux endroits. Sérieusement, écoutez bien Matthew Lutz-Kinoy. Il crée des images qui se nourrissent de l'utopie que pourraient être nos vies. Il compose des environnements sous la forme d'images. Entrer dans les espaces qu'il crée nous donne à voir un monde d'une intensité multicolore, aux couleurs de ses formes viscérales, de son humour attachant et de sa précision plastique.

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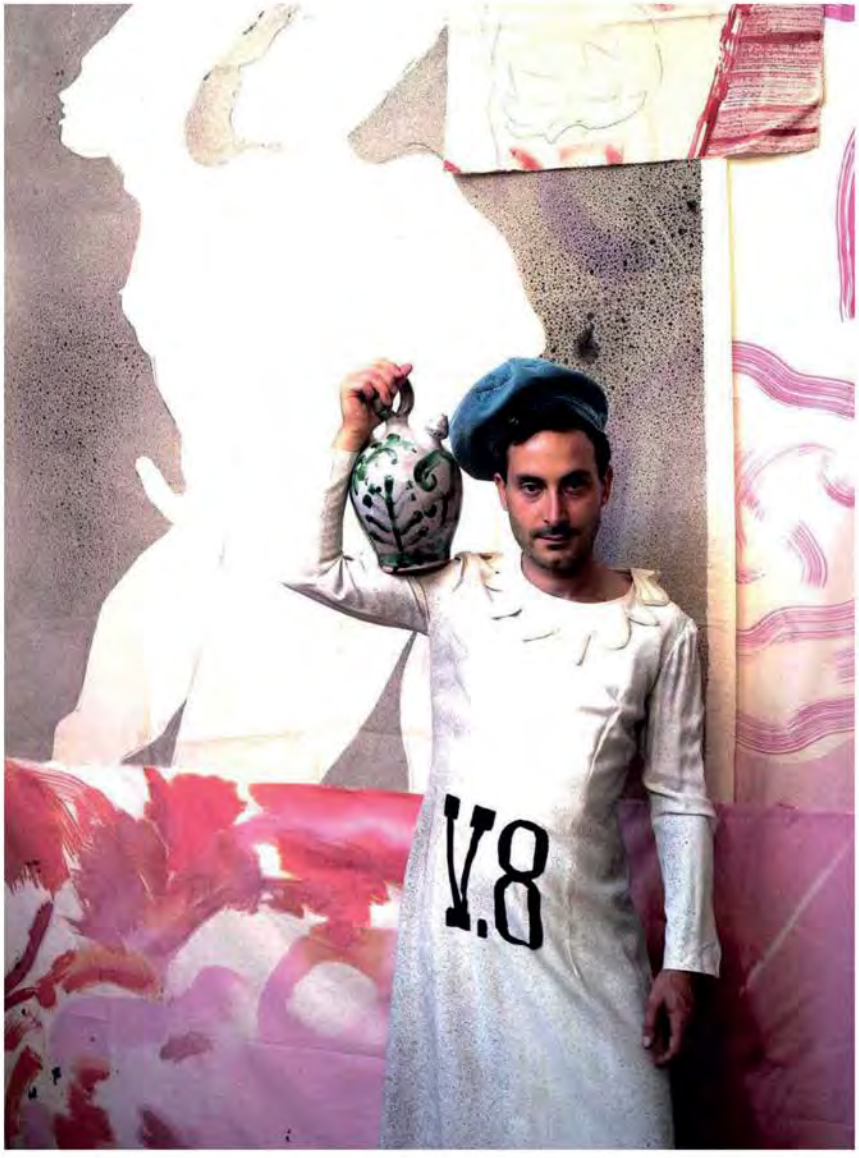
MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY, FAMILY PORTRAIT

FOR *NUMÉRO ART*, THE YOUNG AMERICAN ARTIST, NOW BASED IN PARIS, GATHERED HIS SPIRITUAL FAMILY AROUND HIM FOR A BAROQUE DINNER ON THE EVE OF HIS NEW LEFT BANK SHOW.

Listen little ones, listen up closely, this is one of the tales of Matthew Lutz-Kinoy, a very handsome Jewish man from Brooklyn. His story is neither brief nor simple. As he is a brilliant artist of many talents, to follow his practice is like diving into a meaningful love story, full of glitter and heart-shakes. His art is comprised of many voices, and

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9



Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY PHOTOGRAPHIE AU MILIEU DE SA FAMILLE ARTISTIQUE, À MONTREUIL. DE GAUCHE À DROITE : LOREN STURTEVANT, STÉPHANIE MOISDON, RENAUD JEREZ, ANNE DRESSEN, LEE, JULIE BOUKOBZA, BARNABÉ, MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY, RETO SCHMID, ANINA TRÖSCH, NICOLAS TREMBLEY, ARTHUR FOURAY. NAPPE RÉALISÉE PAR ANINA TRÖSH AND LUTZ-KINOY, CÉRAMIQUES PAR NATSUKO UCHINO ET MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY, DÉCOR ET TOILE DE FOND PAR RENAUD JEREZ ET MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

Numéro

CI-DESSUS VUE DE L'EXPOSITION *BOWLES*, GALERIE KAMEL MENNOUR, AU PREMIER PLAN : *PLAIN PLEASURES* (2018), ACRYLIQUE, TEMPERA SUR TOILE, 340 X 150 CM, ET CÉRAMIQUES ; AU FOND À GAUCHE : *IN THE RED ROOM* (2018), ACRYLIQUE, TEMPERA SUR TOILE, 350 X 260 CM, ET CÉRAMIQUES.

FR

Sa trajectoire de vie l'a amené de la Grosse Pomme au grand B, Berlin, capitale de la jeune scène montante des artistes internationaux, perdus dans une version dépassée de *La Bohème*, se prenant la tête sur leur position dans la vie et le monde de l'art. Mais la vie de Matthew Lutz-Kinoy n'est pas une posture. Il vise le monde réel en en donnant une représentation déformée et outrancière.

Sa manière de surjouer et son usage précis mais original du langage vont au-delà du concept de *camp*. Son recours démesuré aux proportions spatiales, passant de dessins délicats à des céramiques profondément obscures, en passant par des toiles surdimensionnées, invite l'esprit observateur à sauter de son affect le plus intime à la brutalité de l'espace public.

Les différentes strates et voix, visibles dans l'éventail de ses activités comme sur ses toiles, surgissent – explosant de toutes parts –, se contaminent mutuellement, fusionnant les différents concepts de culture et leurs perspectives. La peau, métaphore fragile mais résistante de la multitude des narrations de Matthew Lutz-Kinoy, touche et est touchée, par elle-même, mais aussi par des agents extérieurs. Peu importe combien de fois il recouvre cette peau, elle invite à se connecter, elle se couvre tout en se mettant à nu, elle sent et est sentie. La fluidité du récit narratif global de la pratique de l'artiste est aussi résolue dans son issue qu'elle est ouverte à toute mise en relation avec des questions dépassant ses propres frontières.

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so tickles us in many places. He channels them with the appropriate intensity, and so they challenge us. His story doesn't have a simple beginning, nor does it have an end in sight. For now it takes place in Paris. Seriously, listen to this. If you let him, Lutz-Kinoy will invite you on a journey that resembles his own. He creates images that feed from the utopia that could be our lives, and they form the building blocks immersing our sweet escape. He makes environments that are images. Entering the spaces he creates allows us to see a world coloured by his visceral forms, his endearing humour and his material precision. In both spheres, art and life, he is smart enough to laugh at a world like ours. And he is generous enough to share the depth of his love and spill the beans that are his dreams.

His life journey took him from the Big Apple to the big B: Berlin, the capital of the young and struggling scene of international artists, lost in an outdated Bohemia, overthinking their position in life and the world of art. His life wasn't an act, but it was his act that felt like observing life's essence. His ability to convince his audience, as an astute performer who merges dance and theatre, managed to expose any kind of realism as something synthetic. He points to the real world by blowing it out of proportion. His way of overacting and precise but out-of-this-world use of language surpass the concept

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

CI-DESSUS *THE DELICATE PRAY (2018)*, ACRYLIQUE SUR TOILE, 260 X 190 CM.

FR

Quand est venu le moment de quitter Berlin, Matthew Lutz-Kinoy a parcouru le monde avec son projet, réalisant des expositions et événements dans des lieux lointains comme Los Angeles, São Paulo et New York. Son projet est fait de métissage, de fusion et de mélange, de chamboulements et de soubresauts ; il y mêle des influences de la littérature avec toutes sortes de canons culturels. Attiré par le surf et le soleil, il s'est brièvement fixé à Los Angeles. À la consternation de ses admirateurs et de son public européens, il a presque semblé se perdre dans les vagues et la nourriture saine de la côte californienne. Mais ensuite, c'est l'amour, éternel moteur de cet homme merveilleux, de son inspiration et de son coup de pinceau, qui a poussé l'artiste à revenir en Europe. À Paris, plus précisément, la ville où il a finalement pu exprimer tout son potentiel, et qui pourrait, maintenant et pour toujours, du moins jusqu'à demain, répondre à son énergie d'intimité. Ce déménagement semblait naturel et tout aussi naturellement, sa famille locale s'est agrandi, grâce à de nouveaux liens et des anecdotes déjà cultes.

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy a atterri à Paris comme une citrouille à Halloween, conquérant le cœur des gens avec le plus beau des sourires. En février, il a sabré une bouteille de champagne pour inaugurer la nouvelle antenne parisienne de sa galerie de Los Angeles (Freedman Fitzpatrick), avec l'exposition *Fooding*, pour célébrer, avec ironie, la scène très dynamique des restaurants parisiens et l'appli du même nom destinée aux gourmets branchés. Ses tableaux mettaient en scène des chefs nus en pleins ébats et

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of camp. His over-the-top usage of spatial proportions, moving from delicate drawings to deep-dark ceramics to oversized canvases, invites the observing mind to jump from the most intimate affect to public brutality.

When it was time to leave Berlin, the wonderful artist travelled the world with his project, realizing unforgettable exhibitions and events in Los Angeles, São Paulo and New York. His project is one of miscegenation, merging and mixing, tumbling and tossing, blending influences from Japanese literature to all different kinds of cultural canons. Attracted by the surf and sun, he briefly settled in L.A. To the dismay of his sad European fans and public, he almost seemed lost to the waves and health foods of the Californian coast. But then it was love, which has always been at the core of this wondrous man's drive, his inspiration and his brush stroke, it was love that flushed the artist back to Europe. Back to Paris, to be precise, the city where he could finally flourish to the fullest. Lutz-Kinoy landed in Paris like a pumpkin on Hallowe'en, warming people's hearts with the biggest grin. In February, he inaugurated Freedman Fitzpatrick's new Paris location with the exhibition *Fooding*, celebrating, tongue-in-cheek, the city's vibrant restaurant scene and eponymous eating-out app. His larger-than-life paintings paraded naked chefs fucking and were themselves titled

Barshee, Tenzing, “Portrait de Famille: Matthew Lutz-Kinoy,” *Numero*, October 2018, pp. 3-9

Numéro

CI-DESSUS, DE GAUCHE À DROITE *TWO SKIES* (2018), ACRYLIQUE SUR TOILE, 250 X 140 CM. *PAUL BOWLES IN TANGIER '47* (2018), ACRYLIQUE ET FUSAIN SUR TOILE, 250 X 140 CM

FR

leurs titres faisaient référence à des restaurants (comme *Verre Volé*, 2018), ceux qu'il fréquente avec ses affinités électives, là où lui et sa nouvelle famille ont fait couler des litres de vin rouge et englouti de délicieuses spécialités locales. Bien que l'exposition ait été jugée trop osée, même pour le Marais – c'était aussi trop pour la Fashion Week –, son masquage – derrière des bâches en plastique – n'a fait que renforcer la mystique qui a entouré l'arrivée de l'artiste à Paris.

