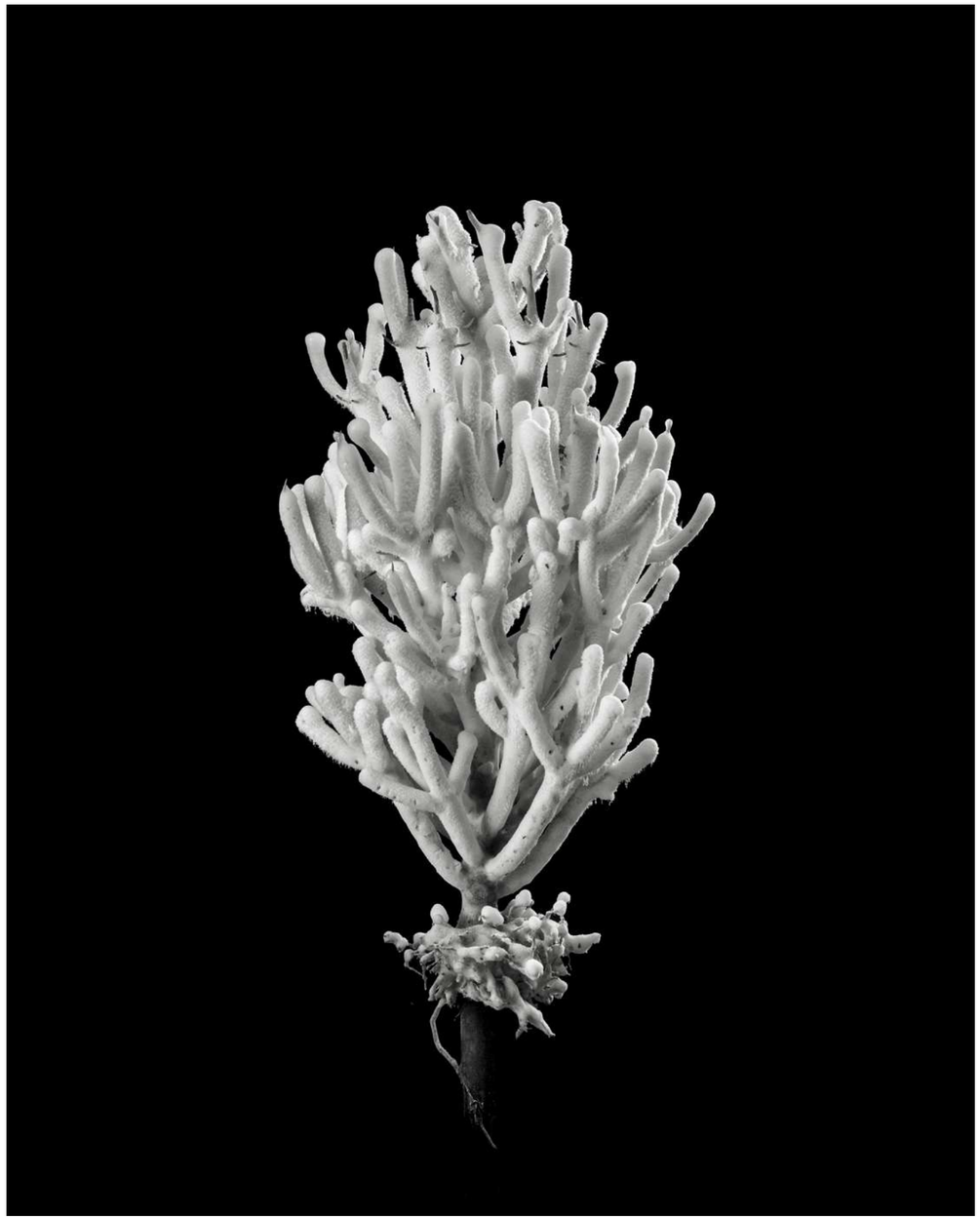
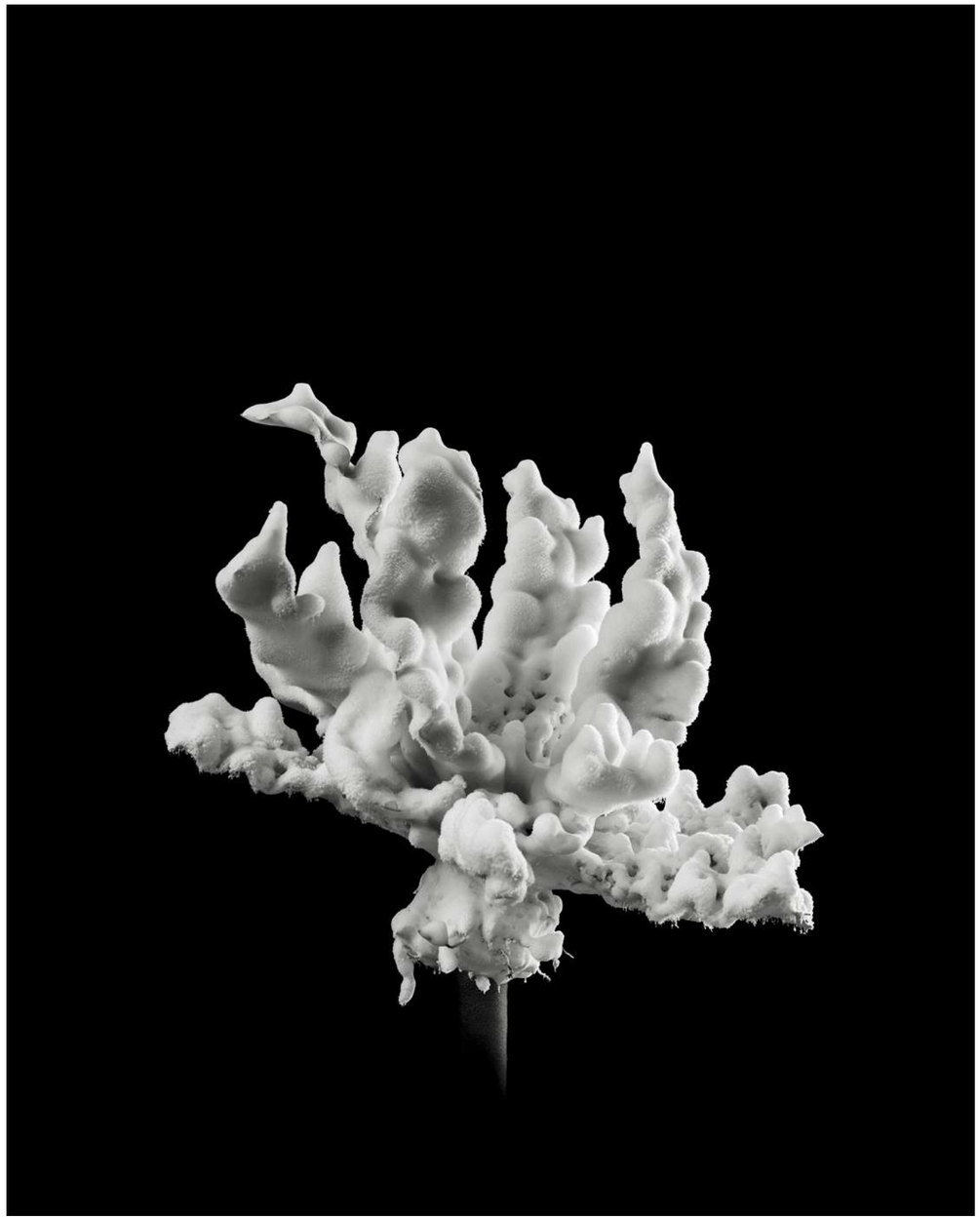
Julian Charriere

