

*Mimesis at Extra City, Antwerp*

(curator Anselm Franke)

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(translated from French by Jeanine Herman)

production system involving collaborations with architect-designers (with two of whom the artist has founded a production company, DGZ Research), graphic artists, geo-biologists, and sound designers. "I'm like a conductor," Gréaud said in a recent interview. "My original ideas go through a machine that negotiates them, distorts them, and distends them," allowing him to be "both emitter and receiver" of his own works—an analysis confirmed by his recent exhibition "Cellar Door" at the Palais de Tokyo. Transforming the entirety of the space into a gigantic organism remote-controlled by an engineer in a central tower, the exhibition was "on" from 2 PM to 8 PM and in "standby" mode from noon to 2 PM and from 8 PM to midnight. (Palais de Tokyo is closed from midnight to noon.) Among the participants in the spectacle were a composer, musicians, and a sound engineer, as well as paintball enthusiasts who played in an enormous iron cage that echoed Kurt Schwitters's *Merzbau*—the paint comes in "Klein blue" and black. "I wrote the exhibition like a musical score," the artist remarked, "so that it would not be the simple result of working procedurally, but above all a time in which possibilities crystallize, in which forms can emerge."

"Access to the exhibition is gained via its libretto," Gréaud commented, and indeed, everything follows the broad outlines of a musical tale. "Once upon a door the future came before. There is no past and no last in this story," which lasted shorter than its glory, and yet has never been told." So begins the opera in "almost one act" composed by Thomas Rousel with a libretto by Raimundas Malasauskas and Aaron Schuster. The exhibition could be read as a vast, total art installation, almost a landscape, lunar and ghostly, haunted by a forest of charred trees, its spectacle interrupted by, among other things, an impressive network of fluorescent neon tubes, the false ceiling made from a mold taken from a cast of the results of an underground fireworks explosion, and the reinstallation of Gréaud's 2005 show at Le Plateau in Paris, which in turn referred to a mysterious intervention in an apartment on Île de la Cité.



Louis Gréaud, *Cellar Door—Le Buffet Forêt de jouets à l'encre* (Cellar Door—Gunpowder Forest Buffet), 2008, synthetic resin covered with gunpowder, installation view

ing boldness of the twenty-nine-year-old Gréaud reveals itself, above all, in his mastery of his work's conditions of presentation. At the risk of finding himself caught in his own trap, Gréaud conceives of each of his exhibitions as the outline of a fragmentary film in which all its modes of exposure (trailers, commentaries, and so on) make up the work itself. That may be the case with "Cellar Door," where Gréaud's gigantic marketing operation threatens to overwhelm the blockbuster exhibition. He even sold flavorless candies under the brand name *Celador* (with the tagline "a taste of illusion"), an echo of the current exhibition's title. Since the beginning of his career, Gréaud has shown hyperrealist paintings of his own works—another element in his strategy of communication. With older paintings such as *Les Résidents 2*, 2005, he was still making fun of viewers and art critics by sparingly distilling a few drops of enigmatic information on the contents and scope of his offerings. This is a way of extending—that is, of never completing—the work, so that each exhibition ends up by engendering some new development. Nothing is lost, everything is transformed.

—Claire Mouline

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman

## Clément Rodzielski CARDENAS BELLANGER

Artists like twenty-nine-year-old Clément Rodzielski, who hails from the French Southwest and went to school in Paris, may signal a new direction in France today. Their work, which employs methods on hand consistent with conceptual content, is a welcome break from the fixation on high production values and the spectacular that was rife among the previous two generations of French artists. Rodzielski's exhibition "Grands a" (Big A's) strikingly disarranged Cardenas Bellanger's space with little more than ink-jet prints on paper, pre-existing offset printed items, and MDF panels (all works *Untitled*, 2008). In his use of recycled images, it is significant that, unlike American artists Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker, Rodzielski does not fall back on the traditional support of the canvas nor otherwise try to emulate painting. Moreover, his choice of pictures here excluded artistic and scholarly references as well as pop-culture references from the past or those that are, per se, attention-getting. His clearing out of all such (even remotely) authoritative devices means that the viewer has nothing to hang on to but Rodzielski's way of dissecting images.