Depuis son installation parisienne, sa carrière s'est envolée vers la stratosphère, consolidée par l'exposition rétrospective, sous l'autorité de Stéphanie Moisdon, au Consortium de Dijon, il y a quelques mois. Il compte parmi les peintres les plus audacieux de sa génération, à qui aucun format ou sujet ne fait peur, qui réussit à célébrer l'autonomie supposée de la peinture, mais pour la laisser se fracasser dans un nexus de codépendance à l'intérieur d'une hyperréalité post-relationnelle. Alors même que chacun des éléments exposés peut être lu indépendamment du reste, il est toujours assez émancipé pour être conscient de sa fonction comme un arrière-plan de sa propre vie et de la nôtre. On peut admirer le dernier coup d'éclat de Matthew Lutz-Kinoy dans son nouveau port d'attache, la galerie Kamel Mennour. Symbole de sa démarche, Paris est sa terre d'élection et c'est son environnement social qui injecte une énergie nouvelle à sa production, autant que sa pratique influence en retour sa famille d'amis de plus en plus nombreuse.

***Bowles*, du 6 septembre au 6 octobre, galerie Kamel Mennour, Paris.**

EN

after the restaurants (e.g. *Verre Volé*, 2018) he frequents with his new elective affinities – basically the places where the artist and his new family glug litres of red wine and gobble up the delicacies. Although the exhibition was too outrageous for the Marais – even fashion week couldn't deal with it – its veiling behind plastic sheets only furthered the mystification of the artist's arrival in the City of Light.

Lutz-Kinoy is a rocket that cannot be stopped. Since his move to Paris, his career has stayed firmly in the fast lane, as witnessed by the generous survey exhibition curated by Stéphanie Moisdon at Le Consortium in Dijon some months ago. The project showed Lutz-Kinoy to be among the most audacious and risk-taking painters of his generation. Shying away from neither size nor subject, he celebrates painting's supposed autonomy, only to let it crash in a nexus of codependency within a post-relational hyperreality. As every one of his exhibited elements stands for itself, it is always emancipated enough to be aware of its function as a backdrop to his own and all our lives. Only with shivers can one anticipate Lutz-Kinoy's latest big splash at his new home, the Parisian gallery Kamel Mennour. Such a symbol of his practice, Paris is this artist's new home, and it his social environment that reinvigorates his production as much as his practice feeds back into his ever-growing family of friends.

D'Aurizio, Michele, "Matthew Lutz-Kinoy Le Consortium / Dijon," *Flash---Art.com*, June 7, 2018

FLASH ART

•REVIEW

7 June 2018, 12:13 pm CET

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy *Le Consortium / Dijon*

Installation view of Southern Garden of the Château Bellevue by Matthew Lutz-Kinoy. Courtesy of the artist and Le Consortium, Dijon.

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy's solo exhibition at Le Consortium conflates two places far away in time and space: New York's Frick Collection, opened to the public in 1935, and the Château de Bellevue, erected in 1750 on the outskirts of Paris for Louis XV's mistress Madame de Pompadour and demolished seventy years later. Lutz-Kinoy's combo, however, is not purely gratuitous; it has been drawn through the figure of François Boucher, the French Rococo painter who was a protégé of Madame de Pompadour (and indeed decorated her private rooms at the château), and whom Henry Frick voraciously collected.

Lutz-Kinoy's embrace of the dense ornamental language of the Late Baroque develops into a journey — or better, a *promenade* — through modes of representation. The artist presents thirteen large-scale paintings and a collection of ceramic objects shown on tatami-*cum*-plinths. The paintings cover almost the entire wall surface of the single room hosting the exhibition, wrapping the space in a continuous decorative shell. Their subjects include: naked male bodies (either entirely drawn or rendered as silhouettes), flower motives, architectural plans of gardens (indeed, of the park surrounding the Château de Bellevue), color fields, pastoral vignettes involving infants (sometimes quoting Boucher's paintings in the Frick Collection), trinkets in the shape of exotic animals, gestures reminiscent of the most abstract landscapes of the Chinese literati, and so on.

Because of their enormous scale, many of the canvases were partitioned; their fragmentation, however, enhances the viewer's experience, echoing both the Rococo affinity for asymmetry and the maze-like design of the *giardino all'italiana*. The painterly surface becomes itself a garden, a place where the artist's visual memories are triggered by the cyclicity of seasons and grow into inventions; where the figure-ground optics of figurative painting meet the theatricality of nature mastered by man; where harmony is achieved through extravagance. Standing before the many bodies populating these paintings, it is hard not to translate this agenda to gendered identities; and, in fact, as in Boucher's bucolic scenes in which children are ambiguously depicted carrying out adult tasks, Lutz-Kinoy's males — often captured in luscious poses — blend with the exquisite queering function of decoration.

by Michele D'Aurizio

Barshee, Tenzing, “Matthew Lutz-Kinoy: Social Fantasy,” *Mousse Magazine,* #56, December 2016-January 2017

MOUSSE

MATTHEW LUTZ-KINOY: SOCIAL FANTASY (Mousse Magazine #56)

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy interviewed by Tenzing Barshee

Mendes Wood DM
Rua da Consolação 3358, Jardins São Paulo, São Paulo 01416-000, Brazil
February 18 – March 22, 2017 mendeswooddm.com

TB: How's the weather in São Paulo?

MLK: It was really sunny. But now it's raining every day.

TB: This is the third time you've traveled to Brazil to make art. What kind of work did you make the rest time?

MLK: One day, I was working on a painting and I had the canvas out on the terrace. It didn't take long until it was covered in black exhaust. To see this rampant pollution affected me quite a bit, and I responded by making charcoal drawings. In one of them, I merged a building with a human form—a high-heeled, skinny leg growing out of a wavy high-rise.

TB: Didn't you also make a drawing of a local nightclub?

MLK: There was this one club called Canthos where everyone was on GHB. Lots of plastic surgery. Many of the guys were super muscular, pumped-up gym queens who were passing out on top of one another, which triggered these thoughts on feminized bodies, curved architecture, and the merging of both. I noticed this binary gender reversal, a ip- op of standard roles: the city is full of huge buildings that aren't masculine and the men, I saw, were buff but vulnerable, passing out in the nightclub, topless, lying around, bending.

TB: But you didn't approach the ideas about these bodies and buildings on a skin-oriented surface level. You considered how they come together structurally, how they're built.

MLK: Well, I went on an LSD walk around the city with two friends, which was somehow another reversal of one's basic social expectation. If you make your- self vulnerable, you can participate. I learned how the city is organized structurally through a series of hills and bridges. You don't really see these layers at rst, but as you walk around, you notice how high you're standing on a hill or a bridge and how the city stretches out beneath and above you. These hills are quite gradual, they're not extreme. All of a sudden, you're much higher than you thought you were. It's very effective.

TB:To what effect?

MLK: Even though São Paulo is very dense, this gives you a liberating feeling because it allows you the illusion of having a vertical access into this vast metropolis.

TB: Is it too far-fetched to make a social comparison here?

MLK: It's a contradiction, of course. The distribution of wealth is so absurd here that most people are trapped in their social class and can only ever advance horizontally. This is one of the reasons why walking around as an outsider is quite interesting. You think that you're moving around these different social levels in a hyper-designed urban environment, surrounded by its epic high-rises that are dispersed as a complex landscape. But unlike other cities, the high-rises aren't a point of orientation. They're just everywhere.You don't necessarily see a building from many angles, as your view is mostly blocked by build- ings and other construction. They're mostly hidden. It's about having all these different perspectives.That feeds into all kinds of metaphors that aren't really true to people who actually live here. Life is rough here.

TB: How did your interest in Brazilian and Japanese culture coincide?

MLK: After I left São Paulo the rst time, I collaborated with Tobias Madison for a theater production based on the work of Shuji Terayama at Kunsthalle Zürich and went to Japan to do research. Right after the show in Zürich, I left for São Paulo, where I decided to make paintings titled Princess PomPom in the Villa of Falling Flowers, a character study of the protago- nists of the classic piece of Japanese literature Genji Monogatari (TheTale of Genji).

TB: Can you give some background?

MLK: In São Paulo, I kept experiencing a vibrant attitude toward the body, an intense relationship to sex work for example, the ability to use pleasure as empowerment.The body becomes utilized as a space of social play and pleasure. I then participated in the gay pride parade, where you see so many people who are in the process of transition. People with small growing breasts. Three million people. It's a whole city. I felt very emotional to see that space of potential, a different kind of narrative. It felt less masculine than similar events in the US or Europe.You have to prevent yourself from projecting too much as you fantasize about this being a political group, and you don't understand why these people are marginalized. You want the whole parade to secede and create an alternative state lled with freaky topless glam.

TB: How did you bridge this experience to Japanese literature?

MLK: I'm generally interested in guration, which isn't a space of metaphor but projection.That's why it was interesting to use TheTale of Genji as a structure. Because it takes the form of a preexisting narrative that you don't have to take responsibility for, it exists outside of you and your own forming of meaning. So you can use it as a formal structure, which allows you to work more freely. It also felt appropriate to use The Tale of Genji because of the historic relationship of Japanese immigration in Brazil, which, as a visitor, I was somehow able to relate to. I wanted to create a bridge between the corporeal frivolity I experienced, and the heavy weight of a social narrative: from this life ark, a portrait of a person, a historic, epic novel. To create a play with a type of frivolity through an accessory, something super uous and decorative. The artworks needed something frivolous beyond the picture plane, while retaining a heavy atmosphere. That's how I came to sow the pompoms onto the paintings. I needed to push the subject.

TB: So, what works are you making now, your third time in Brazil?

MLK: I've been making ceramics with Silmara Watari, a Brazilian woman who studied Minguei, Chinese, and anagama pottery for thirteen years in Japan. To me, the interesting aspect of craft is the social fantasy that surrounds it. Not really how it's made.That's why I'm doing my ceramics here in Brazil and I'm not just nerding out on making a beautiful thing in my studio in Los Angeles.

TB: Do you treat the social narrative that surrounds ceramics as a cultural readymade?

MLK: Maybe, yes. I was already aestheticizing that in my Fire Sale dance in 2013, a performance that was one of my very rst ceramic projects. It was already objectifying social interest in craft and ceramic work. Toying with that fetish.

Berardini, Andrew, "Matthew Lutz-Kinoy - To Satisfy the Rose," *ArtReview,* April 2016, p. 115

ArtReview

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy *To Satisfy the Rose*

Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles 24 January – 12 March

A cool wash of blue. In stockinged feet, tiptoe through a canvassy wave tunnel patched with stretched denim, patterned with an expressive sea-spray of blue and billowing with every step, the whole contraption held up with rickety bamboo poles (*Ocean Essays*, 2016). Peekaboo glory holes plucked in the drapey fabric give tiny frames of what lies beyond: a small photocopied snap of surfers, ceramic masks and glazed pots, découpaged plinths clad in foam, a series of oceanic adventures playing on video overhead and a crumpled watery painting of a rose dangling from the ceiling, which points to the show's title: *To Satisfy the Rose*.