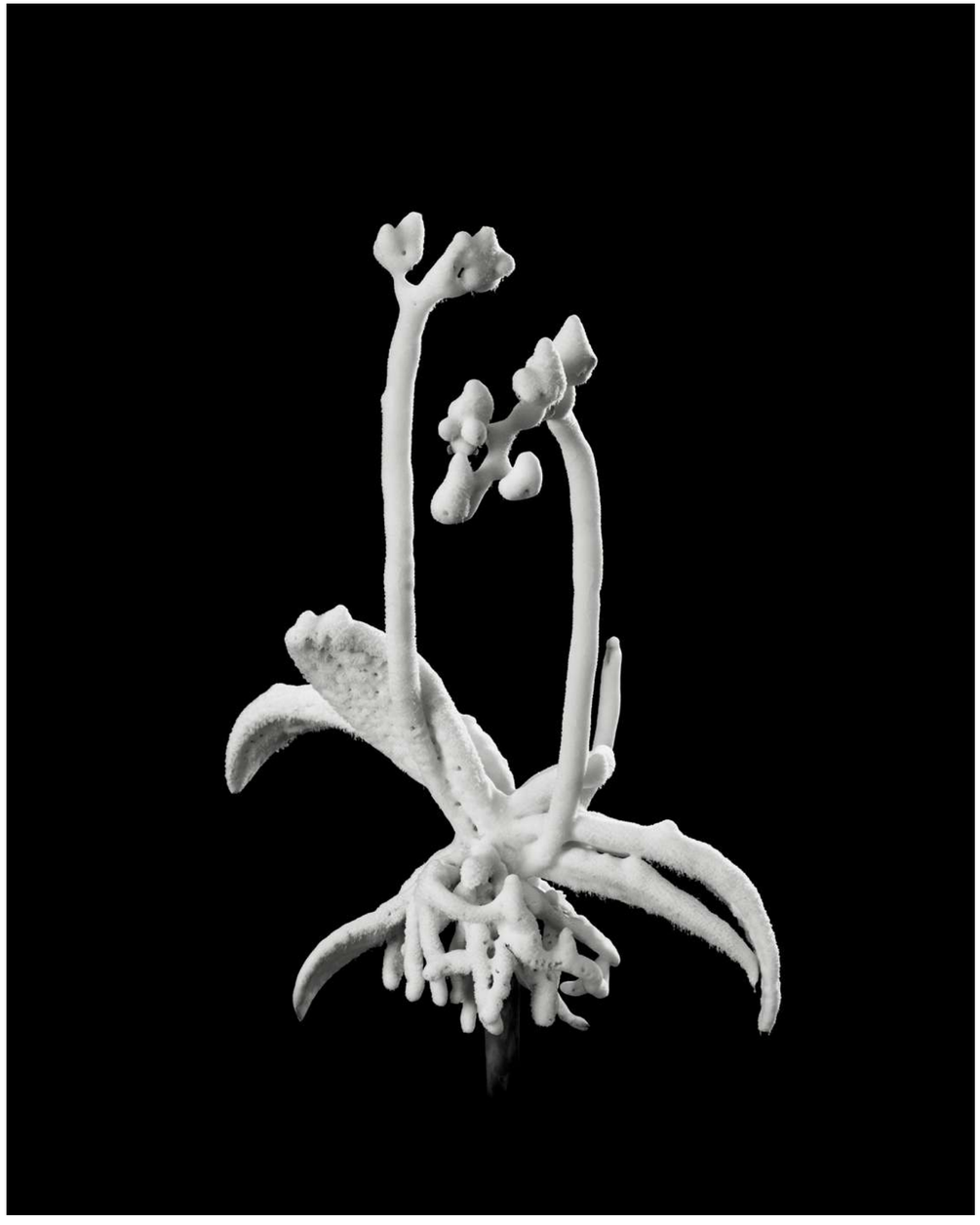
For They That Sow the Wind

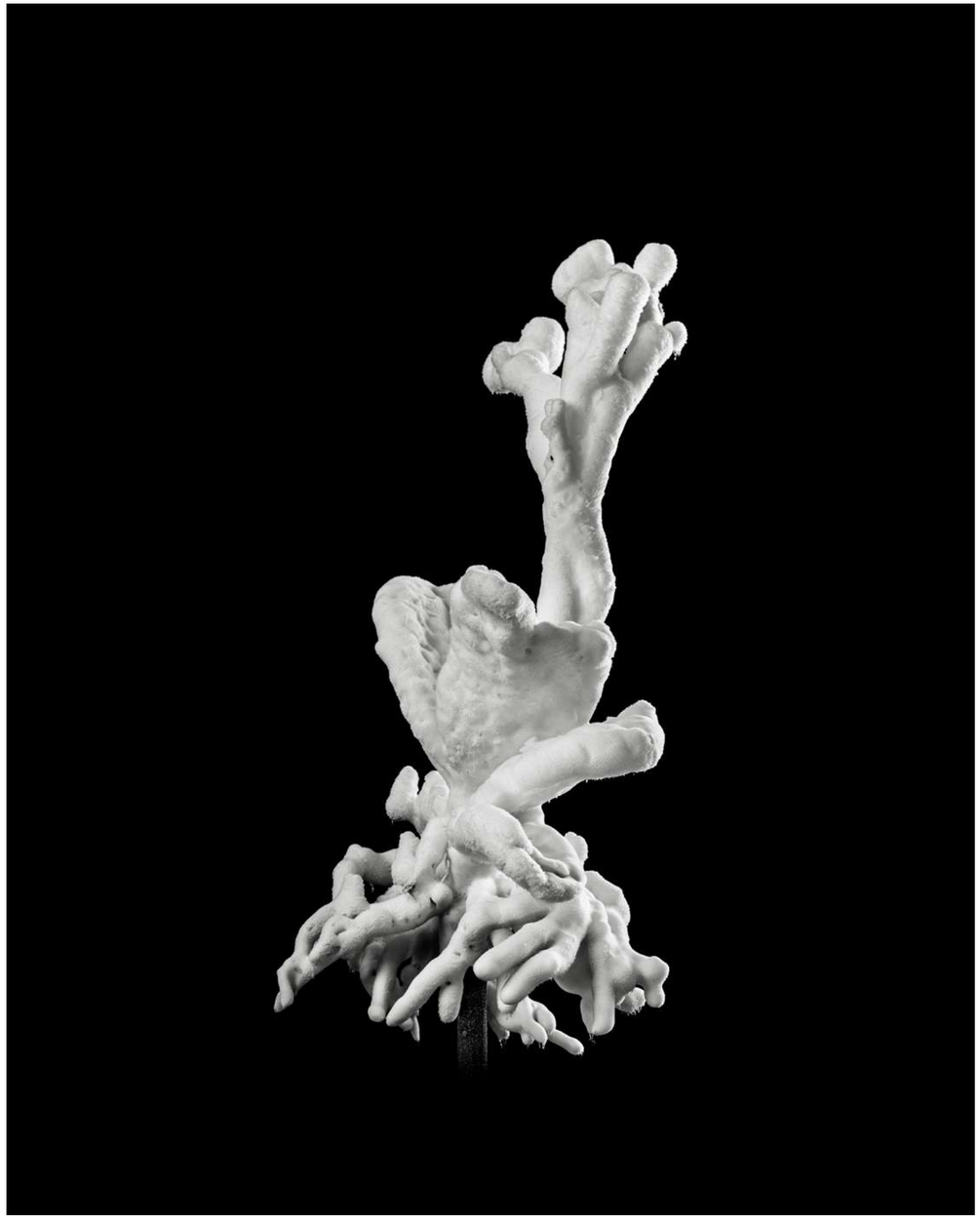
Parasol unit, London

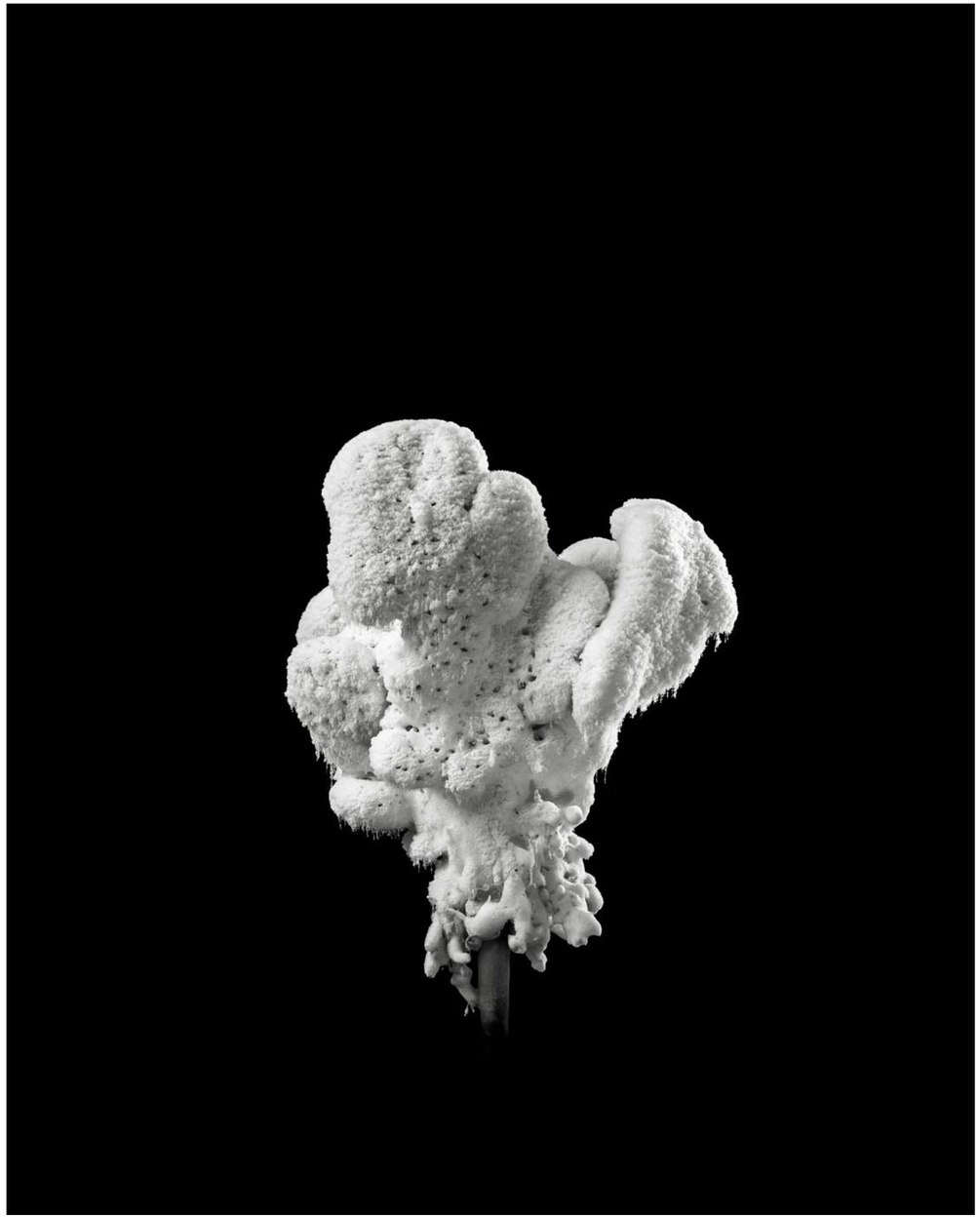


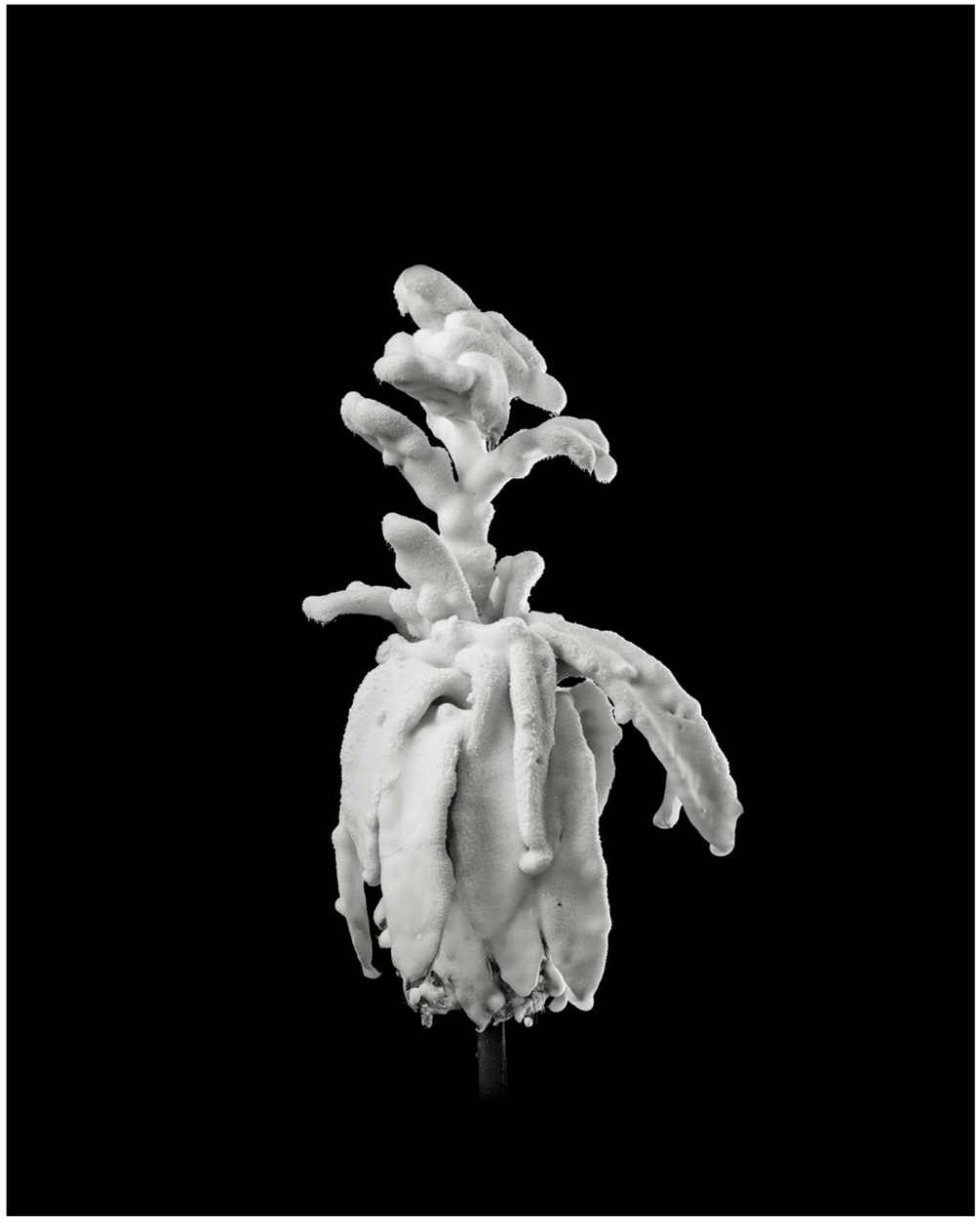
2–10
Tropisme (hélio), 2015
Rotogravure on handmade paper, series of 9 prints
Each 69 × 54 cm (27¼ × 21¼ in)











Foreword

Ten or so years ago, in the early days of the dot-com boom, I found myself in a discussion group of a respected think-tank. The topic was something like *how the Internet could change our future*. When it came to the question and answer section, a member of the audience asked one of the well-informed panellists if, a few years from then, people would shop online? The panellist responded that shopping is best done in person, when one can feel, touch and smell what one buys. Now, just a few years later, that response is positively antiquated. Shopping on the Internet is not only a necessary time-saver for busy people, but for many it has become a fast and pleasurable activity. We have become so accustomed to ordering groceries, buying household items, technical equipment, clothes, even artworks, at the click of a button that we no longer hesitate.

Recent studies of customer behaviour conducted by one of the largest banks in the United States show that only ten years ago, the first monthly repayment an average person made was for their car, even before the mortgage payment on their home! A decade ago having access to a car was a lifeline for people in the US, because it allowed them to get out of the house to be physically present whenever they were required elsewhere. However, by 2015, the first item paid for by most American consumers, maybe other nationals too, is the monthly fee for their cell phone. This is enough to tell us just how quickly the virtual world has taken over the physical one.

At least for now, the cell phone is a secure lifeline for most people in contemporary society. Not only can it be used with ease to execute demanding tasks but it allows them to be accomplished so much faster. This suggests that the present, the very moment we are living in, has become brief, fleeting, concentrated between the past and future. Eastern philosophy advises us to emphasize the present, to *live* in it, but how can we follow such advice when the real world insists that we live faster and faster? With the dominance of communication technology, these are the dichotomies we must face in the first half of the twenty-first century. Like many others still, I feel fortunate to have experienced the alternative, but what about the younger generations?