As can be seen in two altered fashion magazines, the subject portrayed is peripheral to the logic with which Rodzielski shifts found images from one state to another in relation to a system of presentation. In these pieces, after removing the front cover, he angularly cut and discarded large sections of each successive page, for about thirty right-hand pages, leaving only a figureless element from each. Once the still bound magazine is closed, set on a plinth, and weighted down by a glass plate, its cut pages flatten out into a horizontal anti-collage.

Similarly, Rodzielski reduces the idea of the diptych to two successive same-sized pages in a lifestyle magazine, whose ideological monotony is unmasked by the black holes he cut into it. An angular shape removed from the center of a homogeneous pair of home-decoration pictures is filled in from behind by a page spray-painted black. The images are scanned, blown up, printed by ink jet on paper, and pinned to MDF panels. One reproduction is directly on the dark ground, whereas the other is separated by the former picture, a sliver of which peeks out, letting us deduce that these pages never left the magazine's binding. They were incised with an X-Acto knife simultaneously and

Conceived and executed on site, distinct configurations for hanging revised the many works in the show. Two identical low-resolution ink-jet printouts of black curves, for example—according to the artist, the letter *a* in a font too big for the large sheet it is printed on—were spray-painted in a light, mottled, two-tone pattern, then overlaid with strips of black tape that both transform the composition and tape it to its support. One version was minimally taped to a wall; the other, elaborately taped to a huge panel wedged into an odd nook in the gallery, created a plane not unlike a protruding hidden door. "Grands a" could



Clément Rodzielski, *Untitled*, 2008, cut magazine, 11 1/2 x 8 3/4"

be seen as consisting of two versions of almost everything, poised to take on a duplicate's limitless potential.

—Jan-Xing Too

## ANTWERP, BELGIUM "Mimesis" EXTRA CITY

Anselm Franke, one of the curators of this year's Manifesta, has been the director of Extra City, a contemporary art center established in which he recently organized, Franke explains that the exhibition was intended as an alternative to the perhaps too-numeric recent shows that examine the reciprocal influences between art and theater. According to Franke, these are too often based on comparisons of a strictly formal order, with, for example, excessive attention brought to bear on the question of staging. He feels that what's really important is instead the concept of mimesis, whose semantic richness allows a broader and more subtle apprehension of the subject.



View of "Mimesis," 2008.

The exhibition was composed essentially of films and video—in addition to a few photographs and drawings—projected in oversized wooden crates, variously arranged in the open space of the art center. Effortlessly, we lingered, or moved fluidly from one work to another, gradually discovering the general tenor of the show. It soon became clear that this was not a traditional thematic exhibition. A good example of the emancipation of the theme was provided by Jean Rouch's fabulous film *Les Maitres fous* (The Mad Masters). This film, shot by the French anthropologist in Ghana in 1955, is a sort of documentary that presents and explains a curious tribal ritual during which priests become possessed by spirits that take the form of representatives of British colonial power, frenetically mimicking the power relations and hierarchy among them.

The importance of this film in the context of the exhibition proved twofold. On the one hand, the film reveals the ability of the camera to render the real in all its "literalness," while at the same time it questions the status of this reality. Rouch recorded the ritual as it unfolded before his eyes, but this ritual is no less a fiction itself, as the participants were aware of the presence of the filmmaker and were affected by it. At bottom, a remarkable parallel is established between the subject of this film and the concept of mimesis. Indeed, colonialism testifies to the will of a people to fashion a country and its inhabitants in its image. Likewise—or conversely—the anthropologist seeks to blend into a community, in order to understand the rules that govern it.

The exhibition contained other works that broaden the field of reflection in a comparable way. The distinction or lack thereof between being and non-being (Samuel Beckett's *Film*, 1965), identity and anonymity (Sofia Hultén's video *Grey Area*, 2001, in which the artist seems to be attempting to disappear by blending into an office environment, or Charif Benhelma's photographs of a haven for illegal immigrants in Brussels), the individual and the social body (Harun Farocki's *Die Beurlaubung* [The Interview], 1997, filmed at a training course on how to apply for a job): These are a few of the themes that

were opened up for us here, in an exhibition that stepped beyond the limits of its theoretical framework with bricks.