Matthew Lutz-Kinoy, in his second solo show at Freedman Fitzpatrick, clearly loves the loose, wet smack of water and all its slippery possibilities, a promiscuity that can sensually touch all media and ideas, flow over and immerse the high and low of life. The accompanying press release, an artist-authored prose-poem, channels the traditions of James McCourt's wildly flamboyant opera novel *Mawrdew Czgowchwz* (1975) and more recent art-critical musings, such as the high-minded chattiness of Bruce Hainley, a sensuous style that is more for the texture of the words and the shotgunning of referential nouns than any prosaic reading might easily allow: 'Wet is a science fiction place, water world, damp damp.' The rose and its garden seem emblematic of a set of controlled aesthetics that require the wild liquidity of water to exist.

Moving easily from theatre to poetry to video to dance to ceramics, Lutz-Kinoy's œuvre thus far finds its fullest form in expressive paintings and all-over canvassed environments like this one, where vaguely neoclassical figures often prance nakedly through; they're almost like Japanese rice-paper paintings in their collapsed narratives. Call it 'soft expressionism', if it needs a name, which may be found elsewhere in the works of Mira Dancy and a host of others, who ditch all the butch machismo found in the 1980s wave of neo-expressionism and dudes like Julian Schnabel. Here there is a dollop of the more fanciful *Transavanguardia* of Francesco Clemente, Sandro Chia and the gang. A movement more sneered at than beloved (even mentioning it here I feel like I'm whispering "Tristero" in Thomas Pynchon's 1966 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*), *Transavanguardia* still finds collectors to be sure, but hardheaded intellectualism and brute formalism have pushed it out as something frivolous and easily picked over by marketeers (though this dismissal has been growing fainter with each passing season).

Lutz-Kinoy's wet-wash feels clever as hell and clearly draws from a queer aesthetic of the handmade, the frilly, in a palette not far from Pantone's corporate attempt at binary-breaking and softness in its colours of 2016: Rose Quartz and Serenity (a hard steal from the Internet microcultures of seapunk and vaporwave, as well as an attempt to claim the ascension of trans-rights as a trademarkable trend). These sea-kissed colours, without their corporate earrings, make up a cultural movement towards the emotive, towards softness as political gesture, hybridity and liminal spaces as centre rather than margin, all ideas easily found here. In all its bustling energies and political pleasures, Lutz-Kinoy's show is utterly charming, with all the compliment and baggage that adjective can carry, a diaphanous practice that comprises everything its spreading colours wetly touch. *Andrew Berardini*

Ocean essays, 2016, acrylic on canvas, linen, fabric, single-channel audio and video, 3 min. Photo: Michael Underwood. Courtesy the artist and Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles

TB: But you didn't approach the ideas about these bodies and buildings on a skin-oriented surface level. You considered how they come together structurally, how they're built.

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Paik, Sherry, “Mai-Thu Perret: Flowers in the Eye,” *Ocula.com*, October 2, 2020

OCULA

Mai-Thu Perret: Flowers in the Eye

By Sherry Paik | October 2, 2020

Exhibition view: Mai-Thu Perret, *Flowers in the Eye*, Simon Lee Gallery, New York (15 September–17 October 2020). Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery. Photo: Pierre Le Hors

In this Ocula Video Insight, presented in partnership with Simon Lee Gallery, Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret introduces new ceramic and tapestry works on view in her solo show *Flowers in the Eye* at Simon Lee Gallery, New York (15 September–17 October 2020).

Flowers in the Eye follows on from the artist’s exhibition *News from Nowhere* with Simon Lee Hong Kong earlier this year (10 January–28 March 2020). Often drawing inspiration from avant-garde and radical art movements, Perret derived her Hong Kong exhibition’s title from an eponymous novel by the 19th century British artist and writer William Morris, in which he imagined a utopian, capitalism-free future.

While Perret’s *News from Nowhere* included ceramic works like *Yesterday rain, clear skies tomorrow* and *Today there is, tomorrow there isn’t* (both 2019)—smooth rectangular slabs with an organically shaped hole at each of their centres—*Flowers in the Eye* offers a different set of approaches to glazed ceramic: the new works focus on gesture and the transformation of clay from wet and ‘endlessly pliable’ to fired and static.

A thousand peaks twist and turn, their color like indigo and *Majestic and aloof, off in a world apart* (both 2020), a pair of circular, wall-mounted ceramics, are titled in Perret’s characteristically lyrical manner. At a distance, these glazed, tactile surfaces are marked with patterns that evoke an entanglement of flower petals. As Perret explains in the video, however, they are in fact the product of the artist’s hands engraving a trail of time and movement into unfired clay. When fired, the trace is preserved and held between motion and stillness.

A similar preservation infuses a pair of ceramic baskets, whose forms not only refer back to the functional uses for ceramics but also to the tradition of decorative pots and vases. *On top of snow she adds a layer of frost* is entirely white and tall, a contrast to the black and flat-bottomed *The fool piles up snow to make a silver mountain* (both 2020). Seen from above, the sparsely woven baskets resemble netting or skeletal flowers, perhaps hinting at the construction method of the tapestries hanging on the wall nearby.

Based on Perret’s watercolour sketches and woven in a workshop in Mexico, two tapestries retain ‘all the washes, all the details, and all the small accidents of the paint’. *Flowers in the Eye* (2020) looks remarkably like a painting from afar—the muted green and black colours seemingly bleed and seep into the fabric of the canvas—when in reality they have been woven, thread by thread.

Dixon, Carole, “wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery,” *Wallpaper.com*, September 8, 2020

Wallpaper*

wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery

Mid-City’s David Kordansky Gallery expands to a design by wHY Architecture’s Kulapat Yantrasast, spanning a three-volume arts campus that allows for flexibility in cultural programming

By Carole Dixon, photography: Elon Schoenholz | September 8, 2020

David Kordansky Gallery’s new courtyard with outdoor sculptures as part of the gallery’s wHYdesigned expansion in Mid-City, Los Angeles. Featuring Rashid Johnson’s *High Time* (2020) (left) and Will Boone’s *The Three Fates* (2020). Courtesy of the artists, wHY, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

Loyally rooted in the California culture, yet with a pulse on the international conversation, David Kordansky Gallery is expanding with an arts campus at the corner of Edgewood and S. La Brea Avenue in Mid-City. Since its humble beginnings in Chinatown in 2003, followed by two different Culver City homes, the gallery has developed into one of the most dynamic venues for contemporary art in Los Angeles.

The renovation was carried out by Los Angeles-based architect Kulapat Yantrasast and his firm wHY, who also designed the original gallery on site, which opened in 2014. The new complex comprises three structures, joined by a central landscaped courtyard that will allow visitors to flow between the spaces, creating one dynamic art compound where it’s possible to mount a trio of shows simultaneously.

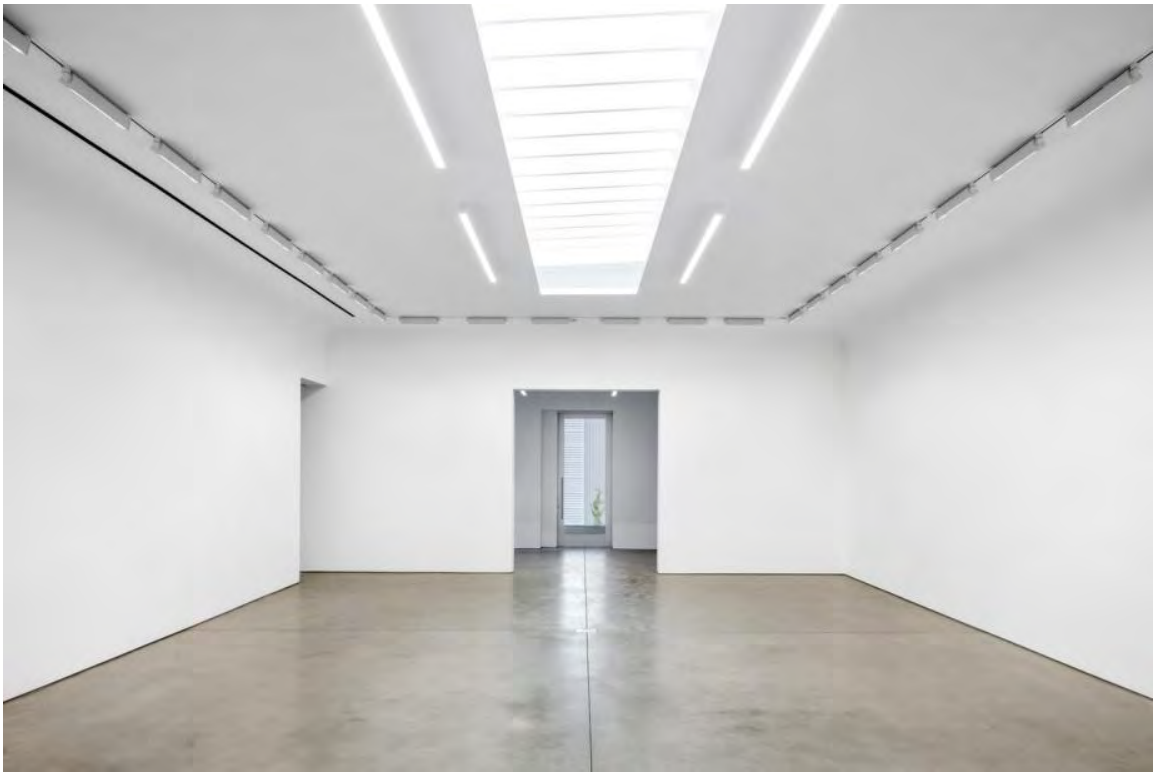
According to Kordansky, ‘the extended campus gives us a range of new possibilities – intimate exhibition space (an alternative to our larger gallery spaces), an exterior courtyard for outdoor sculpture - and when we can gather safely again – screenings, performances, and events, space for photography, additional storage, etc. We’ve never had this much flexibility for programming before.’

Dixon, Carole, “wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery,” *Wallpaper.com*, September 8, 2020

The Three Fates (2020), an enamel on bronze sculpture by Will Boone, installed near the terraced entryway to David Kordansky Gallery’s new expansion in Mid-City, Los Angeles, designed by wHY. Courtesy of the artist, wHY, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

Dixon, Carole, “wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery,” *Wallpaper.com*, September 8, 2020

Courtesy of wHY and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles



Courtesy of wHY and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

The courtyard provides access to the two new exhibition spaces with natural light flooding each space via a centrally cut portal in the ceiling. ‘Kulapat has an ability to highlight the most curious features of a structure while adding clean, focused lines to accentuate art-viewing experiences,’ said Kordansky. ‘He respects art as much as architecture.’