Many of us have been entertaining such thoughts for some time and several living philosophers have been solid advocates of giving ourselves time to think, trying to make us aware of what will be expected of humans in the future, but with little success. Most of us are swept along in the whirlwind of advancing technology without seeing an end, or questioning whether or not we should follow, lest we be considered not progressive enough or to be missing the boat of progress. Therefore, when an artist such as Julian Charrière devotes his work to the condition of the planet, we take courage, give time and space to the topic and discuss it openly. I find Charrière's stance as an artist dealing with such challenging subject matter really interesting and even more so considering that along with their deeply existentialist concerns, his works have a highly aesthetic appeal. For example, some of his works, such as *We Are All Astronauts*, 2013, [pp. 86–89] and *Tropisme*, 2014, [pp. 2–17], which are discussed in various contexts in this book, have an extreme beauty.

It has been a pleasure and an energizing endeavour to organise this exhibition with Julian Charrière. His intelligence, enthusiasm and flexibility of mind have been a great asset to our conversations and have contributed greatly to the success of this exhibition and publication.

Timothy Morton's generous commitment of his time has been a joy and I cannot thank him enough for the insightful essay he has contributed to this publication. His astute and intelligent ideas often coincide with those of Julian Charrière. Indeed, their various conversations have been decisive for us, who share their great respect for our planet.

My heartfelt thanks go especially to all the lenders to this beautiful and thought-provoking exhibition. Without their willingness to part with their prized works, this venture would not have been possible.

To mount an exhibition to the highest standards also requires considerable financial support. I am therefore hugely thankful for the grants and donations we have received in support of the Julian Charrière: *For They That Sow the Wind* exhibition. My gratitude goes to Canton de Vaud, Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Swiss Cultural Fund UK, The Shifting Foundation, and to the members of Parasol Circle, Switzerland, and of the Parasol Future Unit.

Charrière's commercial galleries have been immensely considerate and helpful throughout the process and I gratefully thank them for their unstinting assistance.

Once again, Peter Davis and Chris Ifould at Parasol unit organised a wonderful gallery team, which for this exhibition also included David Schlechtriem, Charrière's studio manager. Their commitment and seamless coordination ensured the successful installation of this challenging exhibition.