—Yvonne Van Parys

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman

## BERLIN Warren Neidich GALERIE MAGNUS MÜLLER

Warren Neidich's recent solo show in Berlin, "Each Rainbow Must Retain the Chromatic Signature, it . . ." comprised a triad of paintings, sculpture, and installation that playfully pointed out the conditions of perception and the ways it can be manipulated and controlled. The exhibition included "Rainbow Brushes," 2007–2008, a series of nine oversized paintbrushes that each feature a different sequence of colors, all taken from famous paintings throughout European art history. Neidich places the matching pigment on a piece of paper laid flat on the ground, then pulls a brush through it, leaving traces of color on based on the rainbow found in Rubens's 1636 painting *Rainbow*, whose laws of optics, a rainbow consists of colors that follow one another variations on this order drawn from various epochs of art history, so that the changing cultural and empirical conditions they represent are "made visible" in retrospect.

Neidich went on to challenge the viewer with concentration exercises that begin where Jasper Johns leaves off: In *Red-Blue-White*, 2007–2008, three canvases each display the names they are spelling out: Green neon reads WHITE, red neon BLUE, and blue neon RED. The work alludes to the Stroop test for attention deficit disorder, perhaps leading us to wonder how bad it is if, confronted with this contradictory perceptual information, we read and even perceive the blue as red for a good two seconds: too long? The last work on display was *Infinite Regress*, 2008, a large pavilion with automatic sliding glass doors that are each tinted a primary color. The movements of the visitors cause these colored panels to overlap, forming secondary mixtures of violet, green, and orange.

Plato noted with disapproval that artists tended to favor appearance over essence. Pliny, too, considered illusion one of art's defining characteristics. According to his famous account of the contest between two Greek painters of the fifth century BC, Zeuxis painted grapes so realistic that birds flew up to peck at them, but Parrhasios outdid his opponent with a picture of a curtain. Zeuxis impatiently demanded that Parrhasios pull back the curtain to show him the picture—Zeuxis had fooled the birds, but Parrhasios fooled Zeuxis. Descartes's distrust of sensory perception prompted him to find certainty in thought alone. Since ancient times, thinkers have viewed art as inferior to rational knowledge, but Nietzsche inverted the hierarchy: Knowledge itself is an illusion, he argued, and art acknowledges its own illusory nature.

Neidich's playfulness in approaching visual "apparatuses" gives the viewer an active role in producing the illusion.



Warren Neidich, *After John Everett Millais 1856*, 2008, paint brush with acrylic paint, 24 x 15"

From the series "Rainbow Brushes," 2007–2008.

Anselm Franke, one of the curators of this year's Manifesta, has been the director of Extra City, a contemporary art center established in Antwerp in 2003, since 2006. In the exhibition guide for «Mimesis,» which he recently organized, Franke explains that the exhibition was intended as an alternative to the perhaps too-numerous recent shows that examine the reciprocal influences between art and theater. According to Franke, these are too often based on comparisons of a strictly formal order, with, for example, excessive attention brought to bear on the question of staging. He feels that what's really important is instead the concept of mimesis, whose semantic richness allows a broader and more subtle apprehension of the subject.

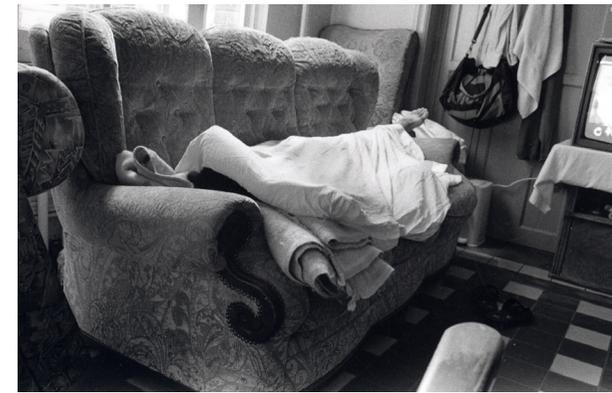
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