Dixon, Carole, “wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery,” *Wallpaper.com*, September 8, 2020

Courtesy of wHY and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

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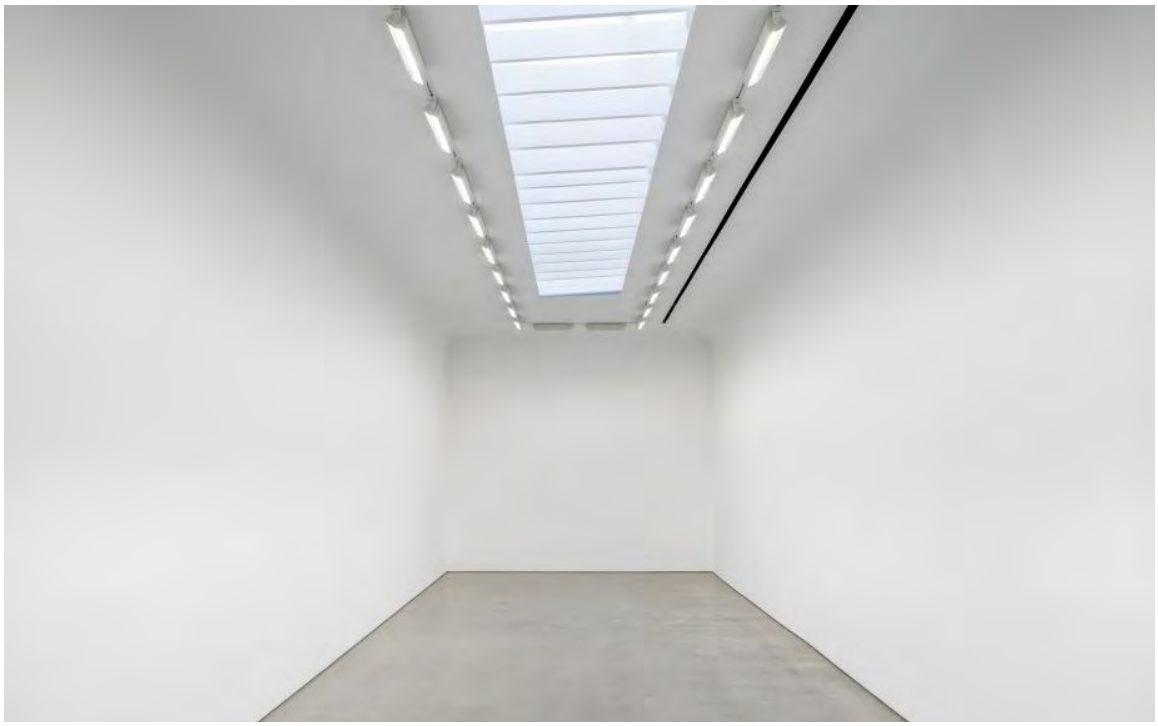
Courtesy of wHY and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

The residential scale and feel of the new arts campus is in tune with the neighborhood. Subtle details soften the space, from coved ceilings to an exterior with a series of monolithic fig-covered site walls that conjure a seamless movement between indoors and outdoors. Dark asphalt bordered with succulent plants and gray gravel create a subdued setting.

Yantrasast drew from the unique aspects of the local art community for inspiration. ‘Many great cultural exchange and art moments in LA happen in wonderful backyards where people feel at home,’ he said. ‘The art scenes in LA are very down-to-earth, and personal, and I think the gallery spaces should reflect that, rather than try to appear commercial or corporate.’

Dixon, Carole, “wHY Architecture’s new Los Angeles arts campus for David Kordansky Gallery,” *Wallpaper.com*, September 8, 2020



Courtesy of wHY and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Custom wallpaper by Mai-Thu Perret installed in the restroom of David Kordansky Gallery’s new wHY-designed exhibition space. Perret’s wallpaper was originally designed and printed for her 2007 solo exhibition *Land of Crystal* at the Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Netherlands. Courtesy of the artist, wHY, and David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

The courtyard space is designed with drought resistant planting, gravel and wooden trim by wHY’s Landscape Workshop to provide a contemplative place for visitors, artists as well as gallery staff to enjoy. ‘The courtyard also comes alive as gathering place for openings and many art events, just like a good LA garden,’ adds Yantrasast.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

One Year (6 Issues) USD 100.00
Two Years (12 Issues) USD 185.00
Single Copies RRP AUD 30.00, CAD 28.00, EUR 18.00, GBP 17.00, HKD 163.00, JPY 2,246, KRW 25,000, NZD 32.00, SGD 30.00, USD 21.00. Almanac USD 32.00
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ArtAsiaPacific (ISSN 1039 3625) is published six times yearly by: ArtAsiaPacific Holdings Ltd.

MAI-THU PERRET, *Les Guérillères XII* (detail), 2016, figure in steel, wire, papier-mâché, acrylic paint, gouache, synthetic hair, cotton and polyester fabric, bronze, polyester resin, ceramic, wool blanket and steel base, wood and steel chair, 135×63×75 cm. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

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(See ONE ON ONE)

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(See THE POINT)

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

Mai-Thu Perret:

I Know the Meaning of Revolution

BY CHLOE CHU

llation view of *Black Balthazar*, 2013, birch plywood,
n core, and water-based paint, 123 × 115 × 30 cm, at
litarian Elite,” David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, 2014.
› by Stefan Altenburger. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

AT THE EDGE

A blazing asteroid hurtles across the sky, alarming three dinosaurs who stand immobile as devastation looms on their horizon. The tyrannosaurus, mouth agape, exclaims, “Oh shit! The economy!!” A Covid-19-era internet gem, this meme’s witticism strikes home as the pandemic’s death toll rises daily while world leaders wring their hands about shrinking GDPs. Clearly, our priorities are all wrong. If we were to cast our myopia in a more generous light, however, it might look like our fault is that we are hopeful creatures. We believe we will survive. The optimistic among us view existential crises as opportunities to not only right our wrongs but to improve our lives. I, for one, have found myself asking the question: how can we rebuild societies so that they are better than before? Are we at the crossroads between utopia and dystopia?

Society is a Hole, 2009, screenprint on paper, 83.8×59.4cm. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles.

My questions about what “utopia” might mean today led me to the practice of Mai-Thu Perret. For over two decades, Perret has created artworks that parallel her continually morphing fictional text *The Crystal Frontier* (1999–). The story is set in the desert of southwestern New Mexico, and revolves around a commune of women who are seeking ways of living that are beyond the alienated capitalist and patriarchal modes of Western neoliberal society, with the eventual view of admitting males into their eden. The disgruntled proclamation of the silkscreen print *Society is a Hole* (2009), emblazoned in a blocky, fuchsia font, reveals the impetus behind the commune’s formation: “Why did I leave? / Why did I come here? / Let me tell you a story / I left because I was tired of people like you / I think / Society is a hole / It makes me lie to my friends / Aren’t you so fucking tired of waiting? / I understand the word secession / I know the meaning of revolution / I was tired of being alone.”

A self-professed bookworm and literature graduate, Perret cites as inspirations for *The Crystal Frontier* the works of numerous writers, chief among them the novel *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in which a group of men discover and assimilate into an all-female realm where there is no violence or social discrimination. The artist’s fictive premise was equally shaped by English duchess Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* (1666), a piece of proto-science fiction about a young woman whose monarchical rule over a universe populated by talking animals is aimed at creating harmony and egalitarianism.

That the women of Perret’s narrative retreat into a remote, seemingly barren corner of the globe is also no accident. By basing their revolutionary activities in the desert, Perret places them within an age-old utopian tradition. Speaking to curators Paula van den Bosch and Giovanni Carmine in an interview published in her 2008 book *The Land of Crystal*, Perret observed: “The American West has always been a refuge for misfits and idealists, an endless number of people went there to ‘start again’—from real organized communities like Llano del Rio, founded by a communist candidate to the United States presidency in the Mojave Desert in 1917, to originals and artists like Agnes Martin who lived and painted in the solitude of the New Mexico desert.”

The name of the town that *The Crystal Frontier* women establish, New Ponderosa, is a play on Ponderosa, the all-male ranch in the western television series *Bonanza* (1959–73). The figurative sculptures that Perret has produced as part of the project represent the commune’s members, while she imagines her paintings, tapestries, textiles, ceramics, drawings, and texts as the women’s creative outputs. Together, these pieces illustrate life in New Ponderosa.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

REFLECTIONS OF STIFLED FUTURES

Perpetual Time Clock, 2004, acrylic paint on wood, 240 × 240 cm. Photo by Annik Wetter. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Early in Perret’s development of the series, the women’s quest for non-capitalist and non-patriarchal lifestyles leads them to the history of Soviet Constructivism. Their research is reflected in the installation *Perpetual Time Clock* (2004), a device that guides the community’s days, while abolishing “the mechanical breakdown of time by the watch,” as Perret writes in *The Land of Crystal*. Comprising a ring of eight discs arranged around a central circle, each painted with a graphic symbol, the clock denotes “essential activities” such as “sleeping, making art, riding and caring for horses, meditation and yoga practice, reading and study, all the different types of agricultural work, the exploration of the unconscious, and various sports.” The icon depicting a paintbrush crossed over a hammer most clearly evokes the Constructivist’s vision “to make workers into artists who actively create their product, to turn the mechanistically working human, the working force, into creative workers,” as painter Vladimir Khrakovsky explained in a 1921 lecture.

Yet, Soviet Constructivism as a real-world revolutionary agenda was dead in the water by the late 1920s. The final blow came from the proponents of Socialist Realism, ushered in as the official art by Joseph Stalin’s regime in 1934. Addressing this, Perret told Bosch and Carmine: “The radicalism of the 1920s fascinates me because it is a liminal moment, a road not taken. When you look at Constructivism you have the embryo of a kind of revolutionary art [that] doesn’t go much further because the revolution turns back on itself and becomes totalitarian.”

The failure of past utopian figments to propel and sustain collective revolutions, then, is the foundation of *The Crystal Frontier*. It is precisely this characteristic that gives Perret’s exploration its edge. In her dialogue with Bosch and Carmine, the artist quotes a line that Karl Marx wrote to Friedrich Engels late in his life: “We are the enemies of utopia for the sake of its realization.” Over half a century later, philosopher Theodor Adorno repeats Marx’s seemingly paradoxical note in his book *Negative Dialectics* (1966). Adorno argues that although the two authors of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) believed in the possibility of a more ideal society, utopia was not in their rhetorical arsenal because the notion is a potentially dangerous distraction, discontinuous from real-world conditions. Adorno later concurred with Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch’s suggestion that “the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present,” and maintained that the value of utopia is located in its abstract nature, which negates whatever exists in reality.

Photo of the performance *Figures*, 2014, at Biennale de l’Image en Mouvement, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Geneva, 2014. Photo by Annik Wetter. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Perret appears to agree as much. She demystifies the utopian experience in the diaries of *The Crystal Frontier* members, who record mundane details on “cow shit and farming troubles.” The narrative eschews idealization. In a timetable of activities from *The Land of Crystal*, one psychonaut tripping on magic mushrooms logs at 5:15 pm: “Anxiety, I suddenly think about my mother.” Though she renders scenes of New Ponderosa in her artworks, Perret makes no attempt to hide that these installations merely form a simulacrum of a utopia. “In actuality there is very little that is practical about my work,” she reflects, “it is quite far from activist art experiences that show how one can build houses from recycled materials, or that kind of ‘real world’ problematic. The work is very clearly situated within the realm of art, of the symbolic. In this sense it is quite naively preoccupied with the need for a better world, if only as an inarticulate yearning for something different.”