As always the enterprise of putting together a publication at Parasol unit benefits from happy team work. Helen Wire continues to be our prized copy editor with an astute mind and precise sense of balance. For the finesse of yet another beautiful publication we owe much to the talents of Marc Kappeler and his design team at Moiré, all of who are a vital asset to Parasol unit. At the gallery, Erica Payet holds it all together with commendable care and professionalism and, finally, to everyone at Parasol unit, who has worked directly or indirectly on this exhibition and publication I give my heartfelt thanks. In this regard I salute the rest of the wonderful Parasol unit team formed by Robin Spalding, Diane Lennan, Juan Alvarez de Lara Sieder, Kirsteen Cairns, Lala Thorpe and Berber Meindertsma.

Ziba Ardalan
Founder/Director

14–17
Tropisme, 2014
Frozen plants, refrigerated showcase
620 × 80 × 186 cm (244 × 31½ × 73¼ in)
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France, 2015

18–23
Polygon I, *VII* and *X*, 2015
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Medium format black-and-white photographs, double exposure through thermonuclear strata, archival pigment prints on Photo Rag Baryta paper
182.8 × 152.8 cm (72 × 60¼ in)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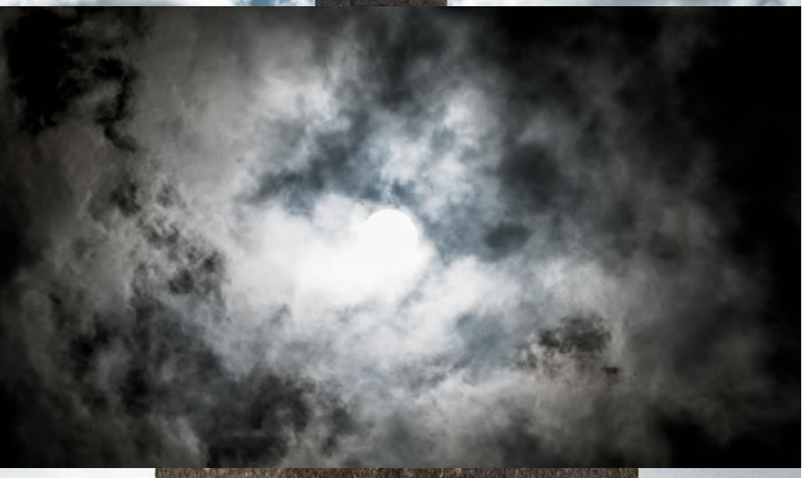
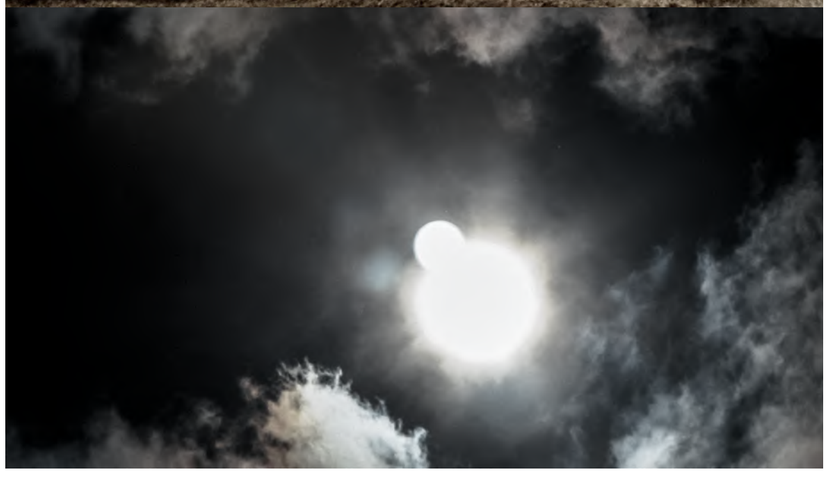
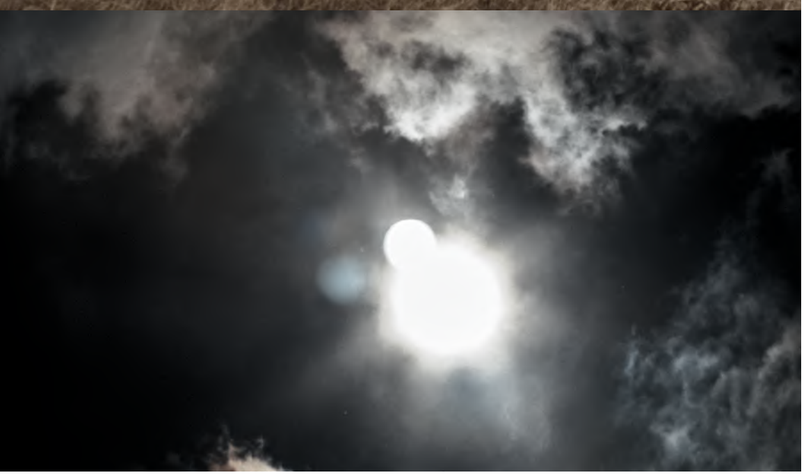
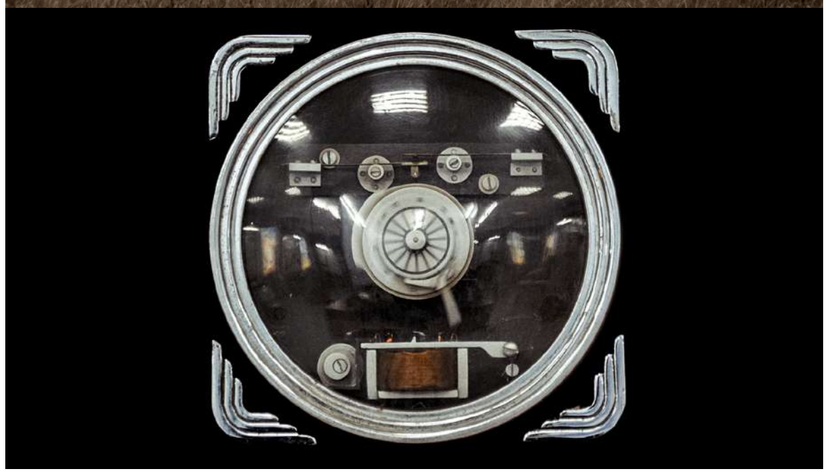








24–29
Somewhere, 2014
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Full HD colour video
Sound: Ed Davenport
Duration: 16’ 24”
Film stills

30–33
The Third Element, 2015
Lithium brine, glass, steel
400 × 210 cm (157½ × 82¾ in)
Installation views at TBA21|Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria

34–37
Monument – Fragment of an Approaching Past, 2015
Car tops, steel and glass
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France

39–42
The Key to the Present Lay in the Future, 2014
13 broken hourglasses containing fossils from different periods of Earth's history: Archean, Proterozoic, Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, Tertiary, Anthropocene
Dimensions variable
40–42: Installation views at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2014

Compressed Present

Ziba Ardalan

Today, in 2015, how do we define our existence as human beings? Four centuries ago the French philosopher, René Descartes (1596–1650) declared it was our faculty to think: *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Fast forward to Postmodernism in the late twentieth century, when the American conceptual artist Barbara Kruger (1945–) poignantly said it all. In 1987, she crystallised her thoughts in a dramatic black-and-white photograph of a hand holding a red-and-white plaque bearing the inscription: *I shop therefore I am*.

The first 15 years of the twenty-first century have heralded in a world that we have part inherited and part created, one in which communication technology, the Internet, and all kinds of programming are all pervasive – we live now in an increasingly virtual world. Accelerated communications make it possible to take on more projects, which in turn keep us too busy to ask ourselves what in the society of today defines our existence as humans? Yet it remains a worthwhile question to ask. Clearly, the actual time we have at our disposal to accomplish any one task or project becomes correspondingly concentrated, and geographically, nations and cultures have conveniently merged as a consequence of economic globalisation. The frequency of short-term, long-haul travel has removed any perceived barriers of distance, while ever faster and more sophisticated electronic communications have in many situations replaced the need for one's physical human presence. In some ways, the cyber-human makes good sense, as does the virtual environment (not using the term 'virtual nature'), which by the way is a perfect fit for the virtual human. In such circumstances, our definition of human existence might be: *I text/I email/I FaceTime*, or even, *I know my electronics, therefore I am*, at least for now. Indeed, who cares about physicality when the virtual world does the job just as well?

In the whirlwind of contemporary life, I doubt we ever give ourselves the luxury of taking time to ask ourselves how these demanding activities have come into being, particularly since the end of the Second World War in 1945. For sure, human intelligence, creativity and drive to succeed have all played important roles, but I don't think they tell the whole story. This is precisely the point where the work of some philosophers and the art of younger artists, such as Julian Charrière, come in to make us aware of, to question and reflect on, who we are. How do we define our existence? And where are we heading?

Charrière's work is a kind of reality-check on what is happening to our planet, making it clear that, ironically, progress in the virtual world could not have been possible without, in some ways, going back to the roots and sadly depleting the 'Mother Earth', but how long we can afford to keep doing this is another question. One of Charrière's most burning research topics is the current worldwide exploitation of the chemical element lithium and the rare earth elements – in what conditions they are exploited and to what ends they are used. But he is foremost interested in the phenomenon of time and how traces and data from the past, which have left their mark on our planet – air, snow, water, earth and vegetation – can provide us with information, connect us with the past and affect our future. Yet, Charrière was born into the Digital Age and although I find his acute sense of observation of so many important phenomena on the planet interesting, I also realise that as a young artist of today, for whom the present ought at least to be a flickering notion, his attention is more often focused on the past, on what has happened, and on the future, on what will happen.

