



Press conference:

Friday, 15 February 2019 | 10:30 am

Opening:

Friday, 15 February 2019 | 6:30 pm

Press documents:

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Cyprien Gaillard. Roots Canal
16 February – 5 May 2019

With his films, photographs, and sculptures, Cyprien Gaillard (born 1980 in Paris) describes and evokes the perpetual destruction, preservation, and reconstruction of urban spaces. From 16 February to 5 May 2019 the exhibition «Cyprien Gaillard. Roots Canal» puts on display works capturing the incessant transformation of the urban landscape, as well as that of nature and humankind. Close to tipping point, his works evoke the imminence, or the coming, of a metamorphosis. They intercept the moment of falling or remain suspended in the instability of becoming. Installed at the heart of Museum Tinguely and presented for the first time in Europe, a series of excavator heads precisely embodies this moment of suspension. A metaphor for human voracity, in the museum context these tools commonly found on building sites become fossils from the future. They are contrasted with a flight of exotic birds over a mutating European city, Polaroids undergoing gradual erasure, and a hallucinatory immersion in a memory-filled urban night in 3D format. Out of these disparate and antagonistic fragments, Gaillard recomposes a universe where macrocosm and microcosm, tool and workpiece, the city and its inhabitants, machine and nature, cohabit in an equilibrium that is both perfect and fragile.

Destruction, preservation, reconstruction: the work of the artist Cyprien Gaillard (born 1980 in Paris) sheds light on our ambivalent relationship with ruination and decay. As a traveller, he wanders the world, collecting found objects and using these artefacts to tell stories about the inexorable and unceasing transformation of the urban landscape and thus of nature and people.

The exhibition «Cyprien Gaillard. Roots Canal» at Museum Tinguely centres on an installation of excavator shovels. These items of heavy equipment, familiar from construction sites, stand facing each other like a double row of soldiers. Brought to a standstill in a museum setting, the silent giants are transformed into mighty sculptures. With the patina they have collected in the course of their mechanical life, the faded paint and the patches of rust that cover them, the machines look like archaeological artefacts retrieved from the depths of the earth. In spite of their archaic appearance, however, these metal monsters spawned by the Industrial Revolution are by no means relics from the past.

Their influence on the world of today and tomorrow is unbroken, since they embody the promise of change, architectural renewal and a constantly evolving cityscape. Gaillard's *Diggers* take us on a journey back and forth between prehistory and the present. This leap in time is further reflected in the rods of onyx and calcite inserted into the shovels' mounts: between the brittle, translucent minerals and the solid pieces of equipment that might have been used to excavate them lie not only up to five tons in weight, but also several million years.

In this installation, as in his oeuvre as a whole, Gaillard stresses that construction and destruction are not contradictory concepts. Instead, they are two sides of the same process, closely linked in time. In order to erect new buildings, it is necessary to accept the disappearance of what already exists, be it a landscape, another building or a no-man's-land. The construction of the new always involves the destruction of what went before.

This train of thought is pursued and extended by *Sober City* (2015), a series of pictures on show in the same room: as a visual counterpoint to the excavator shovels, Polaroid photographs hang on the walls at irregular intervals, in their familiar modest size, forming an urban backdrop. The photographs are double-exposed: views of New York layered over a fragment of amethyst from the city's Museum of Natural History. As a result of this merging of two motifs via double exposure, the pictures seem to have been taken through a prism. A building, a bus, a sculpture or a tree – the urban components are barely recognizable. Under the viewer's gaze they seem to crystallize, like in J. G. Ballard's sci-fi novel *The Crystal World* where a mysterious phenomenon causes humans, animals and plants to gradually transform into crystalline structures. Thanks to the use of Polaroid paper, a fragile, ephemeral support that fades over time, and the choice of motifs, the *Sober Cities* mirror the continual (excavator-driven) metamorphosis of the city in its state of perpetual tension between the preservation of architectural heritage and the construction of new buildings. A city that cannot escape the phenomenon of entropy, the disorder of matter during unavoidable processes of decay. With his works, Gaillard sheds light on this slow transition from one state to another and the resulting tensions – physical, aesthetic, social, political – between renewal and destruction.

In the next room of the exhibition, *KOE* (2015) follows a large-format, wall-filling projection of a video showing a swarm of exotic birds above the luxury shopping streets of Düsseldorf. The winged visitors, ring-necked parakeets originally from Asia, fly past expensive shops between the modern architecture, beneath them the permanent construction site that is the city centre. The green of their plumage traces anachronistic lines at the heart of a hyperaesthetic world of the city of tomorrow, marked by the luxury brands and ethereal buildings of omnipresent consumerism. Ring-necked parakeets originally came to these parts as caged birds and have now found new homes in several European cities. Their appealing appearance makes it easy to forget that they are an invasive species that poses a threat to indigenous ecosystems.

Nightlife (2015) invites visitors to immerse themselves in a hypnotic, trance-like atmosphere. The 3D-film, a mosaic of scenes with no apparent connection, transports the viewer to a brightly coloured urban night. The footage leads from Auguste Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker* outside the Cleveland Museum of Art via a hallucinatory ballet of juniper trees in Los Angeles (another invasive species) and a spectacular firework display above Berlin's Olympic Stadium, back to Cleveland to an oak tree presented (as a sapling) to multiple Olympic medal winner Jesse Owens by the Nazis in 1936. Rendered sculptural by the larger-than-life-size projection, these images offer the disturbing and beguiling experience of a heightened perception. This visual and sensory immersion is further heightened by the work's soundtrack, a mix produced by the artist using samples from two songs by the rocksteady musician Alton Ellis. As in the other works in the exhibition, Gaillard creates a new narrative out of disparate, even contrary fragments. In this new narrative, anecdotes mix with history, while city, nature and people coexist in a shared non-linear space-time structure.

The exhibition has been curated by Séverine Fromaigeat.

General Information:

Title: Cyprien Gaillard. Roots Canal

Address: Museum Tinguely | Paul Sacher-Anlage 1 | 4002 Basel, Switzerland

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Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday, daily from 11 am-6 pm

Websites: www.tinguely.ch

Social Media: @museumtinguely | #museumtinguely | #tinguely | #cypriengaillard | #rootscanal

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