The acknowledgement that her works are unable to truly give form to utopia is embedded in the projects themselves, most prominently in the performance *Figures* (2014). The 20-minute production is based on Japanese *bunraku* theater, where the performers are visible on stage alongside the life-size dolls that they wield, which contrasts with Western puppet shows that maintain the illusion that the puppets are real. One of the stars of Perret’s show is a mannequin with a white, stuffed fabric body and silicone face attached to a wig. At the beginning of the event, a dancer mirrors the puppet’s position on the floor before scooting behind it and slowly bending its arms into a series of different shapes. The puppeteer, here, could stand for Perret manipulating her characters. Moments of transition, such as when the dancer changes the prop’s face and hair, unfold on stage. The most telling gesture comes from Perret herself, when she steps into the center of the performance area with a typewriter, and proceeds to tap away at the keys—a nod to *The Crystal Frontier*’s origins.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

WHAT THE NON-PLACE TELLS US ABOUT HERE AND NOW

Admittedly, at first, I felt rudely reminded by Perret's work that utopian ideals remain chained to the world of fiction. How then can a utopian imagination still be constructive? Perhaps a chimera such as *The Crystal Frontier* is valuable because it reveals the superficiality in how we picture utopia—and, if we follow Adorno's thinking, how far away we are from it.

This comes through in *Les Guérillères* (2016). Comprising a ceramic dog and mixed-media sculptures of women outfitted

Installation view of *Les Guérillères*, 2016, mixed-media sculptures, dimensions variable, at "Féminaire," David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, 2017. Courtesy David Kordansky Gallery.

with camouflage gear and plastic guns, the series was inspired by the propaganda videos of the Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ), part of the armed forces of the de facto autonomous region in northern Syria, Rojava, which promulgates gender parity in its military and government. Perret recalls coming across the YPJ just after the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks. "It was a very depressing, very dark time in Europe. I watched these videos and these women were so beautiful and so full of hope. I became obsessed with them and decided to make this work about them." The propaganda films show the women going about their daily chores as part of the brigades. Accordingly, in *Les Guérillères*, there is no fighting—the women are simply standing or sitting. The critique here has less to do with the movement itself and more to do with how these scenes are but fragments of the on-the-ground realities of the female troops, who have had to combat numerous enemies, including ISIS, since 2011, and whose freedoms have become ever-more precarious following the recent invasion of the Turkish armed forces.

Besides gesturing to the rose-tinted glasses that color our imaginations of alternative societal models, Perret pulls existing oppression squarely into view. One such issue that Perret tackles is the fragmentation of female subjectivities. The first puppet she made for *The Crystal Frontier* project, *La Fée Idéologie* (2004), is a crudely constructed papier-mâché marionette dressed in the artist's old charcoal-gray sweater and jeans. Laid flat on the floor, its limbs were connected by black wires to the ceiling. In a 2018 interview with artists Paulina Olowska and Maya Chamaa, she explained: "The idea was that the puppet represented everything the women in the community had run away from or didn't want to be anymore—and actually what it was, was me . . . There is the natural urge to reclaim this alienated image of oneself because the doll is this passive woman that doesn't move, react, have will power, doesn't have an agenda and is manipulated by this god-like figure who is usually a puppeteer and normally expected to be a man."

Perret's critique of the conditions of women extends back throughout *The Crystal Frontier*. In the earlier *Apocalypse Ballet*

series (2006), for example, a quintet of papier-mâché figures, with painted pinkish skin and short bobs, put on a static recital. One of them holds a red neon hoop above her head, while the others toy with similar, illuminated circles, their poses based on the joy-filled images of the 20th-century, back-to-nature Lebensreform movement, Russian propaganda, and American musicals—hollow representations of freedom. At their debut, at Berlin's Galerie Barbara Weiss in 2006, the troupe was accompanied with the two-panel screen-print *Letter Home (After A.R.)* (2006), based on a 1924 letter that the founder of Russian Constructivism, Alexander Rodchenko, wrote to his wife, the artist Varvara Stepanova, after his first trip to Paris. “The woman as object fabricated by the capitalist West will be its downfall. Everything about them is fabricated: the hands, the postures, the bodies. There are dozens of theaters where naked women spend the entire night walking about the stage silently . . . They don't speak, they don't dance, they don't move. And even now I couldn't possibly tell whether it is exactly 'nothing,' or whether they are 'objects.'” In this context, the dancers of the *Apocalypse Ballet* can be understood as manifestations of the women Rodchenko encountered, stripped of any sense of agency and merely mirages of liberated subjects.

At its second rendition, hosted later in 2006 by The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, the *Apocalypse Ballet* was accompanied by a hut-size silver teapot. Visitors could step inside the enlarged vessel to view miniature abstract paintings inspired by Constructivism and tantric art—two disparate genres Perret brought together because of their uncanny formal resonances, demonstrating the type of art the women of New Ponderosa make. “One of the things that I like to do is to play with scale,” Perret explained during our conversation. This applies to the scale of body parts, as with the bosu-ball-like eyes placed on the ground at her 2016 solo show, “Sightings,” at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, or the scale of objects like the giant teapot, and the supersized tulip lamps—odes to designer Isamu Noguchi's playscapes and the schemes of Metabolist architects—at her 2020 solo exhibition “News from Nowhere” at Simon Lee Gallery in Hong Kong. Perret explained that such manipulations of scale create surreal effects. When I pressed her about the importance of this quality in her work, she furthered: “I think the most interesting thing about surrealism is that it speaks the truth about our relationship to our bodies and our surroundings. It has to do with dreams and nightmares and the unconscious—how our minds determine how we relate to ourselves, our bodies and the bodies of other people.” By inviting audiences into a dreamlike scenario, Perret foregrounds the alienated, irrational aspects of our being, thus prompting us to confront what we have banished from the conscious plane of our minds.

Apocalypse Ballet (Neon Dress), 2006, figure in steel, wire, papier-mâché, acrylic, gouache, wig, five white neon rings, steel base, 175 × 160 × 160 cm. Photo by Jens Ziehe. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Installation view of *The lantern's gone out! The lantern's gone out! I*, 2019, glazed ceramic, 72 × 48 cm, at “News from Nowhere,” Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong, 2020. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Installation view of *La Fée Idéologie*, 2004, mixed-media sculpture, dimensions variable, at “Yvonne Rainer Project,” Centre d'art contemporain de La Ferme du buisson, Marne-la-Vallée, 2014. Photo by Aurelien Mole. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

ME, HER, IT, UTOPIA

Perret's works have at times veered from *The Crystal Frontier* narrative. At her 2019 Spike Island solo exhibition, "The Blazing World," Perret dissected the societal treatment of women through the lens of witchcraft. The works were based on her studies of the paralleled emergence of capitalism and the "unruly woman" archetype in early modern Europe, anchored in Marxist scholar Silvia Federici's history, *Caliban and the Witch* (1998). In Perret's explaination, Federici argues that "the witch hunts and the systematic persecution of strong, independent women were not a footnote to the history of the period but rather a fundamental force in the destruction of the commons and the disciplining of the peasantry into a servile workforce for the capitalist system." At the show, a basket of glossy ceramic apples, *Abnormally avid* (2019), alluded to society's stereotypes of women as gatherers and not hunters. At the same time, it brought to mind the poisoned fruit that Snow White consumes, and thus the witchy subversion of this expectation. Elsewhere in the exhibition, a biscuit-colored ceramic doll house, *A Magnetizer* (2019), was a reference to how girls are primed for motherhood from a young age, as well as evoking the enchanted gingerbread house that Hansel and Gretel are lured into. A life-size withered tree stump that looks like an inverted uterus, *Superpotent* (2019), suggested fertility as an essential feature of womanhood.

The witch as a figure of the night, and, by association, alterity, is encapsulated in *Mirror Logic* (2019), a tapestry hung at the far end of the exhibition hall with multicolored circles abstracting lunar positions, while conjuring the etymological connection between "menstruation" and the Greek "mene," meaning moon. It was paired with a trapezoid-shaped mound, based on the *kogetsudai* (moon-viewing platform) of Zen gardens, which are designed to reflect moonrays.

Installation view of *A Magnetizer*, 2019, glazed ceramic, 63×63×42 cm, at "The Blazing World," Spike Island, Bristol, 2019. Photo by Stuart Whipps. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Installation view of *Abnormally avid*, 2019, glazed ceramic, copper wire, and plastic, basket: 35×48×36 cm and 14 apples: between 5–9 cm each, at "The Blazing World," Spike Island, Bristol, 2019. Photo by Stuart Whipps. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

The gallery became a stage for the performance *The Blazing World* (2019), in which dancers, donning animal masks, enacted ecstatic rites reminiscent of legendary sabbath gatherings, further elaborating on the convergence of woman with other. "Doing all this research," Perret told me, "one of the things that always came up was the proximity between the witch and the animals. [According to folklore,] witches were transformed into animals during sabbath. The judges that were persecuting the witches would also turn them into beasts. Basically, they were women but were not really human. The animal masks represent this transformation."

Perret employs the lives of animals as metaphors for womanly experiences elsewhere in her oeuvre. The pair of wicker sculptures, *Balthazar* (2012) and *Black Balthazar* (2013), depict the donkey from film director Robert Bresson's affective masterpiece *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), centering the suffering of the animal. As she explained: "The symbolism of the donkey is fascinating because they're images of labor and humility. They're work animals, they have not been valued, and they have none of the manly and positive associations that you have with the horse. The value of the donkey reflects society's valuation of women. And this is why the donkey is such an important allegory in Christian art, for example. The donkey is meek, poor, works hard, and is unloved, and is therefore closer to God."

Another animal metaphor, for humanity and its search for the ideal, appeared in "The Prairie," Perret's 2013 solo show at Zurich's Francesca Pia gallery. There, a stuffed fabric whale replete with mini, wooden teeth was suspended from the ceiling over beds of lumpen, ceramic coral reefs, the enigmatic marine world serving as a cipher for *Moby Dick* (1851) and the attempts of men to conquer the titular figure in Herman Melville's novel. "For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half-known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return," Perret drew from Melville. Perret's practice has allowed her to journey to the paradises of many people, their visions refracted through the subjectivities of *The Crystal Frontier* women. Perret attributes her method of encyclopedic research to her affinity for Zen philosophy, where the quest for enlightenment is equated with pursuing an "openness to the world and not a projection of your own story, your own individuality." In seeking out utopia, she has braved the choppy waters and "horrors of the half-known life," not for a bounty but the journey itself.

Chu, Chloe, “I Know the Meaning of Revolution” *ArtAsiaPacific*, July/August 2020, pp. cover, 12, 40-47

Installation view of “The Blazing World,” at Spike Island, Bristol, 2019. Photo by Stuart Whipps. Courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong / London / New York.

Photo documentation of *The Blazing World*, 2019, performance at Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 2019. Photo by Lisa Bergmann. Courtesy Badischer Kunstverein.