Take Charrière's work, *The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories*, 2013, [pp. 90–95]. In this series of large photographs we see him on an Icelandic iceberg, attempting to melt ice with a blowtorch, a venture he apparently continued with little success for eight hours. One has to question such an undertaking. Is it to validate the absurdity of his action? Is it regret about the icebergs melting? Or is it a human demonstration of awe in the face of nature – nineteenth-century Romanticism lingering on in the life of a powerful twenty-first-century man? In his attempt to melt the iceberg, Charrière is endeavouring to perform a philosophical act, that of connecting data from the past to what will be in the future. In other words, he is perhaps bypassing the present to gain access to the future. Another work, *On the Sidewalk*, 2013, [pp. 120–123] is a series of drill cores of compressed sedimentary layers taken from 80-metre-deep holes drilled beneath the footpath in front of his home in Berlin. I agree with Charrière that each layer of the vertical deposits contains objective information (as opposed to subjective horizontal historiography) about the past that connects them with future layers, but it seems to me that the present has been squeezed out.

In the genesis of his various artworks, Charrière might be influenced by and share thoughts with the philosophers who have done considerable work on time-space compression, such as David Harvey (1935–), who in 1989 was the first person to articulate such thoughts, Paul Virilio (1932–), Doreen Massey (1944–), and Nigel Thrift (1949–). Charrière's work is deeply conceptual and often inspired by the writings of thinkers, philosophers and innovators. Much of his work shows a significant concern with time, the time required for natural phenomena to affect our planet, but also curiously the shortened and manipulated time enabled by technology to alter our understanding of time and its subsequent effect on the planet. Finally, he investigates the means by which this technology has come to exist. In this regard we can extract a wealth of thought and information in the writings of philosophers, such as Timothy Morton, which is crucial to our understanding of Charrière's art. Morton and Charrière share many of the same concerns about life on planet Earth and it was indeed a welcome moment when Morton agreed to contribute what is an insightful essay to this publication.

It is also here that we face the outcome of Charrière's ambitious projects in some of the world's largest salt flats in Bolivia or on the highly radioactive steppes of Kazakhstan, and think for a superficial moment that these projects have formed his *oeuvre*. Charrière's work reveals itself to us in several facets. Much of his art created after various expeditions – such as *Polygon*, 2015, (Kazakhstan) [pp. 18–23] and *Future Fossil Spaces*, 2014, (Bolivia) [pp. 48–57] – has been compared with the exploratory travels of the nineteenth-century Prussian naturalist, geographer and proponent of romantic philosophy, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). There is certainly a hint of romanticism in Charrière's endeavours, perhaps because he has grown up in the period of transition from the Analogue to the Digital Age. This is something he and I discuss in the interview part of this publication. Maybe to support my suggestion, I could mention a work called *Panorama*, 2011, [pp. 132–139] a series of photographs Charrière made in Berlin. At first sight, the photographs seem to represent various Alpine landscapes in different weather conditions, but in reality Charrière fabricated them by spreading flour and fire-extinguisher foam over some building-site rubble in Berlin, then photographed them. Might such a work be indicative of a Swiss man's nostalgia for his beloved mountains whilst residing in a large and geographically flat city?

Future Fossil Spaces (multiple salt sculptures), *Polygon* (a series of photographs of Semipalatinsk, the Soviet Union's disused nuclear testing grounds in Kazakhstan) and a video called *Somewhere* [pp. 24–29], all respond to Charrière's urge to discover and document truths about our planet. In *Future Fossil Spaces*, the mostly hexagonal salt plaques, excavated and cut from the Salar de Uyuni salt-flat region of Bolivia and configured for installation in the gallery space, achieve a beautiful and touchingly ethereal fragility within the white cube. Very much like a displaced archaeological site, it also recalls the *Site, Non-site* earthworks of the American land artist, Robert Smithson (1938–1973). *Future Fossil Spaces* bears testimony to the changes and transformations that have taken place over a long period and under natural conditions in that part of the planet. In Bolivia the layers of salt cover saline lakes, which reputedly contain high concentrations of lithium which are exploited as an essential element for batteries to power electronic equipment.

The *Polygon* photographs act very much as sample images bearing witness to the vast (18,000 sq km) nuclear testing grounds of Semipalatinsk. Informed and inspired by J.G. Ballard's short story, *The Terminal Beach*, these photographs depict the vast steppes, populated here and there by monumental concrete structures that were supposed to deliver readings on the magnitude of nuclear testing blasts. Yet now, and in these images, they are solidly tangible ghosts of humanity's acts of horror, particularly when one thinks that between 1949 and 1989 about 456 nuclear tests, both above and underground, were conducted in the area.

Not all of Charrière's works are exploratory, investigatory or political. Two works in the exhibition, *Tropisme*, 2014, [pp. 2–17] and *We Are All Astronauts*, 2013, [pp. 86–89] are of enormous beauty and fragility, and deal with questions that bring the past and future into relationship, as happens in much of Charrière's *oeuvre*. *Tropisme* is a refrigerated glass vitrine in which he displays some of the oldest species of plants on the planet – the kind that survived the major extinction at the end of the Cretaceous Period which ended 65 million years ago. To protect them from future decay, Charrière dipped the plants in liquid nitrogen which shock-freezes them at a temperature of around –196° centigrade. Thus, for now and for as long as they remain refrigerated at –20° C in the display case, the plants are coated in a white, almost luminous film that endows them with an exquisitely aesthetic delicacy. Like some of Charrière's other works, such as *Polygon*, *Tropisme* was also inspired by the science-fiction writing of J.G. Ballard, this time by his novel, *The Drowned World*.

The title of another poetic work, *We Are All Astronauts*, was inspired by the writing of the American architect and inventor, Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), which was also the inspiration for other works by Charrière. Among other things, Fuller was an environmental activist who was acutely aware of the limited resources of the planet, just as Charrière is today. *We Are All Astronauts* consists of several globes from different times, some more than a hundred years old, suspended from the ceiling just above a large table. Charrière sanded the surface of the globes to make all geographical borders disappear. The dust from sanding each globe – with the 'international sandpaper' he produced from minerals gathered from all the countries recognised by the United Nations – is settled on the table, gently intermingling with the dust from the other globes in a poetic determination to bring about an end to all differences.

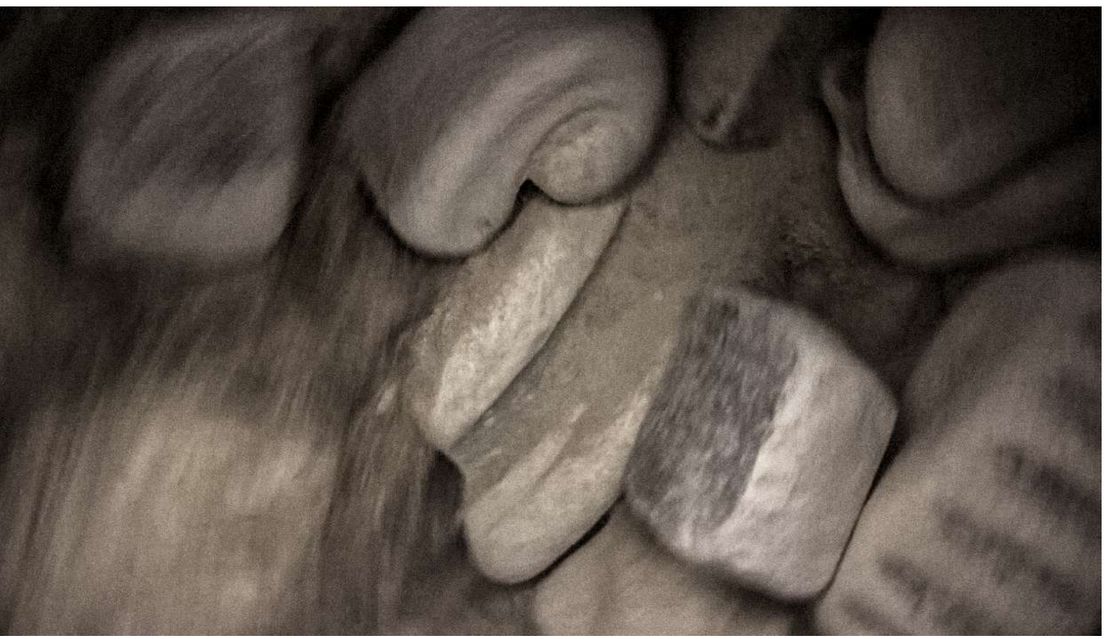
Since the seventeenth century when Descartes lived, humanity has achieved an extraordinary amount of good, bad, awful, and supremely great things. Four hundred years later we can report to Descartes that *thinking time* has been replaced by *action time*. Few of us can now afford the considerable luxury of time to think and act wisely and sensibly. We now live in a two-tense time, that of the past and future, which is an indication of how little importance humanity is to the overall life of the planet. We can otherwise report that although the Earth's inevitable course of destruction has accelerated, there are still young people deeply concerned about the world and desperately seeking to save it.