Leviathan II, 2013, canvas, leather, metal loops, wood, coconut fiber, and cord, 60 x 240 x 50 cm. Photo by Gunnar Meier. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich.

frieze

MAI-THU PERRET
Mamco Genève, Switzerland, and Spike Island, Bristol, UK

Since 1999, the Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret has presented work, through her project *The Crystal Frontier* (1999–ongoing), as the product of a fictional utopian feminist commune in the New Mexican desert. Over the years, Perret said in a 2016 interview, ‘the artworks have gained their own independence from the story, but it’s something I always come back to’. Her retrospective in Geneva, complemented by a show in Bristol, provides a full view of her evolving approach.

One entry point at MAMCO is a colourful room of wall texts extracted from *The Crystal Frontier*, contextualizing objects as evidence of the systems and rituals whereby the women of New Ponderosa aim to construct their own Eden ‘through a return to nature and craft’. That reflects an opposition to mechanical production as representing a patriarchal diminution of the role of women, and leads to ceramics and tapestry being situated as feminist, rather than domestic, arts. Moreover, the production of such items has narrative logic: their sale is an important source of communal income, and their making-by-all rejects the division of labour. That fits with how Perret herself turns, though her primary training was in literature, to sculpture, ceramics, wickerwork, tapestry, painting and film.

The objects made directly ‘as from’ the outsider community fill two rooms at MAMCO. Their seductive textures, colours and repurposing of modernist aesthetics make them easy to enjoy for themselves. Yet they need the backstory for substance and aura. Plenty of artists draw upon imagined worlds, but Perret’s differs from the norm in that we have no straightforward description of New Ponderosa. We are restricted to such fragments as diary entries, correspondence, instructions and an essay in the Commune’s Newsletter – as well as to crafts, which are peripheral to the politics. This utopia is more an ambience than a place, allowing the work to breathe, free of any overt agenda.

Further rooms represent four other extensive multi-media projects – from film to tapestry – such as ‘Apocalyptic Ballet’ (2006), ‘The Evening of the Book’ (2007) and ‘Feminaire’ (2017). ‘Feminaire’ features six mannequins on a raised stage, inspired by the Kurdish women fighters who have resisted the Syrians since 2011. Is this the community’s radical wing? Perret keeps her figures – as in the earlier projects – remote, their faces inexpressive or hidden. The soldiers face abstract banners, another Perret motif, suggesting political symbols but again without spelling them out.

‘Garden of Nothingness’ (2018) is an installation made for MAMCO. In the only room which actually faces the outside world, the windows are blocked off by a black fence-like construction. That sets up a backlighting effect, which Perret associates with the spiritual awakening of Buddhism. The space so enclosed contains bronzes, hung head-high, of body parts. The lungs have been converted to a bell, with clappers visible. We seem to be in a Zen garden, awaiting the chime of ritualistic instruments which will bring body and mind together.

Like those recent projects, ‘The Blazing World’, Perret’s exhibition at Spike Island, isn’t attributed to *The Crystal Frontier*, but is consistent with it. A recurring character of Perret’s is the witch, which we can take in the context of her overall practice as a representative figure of female empowerment: for women to assert themselves separately from social expectations has been to risk exclusion. Perret sets out not a narrative but a stage set into which we can read the potential for stories to come – including a performance at the end of the exhibition. Against a silver backdrop, an incantatory stream of Perret’s words is spoken by singer Tamara Barnett-Herrin. A banner – *Mirror Logic* (2019) – uses circles to suggest the moon is influential. Three simple but monumental objects (*Superpotent*, 2019) which can be moved round on wheels provide alternative settings. One is the base of a tree, evoking a potentially romantic view of witches as outcasts from town, living off roots and berries. This stage set is populated only by ceramics. *A Magnetiser* (2019) is a gingerbread house – reminding us that the clay has been baked – and *Abnormally Vivid* (2019) a basket of part-bitten apples: the wicked witches of Grimms’ fairy tales are summoned. *With an Unbounded Force* (2019) is a wall line of animal masks, cast from the plastic versions in a German carnival. What might we be possessed by or turned into?

Taken together, the last few years of Perret’s production represent an impressive expansion of the concerns of *The Crystal Frontier*, maintaining a mutually supportive balance between her individual works, particular exhibitions and overall practice. Use-value, cult-value and art-value jostle for primacy, the works’ status complicated by the hints of a wider stories. There is scope to push further. For example, the community is all-female not through antagonism against men, but because they wish to learn how to be perfectly self-sufficient before including them. Should they reach that point, the scenario could take another interesting turn.

Paul Carey-Kent

Mai-Thu Perret, 2018–19, exhibition views, Mamco Genève

Epps, Philomena, “Escape the Brexit Blues with the Artist Mixing Fairy Tales, Zen Gardens, and Feminist Separatism,” *Garage.com*, January 18, 2019

GARAGE Magazine

Escape the Brexit Blues with the Artist Mixing Fairy Tales, Zen Gardens, and Feminist Separatism

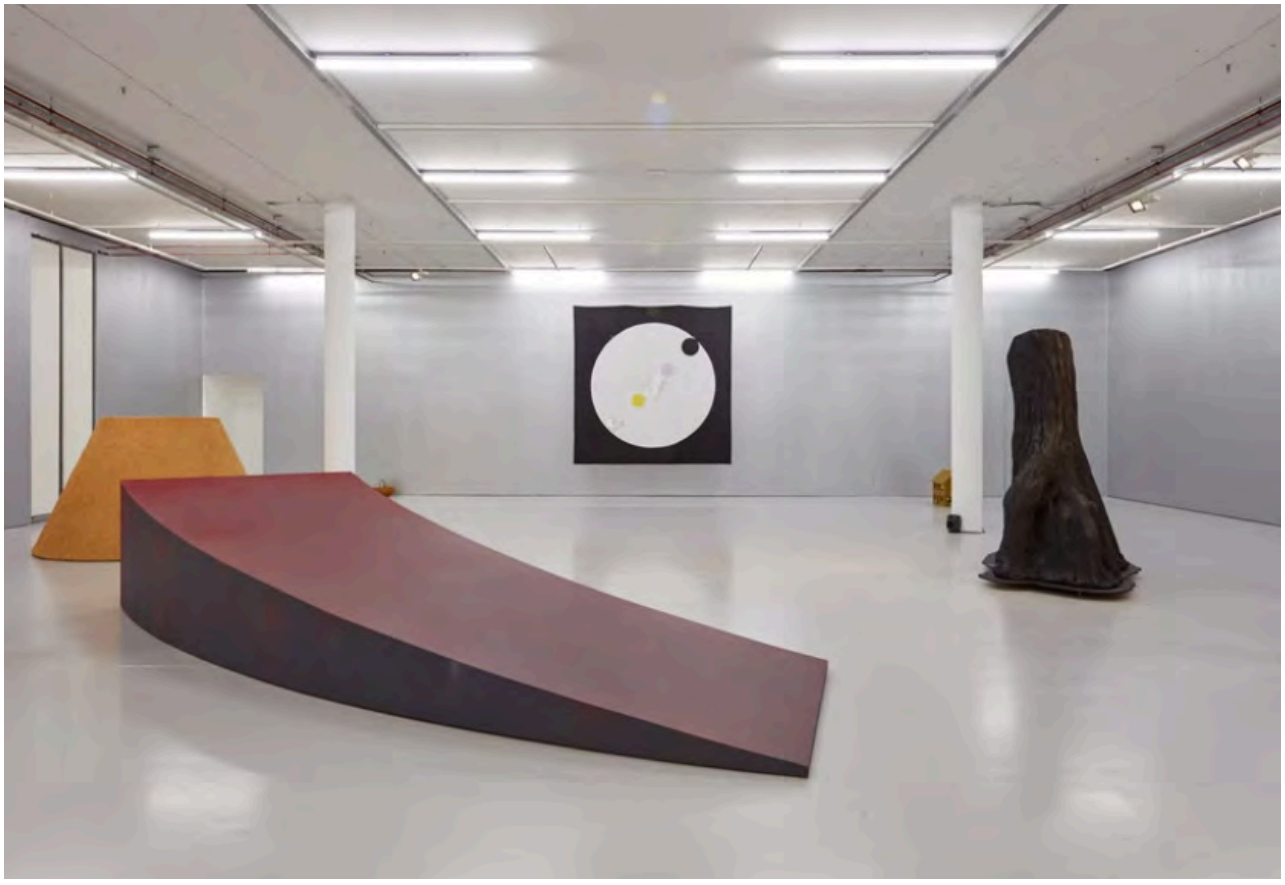
Artist Mai-Thu Perret on the connection between witchcraft, feminism, and how it all relates to her major new installation in the UK.

By Philomena Epps | January 18, 2019

In anticipation of Sunday's 'Super Blood Wolf Moon', GARAGE is celebrating all things lunar.

Witches, in case you haven't heard, are perhaps more popular than ever. Lana Del Rey put a hex on Donald Trump a year and a half ago, and one can hardly swing a dead cat these days without bumping into an acclaimed film, a new TV show, or even interviews with the craft's contemporary practitioners. In a timely addition to the discourse, Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret's first major solo exhibition in the UK, The Blazing World—for which she produced a group of ceramic sculptures, animal masks, textile banners, and an atmospheric spoken word soundtrack, all loosely inspired by the occult, fantasy, and metamorphosis—opens this week at the non-profit Spike Island in Bristol.

Witches aren't the only manifestation of unruly women the artist is concerned with: in 1999, Perret began writing The Crystal Frontier, an account of a fictional feminist commune in New Mexico, which has provided an important framework for much of her work since. This exhibition is rich with literary sources and visual references, from Anne Carson's 1992 essay Gender of Sound to Eiichi Yama-



Mai-Thu Perret The Blazing World (2019) Installation view, Spike Island, Bristol. Works courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery. Photograph by Max McClure.

moto’s 1973 film Belladonna of Sadness. For GARAGE, the artist discusses how she intertwines radical feminist politics with the history of modernism, the Arts and Crafts movement, and Eastern spirituality.

GARAGE: Since the inception of The Crystal Frontier, shows of your work seem to function like pieces added to an always-expanding narrative. Was the research into the figure of the witch for this exhibition a development of what you were looking at for other recent shows, such as the one in 2017 inspired by Monique Wittig’s 1969 novel Les Guérillères ?

Mai-Thu Perret: There is an obvious kinship between the female warriors of Les Guérillères and the figure of the witch as an archetypal, non-compliant woman. Around the time I was invited to do this show, I had met curators of a feminist festival who wanted me to conceive a public monument to Michée Chauderon, who in 1652 was the last woman to be executed for witchcraft in Geneva (my hometown). The subject led me to read books with a feminist point of view, like Silvia Federici’s Caliban and the Witch, in which she argues that the witch hunts and the systematic persecution of strong, independent women were not a footnote to the history of the period but rather a fundamental force in the destruction of the commons and the disciplining of the peasantry into a servile workforce for the capitalist system. I also read anthropological texts, such as the French ethnographer Jeanne Favret-Saada on witchcraft in rural north-western France in the 1960-70s.

What was your approach when translating these theories and histories into visual art works?

Costumes and masks are the simplest way into transformation, as any carnival celebration can attest. The masks offer representations of the transformation of humans into animals (a key concept of the Sabbath in the histories I read), and the scaled down dimensions of the dolls houses in the exhibition,

Mai-Thu Perret *Superpotent* (2019) (detail) Installation view, Spike Island, Bristol. Work courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery. Photograph by Max McClure.

Mai-Thu Perret Abnormally avid (2019) Installation view, The Blazing World, Spike Island, Bristol. Works courtesy the artist and Simon Lee Gallery. Photograph by Max McClure.

rendered in ceramic, ask for mental projection into a diminutive space. They also recall the gingerbread house in the fairy tale of “Hansel and Gretel,” since ceramics is also a kind of baking, and involves similar working processes in terms of construction and glazing.

There’s a ceramic house, and a basket of apples, that made me think about works like artist Joan Jonas’s The Juniper Tree (1976), or writers of magical realism like Angela Carter, who re-imagined these stories, and used subversive tactics to liberate female protagonists from objectified gender roles.

I’m an admirer of both Jonas and Carter. As society transitioned from feudalism into modernity, the figure of the witch moved from the village square into the nursery. The witch is an archetype now engrained in our collective unconscious. It is a kind of cliché or readymade, from fairy tales to Hollywood films.

How is the stage set, which is composed of three abstracted, minimal motifs (a tree, a ramp, and a cone), indebted to Japanese Zen gardens?

The Zen garden reference was driven by an interest in shadows; what in the West we would call minimal forms. A number of important Zen gardens were designed with the presence of the moon in mind, knowing full well that the satellite would not be visible most of the time, therefore putting absence at the center of those places. In my mind (and my own idiosyncratic misreading, as I know that nothing could be further from a Japanese monk’s mind than my feminist musings), this was an interesting connection to the way witches are often represented as living in wild places such as moors or forests. I thought that the metaphor of the garden (i.e. a space where nature is brought in) was a generative way of thinking about the installation, even if in the end what you see is just the barest hint of it.

Campbell, Andy, “Mai-Thu Perret,” *Artforum.com*, Critics’ Picks, June 9, 2017

ARTFORUM

Los Angeles

Mai-Thu Perret

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY
5130 West Edgewood Place
May 19–July 1

When Monique Wittig wrote *Les Guérillères* (The Guerillas) in 1969, she was already a celebrated author in France. She pioneered a mode of storytelling that put female protagonists at the epicenter, and formulated a writing style that set narrative fragments in loose coordination with one another, challenging orthodox boundaries between prose and poetry (something that fellow feminist theorist *Hélène Cixous* would later term *l’ecriture feminine*). *Les Guérillères* chronicles the goings-on of an army of women. Throughout the text, in which Wittig’s subjects are often referred to collectively, the women tell each other stories, argue about the cosmologies and myths most appropriate to their ideal society, play complicated games, destroy buildings, and attack enemies with rocket launchers, machine guns, and mirrors.

View of “Mai-Thu Perret: Féminaire,” 2017.

Mai-Thu Perret’s installation takes council from Wittig’s novel, presenting a group of nine mannequin-like soldiers (made out of a heterogeneous mix of materials such as papier-mâché, wicker, ceramic, silicone, and metal) in various states of rest. Although they look anonymous, they’re molded after the visages of some of Perret’s closest friends and associates. Some, like *Les Guérillères V*, 2016, carry translucent AK-47 assault rifles. This is the army of lovers that cannot fail. Yet their inert aloofness, exacerbated by a high pedestal, puts their countenance on par with more traditional memorials. Together, they face a grid of thirty-two cast ceramic wall reliefs. Some of these, such as *Add where there’s lots*, *reduce where there’s little*, 2017, feature a carefully excised, perfectly round circle, a recurring symbol throughout the book. In *The mind’s eye is as bright as the moon*, 2017, the edges of the ceramic slab are gathered together, fingers having dug into it like a bite, with a graphic red glaze applied so thin so as to show a deep purple underglaze—a body and its viscera, a pliable politics, a picture of action.

—Andy Campbell

Green, Kate, “Mai-Thu Perret, Nasher Sculpture Center,” *Artforum.com*, May 2016

ARTFORUM

Mai-Thu Perret

NASHER SCULPTURE CENTER
2001 Flora Street
March 12–July 17

View of “Mai-Thu Perret: Sightings,” 2016. From left: *Les guérillères III*, 2016; *Les guérillères VI*, 2016.

One’s first glimpse of this small yet powerful exhibition—an installation of eight life-size female fighters, a ceramic dog, an enormous Rorschach-like painting, and two oversize sculptural eyes—is through a glass wall that Mai-Thu Perret has smeared with petroleum jelly. Fittingly, and elegantly, the viscous salve on the manufactured surface initially makes the contents of “Sightings” an alluring mystery.

Once visitors pass through the glass to mingle among *“Les guérillères”* (The Guerillas), 2016—comprising the female figures and their dog, each subtitled I through IX and inspired by female Y.P.J. Kurdish resisters—an uncanny confusion occurs between the inanimate and living. The soldiers are convincing, and not: Their wigs and military garb show no signs of wear, guns are cast in candy-hued translucent resin, and body parts are made of varying materials. Les guérillères V, with ombre shoulder-length hair and endearing polka-dot socks, crouches realistically, though her gun is purple and her flesh is made of woven wicker. *Les guérillères III* sits wearily, head in hand, by the ceramic dog named *VI*—ears alert yet eye sockets empty—but her lumpy papier-mâché skin annuls any suspicions that she lives, as does the painted orange circle obscuring her face.

Les guérillères VIII’s silicone body stands tall in the center of the room, her raised hand a suggestion that she might be leading this army. However, what commands our attention is on the gallery’s back wall. There hangs the thirteen-by-ten-foot painting on carpet, titled *Agoraphobia I*, 2016. Blotches of blood red overshadow skeins of grays and yellows, saturating the fleshy fabric. Is this a splayed body, a torn flag? The work demonstrates Perret’s skill in using charged material to produce objects and environments that attract and repel, vibrating on the edge of life.

-- Kate Green

Tsai, Sylvia, "A League Of Their Own: Conversation with Mai-Thu Perret," *ArtAsiaPacific*, August 5, 2014

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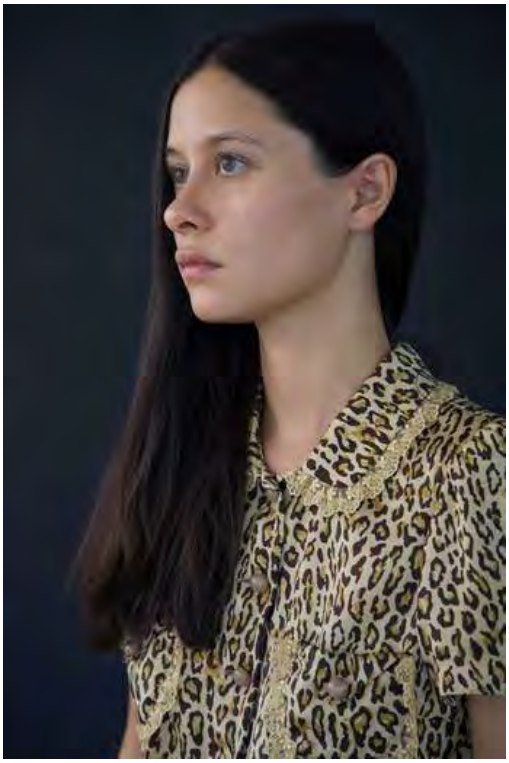


Portrait of Mai-Thu Perret. Courtesy Annik Wtter and Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong.

AUG 05 2014

SWITZERLAND HONG KONG

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN: CONVERSATION WITH MAI-THU PERRET

BY SYLVIA TSAI

For the past 15 years, Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret has been building on the ongoing project "Crystal Frontier" (1999–), based on a multidisciplinary narrative about a group of women who move away from mainstream society to create a feminist commune, called New Ponderosa Year Zero, in the desert of southwest New Mexico. Inspired by various selections of literature, the fiction behind "Crystal Frontier" has resulted in a multitude of ephemera—from letters and diary entries to ceramics, textiles and furniture—that chronicle the women's experiences in their colony. Over a cup of hot water, Perret's preferred drink of choice, ArtAsiaPacific sat down with the artist before her debut at Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong, to talk about the notion of utopia, her latest work inspired by Enzo Mari—one of the great Italian designers of the late 20th century—and the current state of "Crystal Frontier."

You began "Crystal Frontier" in 1999. Can you explain the concept of the project and what led you to the idea of an all-female utopia?

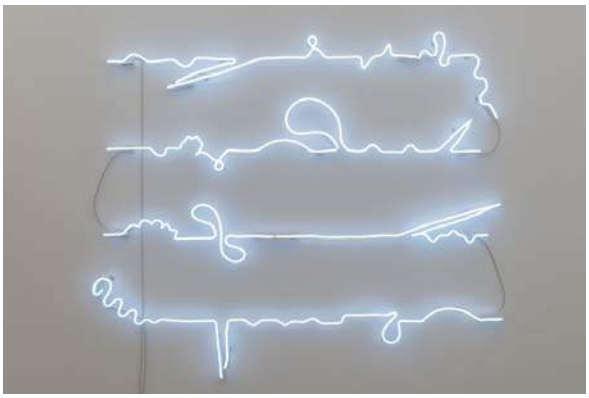
At the time there were two things: I was interested in ways of making art using some kind of narrative filter, and I was also interested in [a form of] conceptual art with a rule-based system for directing a practice. I referred to people who used narrative in this way, such as Liam Gillick and also Jim Shaw, whose "Dream Drawings" series (1992–96) is allegedly based on his dreams, which allows for his works to be open and complex. In terms of the content [of "Crystal Frontier"], I went to the American southwest quite a few times and was impressed by its desert. The desert is both a literal and mental place—it's a very good shortcut to an imaginary space. In history, there's a lot of people who moved to the desert in the US to secede from mainstream society. For example, during the 1920s, there was a colony of artists who lived in Taos, New Mexico, including Georgia O'Keefe and DH Lawrence. There were other models of this, such as Monte Verità in Switzerland, which was a colony in the 1900s that was based on principles of vegetarianism, free dancing and nudism, among others. All of these ideas went into how I conceived "Crystal Frontier." In history, as soon as modern cities came into existence, you had people who wanted to escape it and create a separate, rural utopia. Yet in the Middle Ages, when there weren't many big cities, this idea didn't make any sense. Although these communities look for ways to get back to nature and a move away from modernity, it is, ironically, one of the most modern concepts of society.

Does the fictional utopia of New Ponderosa Year Zero necessarily have to be only for women? What is the reason for excluding men? In many ways, this community reminds me of the novel Herland (1915), by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, where the absence of men results in a freedom from traditional gender roles and war, and thereby nurtures an

egalitarian society. Was this piece of literature among those that inspired "Crystal Frontier"? What other literary sources is this work a reference to?