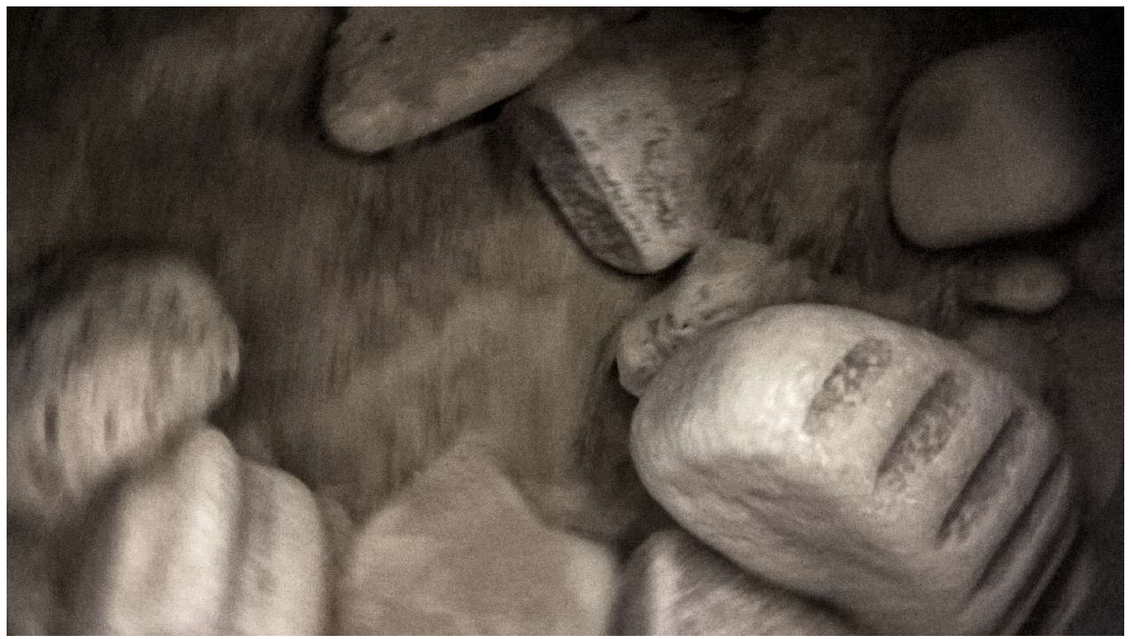
Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni, plaster, enamelled steel basins, lithium brine
Dimensions variable
Installation view at Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany, 2015

50–55
Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni, enamelled steel basins, lithium brine
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2014

Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France, 2015

58–63
Clockwork, 2014
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck
12 concrete mixers, stones
Dimensions variable
Installation views at OBEN, Vienna, Austria, 2014





Spectres of the Non-human

Timothy Morton

We have no idea whether our reading of a poem or our interpretation of a work of art will be the final one. This puts us in a strange position, not unlike the one Turing machines find themselves in – if Turing machines could feel and think.

A Turing machine is a sort of abstraction of a computer program. It works, as imagined by Alan Turing (1912–1954), in a charmingly mechanical way, shuffling tape back and forth across a reader. No matter what its physical form, the following will always be true: no Turing machine can possibly predict when every other Turing machine will, or will not, go into an infinite loop. Turing showed that you cannot design an algorithm of algorithms, a perfect meta-program that could sit on top of all the others and police them. Another way of saying the same thing is that a logical system must be incomplete in order to be true (on its own terms). Let's say that again: a logical system *cannot say everything* as a condition of the possibility of being able to say anything at all. That is Kurt Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, and Turing proved the Theorem by imagining a physical version of it, his machines with their software.

A computer can pretend to be many other kinds of thing: a piece of paper, a telephone, a television, a calculator, a calendar, a camera … A computer's identity hides in the tasks it executes, the things it pretends to be. Perhaps a computer tells us something about what it means to be a thing, because it can mimic many things. Perhaps what it means to be a thing is to have a gap between what it is and how it appears. Which would explain why you can never tell decisively whether every algorithm will go into an infinite loop, because you only have its appearance to go on – its computations. They might go on forever – but at any one moment, you can't know that.

Perhaps this also explains why you can't provide a final interpretation of a work of art. A work of art is something where the gap between what a thing is and how it appears becomes particularly acute for human beings, even those of us living in the contemporary age, where the drive to know and see everything – and upload it to Instagram – is rabidly rampant. A work of art cannot be exhausted, not because of some nebulous mystical property, but because of something very precise and obvious. The fact that you can see a photograph, like the fact that you can count or the fact that you can hit *Return* and cause an algorithm to execute, means that the entity in question *isn't* totally available to you! There is always an excess, something is always 'withdrawn' about an object, to use the language of object-oriented ontology.

But this doesn't mean that the 'real' object is 'hiding behind' its appearance. This would mean that you could somehow strip off the appearance and reveal the real object beneath. The object is nothing other than, say, a particular ice core, standing upright in a gallery. It isn't an octopus. It is an ice core, a real ice core – but precisely insofar as it is real, it slips out of our grasp all the time. No Instagram photo will exhaust it.

Not that the ice core will last forever. The ice will melt, and humans are doing a great job of that kind of thing all over Earth right now. What it means is that the human project of trying to access everything, and acting like everything is accessible by us, aka 'ours', is absurd and necessarily violent. Precisely because things slip away from us, both physically, cognitively and in every other way, trying to bring all of them into our orbit, like using all the parts of a cow for food and clothing and so on, inevitably goes against how things are. Our attempt to light everything up in the glare of contemporary technology isn't realistic. Artworks are one tiny corner of reality that we protect from violence, although many forms of art criticism do try to reduce them in some way – to the biography of their author, for instance, whether we think that author is the human who took the photograph, or the group of humans with whom the photographer was living when the photograph was taken, or the groups of humans in the photographer's country of origin, and so on. It doesn't matter how wide we draw the circle, and even if we include non-human beings in the context, we are still trying to reduce the artwork to something that isn't the artwork. We are trying to see artworks as fossils that tell us about things other than the artwork. We are trying to see artworks as settled – as past.

Another way of saying the same thing is that we are trying to shut down the future. What kind of future? The *future* future: the future that is radically unpredictable, the future on which the predictable future depends. In a way, what computation does is to restrict futurality from getting out from under us. But we have just seen that this is impossible, not because algorithms are incompetent, but precisely as a condition of their competence! A brilliant interpretation will be one that *doesn't* act as if it could exhaust what it is interpreting. A true logical statement is one that contains an intrinsic flaw, like a tragic hero. In a way, the future is precisely that aspect of a thing that cannot be shut down. What aspect? The *essence*.

The form of a thing, its appearance, has already shut down. This hourglass was smashed at such-and-such a time, the shards fell in such-and-such a way. We can chart their trajectory. The past just is appearance: time is not a box that contains things, but a feature of how things are, which is why different things have different temporalities, different timescales. But the form of a thing is never exactly what it is. No matter how much we expand the explanatory context, we will never find the thing: just more biography, more interviews, more ballistics, more blow-by-blow accounts. What a thing is: *this is the future*. A flickering *not-yet* haunts a thing.

A thing is precisely a fossil from the future. And this future beams weirdly into the 'present', which is never an exact point of whatever size (a nanosecond, a geological era). The present is only a relative motion between the past and the future. And since past and future are features of a thing,

rather than containers of a thing, things are shifty, shadowy, dappled beings that flicker and melt before our eyes. We can't point to them directly, we can't exhaust them by any mode of access (thought, Instagram photograph, contextualization, physical handling).

Ecological awareness means opening up to more and more temporalities: the time of frogs, the time of geology, of destructive weather events, of extinction … This *temporality explosion* prevents us from getting up to our usual tricks, in which everything seems perfectly illuminated, we know our way around, the point of knowledge is to settle everything, and so on. Our usual tricks are called *anthropocentrism*. We act as if access thoroughly exhausts things, and furthermore we act as if human access is the special or only kind of access in the entire universe.

Ironically, most contextualism is an attempt to *contain* the explosion of context, the vertigo we get when we realize there are thousands of overlapping temporalities, thousands of pasts and futures, intersecting everywhere. Most contextualism is a buck-stops-here kind of a thing: the buck stops at human class relations, or Western art concepts, or European phases of modern art history, or the last two centuries of economic transactions, or this or that ideological frame.

This is not the same as saying that historical and political contexts are all invalid. They aren't. They are perfectly valid, yet their validity depends upon their *inability* to exhaust what they are explaining. The fact that we can now notice how trees and rivers may also have to do with pigments and paper gives us a brief and powerful glimpse, as the context door swings a little wider open, of what some philosophers call *nothingness*, which is what I have been calling the way a thing shimmers, which is just the out-of-phase motion of the past sliding under the future, not touching. Even a frozen plant leaks out time. Look at Julian Charrière's *Tropisme* [pp. 2–17]. Our violence towards life forms freezes them in time, so to speak: an extinct species is now only visible in a drawing or as a fossil in a museum or as a photograph. Charrière's work does to the plants what modernity does to life forms – but this violence in another key shows us the impossibility of freezing things just how we (think we) want. We don't know what these haunting spectres are, completely. Time still happens. Suspension is not the complete absence of time, just a slowing down, like seeing things on an evolutionary scale. Nothing can be frozen for good. Things melt, and our ideas about things melt: nothingness flickers.