I have always been interested in feminist art history and literary theory. It has inspired me to imagine the world differently, or different from the way it functions in the mainstream. There are so many forerunners to this: Herland, for example. I love Herland and think it's such a funny and strange book. There's also Ursula K. Le Guin, the American science-fiction writer, who wrote a number of books trying to imagine an alternate society from all kinds of perspectives. In The Dispossessed (1974), there's an anarchist community or society on a separate planet. There's also a really beautiful novel called The Left Hand of Darkness (1969), which is about a planet where there is no gender. They are humans, but somehow they have mutated and are different. Over the course of their hormonal cycle, they either become male or female at a particular point, and they can mate and reproduce, but gender doesn't exist. The main character of the novel, who is a man, is completely confused and makes all kinds of assumptions about society based on his male perspective, which leads him to chronically misread what is happening on this foreign planet. So those two novels are part of the many influences and ideas. It's really a speculative thing—this process of turning the world upside down. And in "Crystal Frontier," the community is all female, but they can come and go freely and have contact with the outside world. It's not a total secessionist kind of thing. There's a text [in the project] in which one of the women says that she wants to rebuild the whole world to be all-female and egalitarian, and once they have managed this, and to live with fair exchange among each other, they'll allow men in.

Can you speak about your latest installation at Simon Lee? Should viewers see this as part of "Crystal Frontier"?



MAI-THU PERRET, *A Tolerable Straight Line (Shandy II)*, 2014, neon, 170 □ 200 cm. Courtesy Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong.

At this point, I don't really know anymore. But I don't really bother with setting things so clearly in relation to "Crystal Frontier." I've wanted to give the work a little bit of space in its story, also because it turns out that though the narrative is interesting, it can filter the way people interpret the project—to the extent that I feel that it can prevent viewers from really looking at the work. This was not the original intention, so I've wanted to let the interpretations be more open and let the viewers make the decision. But of course, it's very easy to see how the various works of the series link up. There's continuity in the choice of material, in the [use of the] female figure and in the inclusion of an Enzo Mari bed. Mari had the whole idea that consumers could reclaim the objects that are around them by learning how to make them, which allows for people to be more critical and empowered in relation to industrial and consumer society. This is very close to what the women from "Crystal Frontier" are trying to do.

Enzo Mari's furniture designs also focus on the essential elements of form. How does his approach correspond to your own philosophy or that of your practice?

I'm very much a formalist. I'm very interested in the shape that things take and what that says [about it]. It's very difficult to make art if you're not interested in form. When a friend gave me the Mari manual Autoprogettazione (1974), I experienced such a strange feeling—it's like I knew it had existed somewhere but had just never found it before. What struck me about his designs, from the perspective of form, is how close they are to things you see in Constructivism. If you look at the designs by Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891–1956), for the Soviet Pavilion at the 1925

Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, where he created a worker’s clubhouse with very simple chairs and a set of furniture that could take on different purposes, you see that everything is clearly delineated and has very basic form. For me, the Mari designs are reminiscent of Rodchenko’s designs and that particular way of constructing things. I’ve always been really interested in Constructivism as a formal moment, but also as a historical moment in terms of what the artists were trying to do and what they went through. Obviously, it’s a story that ended quite badly. Mari is also a designer that is very political and thinks very critically about what it means to be a designer. As a Communist in Italy during the 1960s, this position sat uneasily with working for furniture companies and in designing corporate, capitalist and mass-produced objects. I find that contradiction really fascinating.

And by creating the Autoprogettazione, Mari brought his design back to his own vision and philosophy.

Exactly. I think that was the idea. In the introduction of the book, he says that if people start to make furniture themselves, they will be able to understand all the other furniture around them better and will be more critical of the designs that are constantly being forced upon them by manufacturing companies or other designers. So, in a way, it’s about making the consumers less of a consumer and more of a critical thinker in regards to the choices being offered to them.

With your texts and objects in “Crystal Frontier,” are they based off of the qualities of one particular protagonist from New Ponderosa Year Zero? Or should they be seen as items made by one collective entity?

When I began, the story was very much about making work. It was also about designing a machine for becoming an artist. Now, I feel that the work has gained enough autonomy. There’s enough work out there that it almost makes itself. This plurality of voices, these different strands of narratives exist on their own. But it was always more about the multiplicity of characters. When I was writing the story [for “Crystal Frontier”], there were characters that had different urges. For example, one was more of a writer, the spiritual leader of the group. But even though they all had their own personalities, the artworks were never assigned to a particular person.

By creating this narrative of a utopian community, do you intend to establish a distance between yourself, the creator, and the actual objects? Or do you see yourself in an omniscient position?

I haven’t been writing [the narrative for “Crystal Frontier] for quite a while, so with that being said, what I find great about writing is that you can become all these different people. I wouldn’t say that I’m not trying to be personal, because at the end it all comes from the different seeds of my experiences. That’s what is completely fascinating about being a human. You can be so many different things and so contradictory, yet at the same time be so bound to this entity as one body, one sensory system, one way of perceiving the world. When you’re a writer, you’re definitely in a position where you can shift and project yourself onto something else.

Lehrer-Graiwer, Sarah, "Critics Picks: Mai-Thu Perret," *Artforum.com*, April 2011

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Los Angeles

Mai-Thu Perret

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY
3143 S. La Cienega Blvd., Unit A
April 2–May 7

"Migraine"—Mai-Thu Perret's first exhibition of ceramics and paintings in Los Angeles—is a continuation of her ongoing meta-narrative, *Land of Crystal* (aka *The Crystal Frontier*, begun in 1999 as an open-ended literary account describing a fictional, all-female utopian commune based on radical feminist ideals), advancing that sprawling epic's mounting sense of cerebral fissure and nervous breakdown. An outgrowth of Perret's "Crack-Up" series from 2009, five "Migraine" paintings (all 2010) symmetrically map blooming and sputtering Rorschach blots of black, blue, red, and orange acrylic paint onto gray or off-white carpet supports. The group's title reinforces the resemblance of the works' psychedelic abstractions to brain scans imaging neural activity or, presumably, the onset of a fierce headache of existential proportions. The soaked and stained pile of each carpeted surface stylizes the sinister dimension of the material's domestic register, suggesting the spilled blood or wine of marital strife and the messy accidents of potty training.

Mai-Thu Perret, *All your bones and joints are made of gold*, 2011, glazed ceramic, 25 1/2 x 22 x 20".

One floor-based and ten wall-mounted handmade ceramics, all 2011, similarly display slightly disturbing abject and cranial qualities. *The great earth is so vast it saddens the people terribly*, a swollen, brainy mass whose pocked and pitted surface glistens with purple glaze, protrudes Benglis-like from a wall. Elsewhere, clay eggs cluster and stud several pallid works, teaming in particular abundance like a profuse deposit of gelatinous insect larvae in *All your bones and joints are made of gold*, where hundreds of eggs are heaped high into an unstable mound that seems ready to hatch a swarm. Clay slabs have been squeezed through fists, massaged around their temples, and gouged away at by attacking fingers in many of Perret's gripping ceramic wall reliefs. The slick gleam of their enticingly glazed facades lubricates the show's transitional slippage from composure to tumult, from uptight to outburst, from calm to migraine.

— *Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer*

Bonacina, Andrew, “Mai-Thu Perret: Revolutions, radical women and the shifting function of objects,” *Frieze*, Issue 113, March 2008

frieze

Mai-Thu Perret

FOCUS

Revolutions, radical women and the shifting function of objects

Little Planetary Harmony (2006)

The extensive role-call of individuals and artistic movements that make an appearance in Mai-Thu Perret’s ongoing project *The Crystal Frontier* reads like the guest list for a fantasy tea party enthusiastically drawn up at a late-night gathering (‘Let’s put Sergei Diaghilev next to Busby Berkeley and Varvara Stepanova next to Andrea Zittel!’). Serve this motley crew with an infusion from Perret’s dainty *Mescaline Tea Service* (2002) and one can begin to distil the elements of the wildly eclectic concoction of fact and fiction, avant-garde aesthetics and radical feminist politics, that contribute to Perret’s epic tale.

Begun in 1999, *The Crystal Frontier*’s narrative chronicles the lives of a group of radically minded women who turn their backs on the ‘grey-tinged nightmare’ of the city and move to New Mexico to establish a feminist commune. These women come to inhabit the real world (or at least the spaces of museums and galleries that constitute a particular reality) through texts, written by Perret, that take the form of diary entries and letters – which in themselves are often appropriated from existing fragments of historical

correspondence – and a diverse array of functional and decorative objects that masquerade as the ‘hypothetical production’ of the community.

It’s a story of self-liberation that recalls the myriad Utopian communities that emerged throughout the last century: from the communist settlement of Llano del Rio in the Mojave Desert and Paolo Soleri’s still extant Arcosanti project in Arizona to more personal retreats such as Georgia O’Keeffe’s move to Taos in New Mexico or even Zittel’s relocation from New York to Joshua Tree in southern California. In Perret’s wilfully polymorphous notion of community these rural endeavours collide with references to some of Modernism’s ‘communes’ – the Soviet Constructivists and the Bauhaus in particular – combining to form a cacophonous meta-community that reflects on the failures of these historical endeavours and the strained relationship between art and social revolution.

For her participation at the 2007 Lyon Biennial, Perret presented *An Evening of the Book* (2007), a *Gesamtkunstwerk* comprising three black and white films projected in a room decorated with patterned wallpaper inspired by Stepanova. The films document a group of women, whom we might assume to be Perret’s enduring female protagonists, rehearsing repetitive choreographed movements and poses that evoke varying states of work, rest and play. As the films come to an end and the lights go up, the empty room is filled with the strains of a song taken from *Winter of Discontent or the Ballad of a Russian Doll* (2003–4), an unfinished play written by Perret with music by the late Steven Parrino. The work is based on a 1924 Agit-prop play directed by Vitalii Zhemchuzhnyi (with costumes and sets by Stepanova), which contrasted history’s revolutionaries with those of the present, working as a metaphor for the conflict between the comforting security of nostalgia and the uncertainties of the current moment. This game of temporal push-and-pull is mirrored in *The Crystal Frontier*, which encapsulates the way in which we search for, but rarely find, fulfilment for present longings in stories from the past.

Weaving between the conjured personalities of the commune and Perret’s own hand in all of this, the threads that link object to author in *The Crystal Frontier* become increasingly (and intentionally) frayed and tangled. Works such as the aforementioned tea set and other practical objects including *Pyramid of Love* (2003) – a modular rabbit hutch containing live rabbits – parade as items made and used by the members of the commune on a day-to-day basis, while the clay models in *Self-Expression x 25* (2003) are seemingly functionless objects that serve only to articulate the individuality of the members. Most confounding perhaps are the mannequins – papier-mâché figures of women and children clothed in pragmatic costumes (designed by Perret’s collaborator, Ligia Dias) that neither act as representations of the women in *The Crystal Frontier* nor remain entirely true to their function as display mechanisms. Their shifting status brings to the fore questions that lie at the heart of The Crystal Frontier concerning the status of the art object – what it is and what one wants it to be. ‘I often feel like I am hesitating in the work between the two opposing poles of use-value and cult-value,’ Perret has observed; ‘In that sense the objects I make are crude, hastily designed, and purposeful [which] feels like an interesting thing to explore at a time when the “autonomous” as such is no longer available and seems in danger of being replaced by pure instrumentalization.’

By engaging in systems of cultural and economic exchange with her fictionalized production, Perret plays (for her own amusement as well as ours) with these systems’ powers of transformation: the museum’s enduring ready-made effect that turns a rabbit hutch into a work of art, and the market’s unholy equation of this act of aesthetic transubstantiation with a number. *The Crystal Frontier* is Perret’s very own museological cottage industry, founded on our speculative desires and trading in histories and objects that are never quite what we think they are or what we want them to be.

Andrew Bonacina