Hopefully, we take this nothingness seriously, and don't try to exhaust everything 'better', now with a super-context that includes non-human beings. Translated into the world of technological manipulation, that kind of exhaustion would be part of a triumphalist project that would make the current technocratic oppression look like an anarchist picnic. If that's what ecological awareness results in, then 'Beam me up, Scotty.'

Lithium powers batteries, and it calms manic-depressives. In those places where this solar element is concentrated in the ground water, there are measurably less incidences of human violence, particularly the kinds of violence we associate with patriarchy. Julian Charrière's work is a kind of aesthetic lithium that calms down the current human mania for exhausting and reducing things. This is quite different from saying that his art makes you stupid; quite the opposite in fact. Stupidity isn't dullness. Stupidity is the *manic computation* that ploughs ahead without checking itself – and how's that been working out for us and other life forms for the last 12,500 years, since the advent of the agricultural mode that eventually gave rise to industry and global warming? The computation that proceeds as if it could predict everything, that never read the Gödelian fine print, that sees a thing as infinitely malleable, the object of sadistic-patriarchal manipulation, constantly present 'beneath' appearances no matter what one does to those appearances (like, say, spraying them with pesticides that eliminate bees).

Charrière's fragile colour palette, like Arctic ice or Earth seen from space, is *beautiful* – that scary word we want to make old-fashioned – precisely insofar as it contributes to the disorientation of scale, the disorientation that *is scale*, the way we are looking at the planet, or part of the planet, the fragment of a whole to which the fragment does not add up, and to which the fragment cannot be reduced. The really haunting aspect of the NASA Blue Marble photographs was not the empowering rush of 'We've got the whole world in our hands,' but its opposite, a non-violent inability to grasp, the lack of a top level: the view from space is no more valid than the view from a room in an art gallery. Further into ecological awareness, the futuristic confidence of a Buckminster Fuller (inventor of the geodesic dome, a replica of which Charrière has flattened with a digger) will seem like part of a last gasp of anthropocentric control fantasies, emerging just at the moment at which we begin to see that things are horribly and wonderfully out of our control. If we are still around in the future that his work opens up, it will mean that we have relinquished some of this mastery, through which we are also mastered.

This is the true lesson of ecology. We do not stand astride things, like Charrière on the iceberg [pp. 90–95]: again, aesthetic violence counteracts social violence. We slip out from under things, just as things slip out from under us. Beauty, the resonance between two beings, implies fragility: turned up to eleven, the resonance will destroy at least one of them, like an opera singer exploding a glass. Things can't last for ever, not because something undermines them from outside, but because things are precarious spectres, torn from within between what they are and how they appear. It would be good if we could have an aesthetics and a politics based on this inner fragility.

A spectre is haunting the spectre of communism: the spectre of the non-human.

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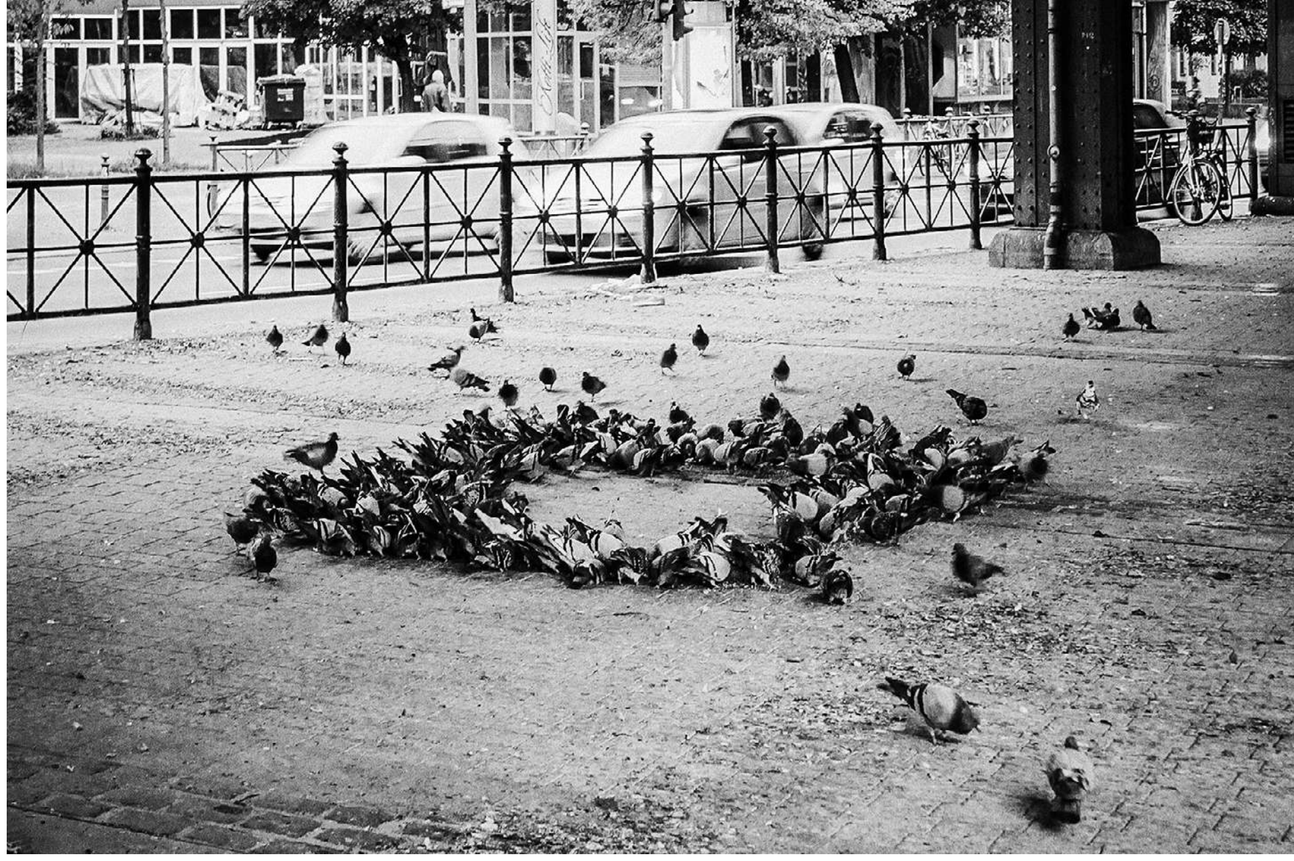
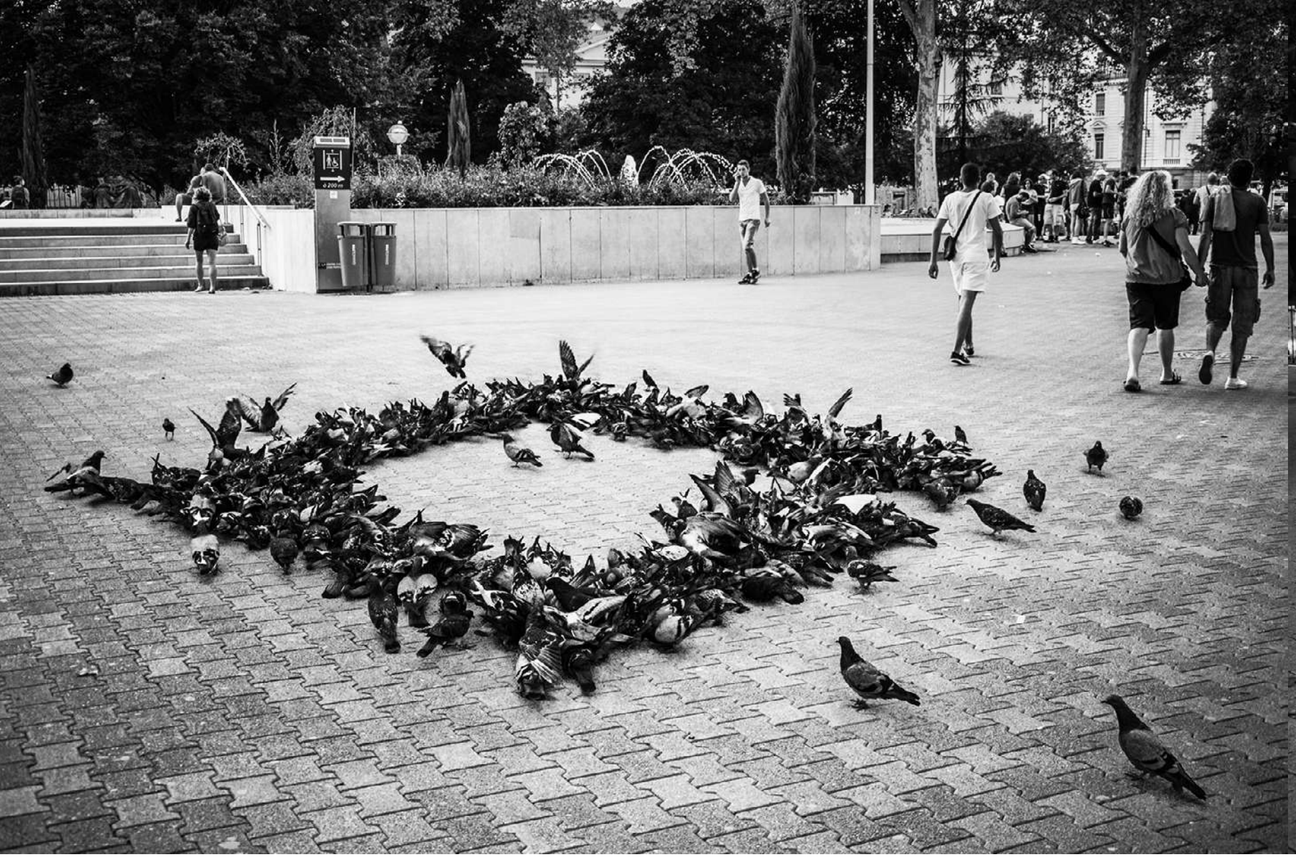


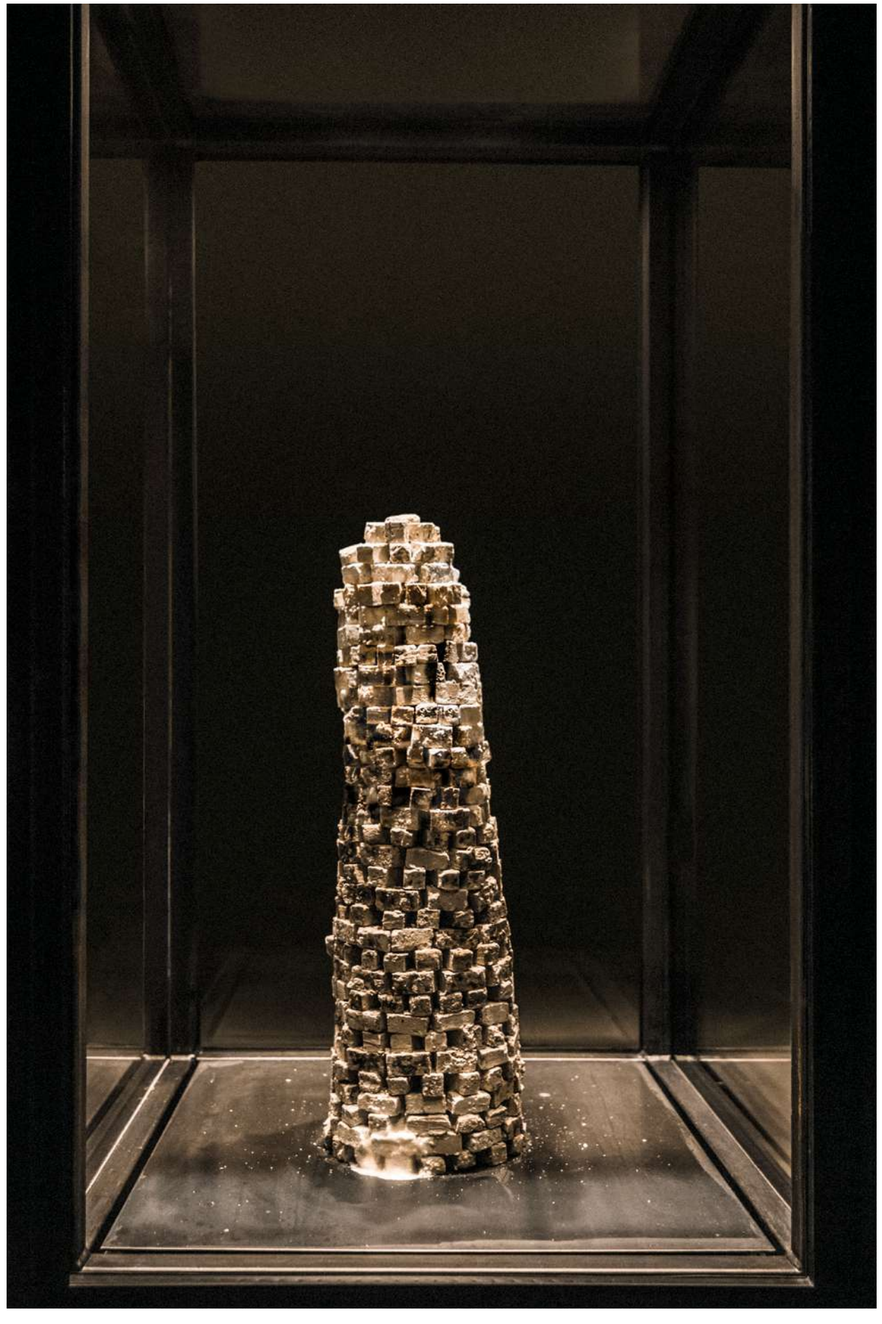
69–75
Digesting Geometry, 2011–2014
Archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle Baryta paper
Each 20 × 30 cm (8 × 12 in)

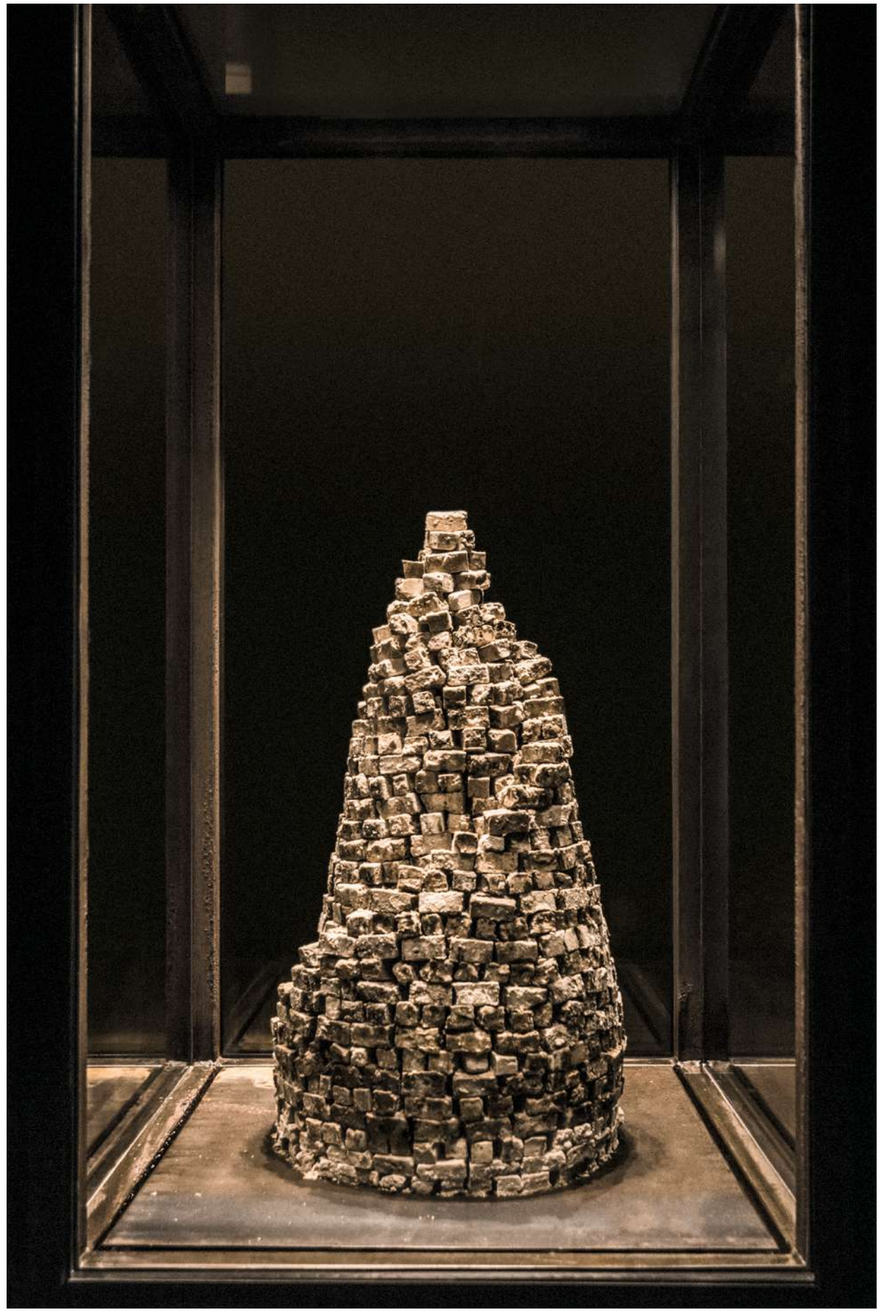

RESTAURANT
BISTROT
CAFE
SNACK
CAFE PARIS
SERVICE NON STOP

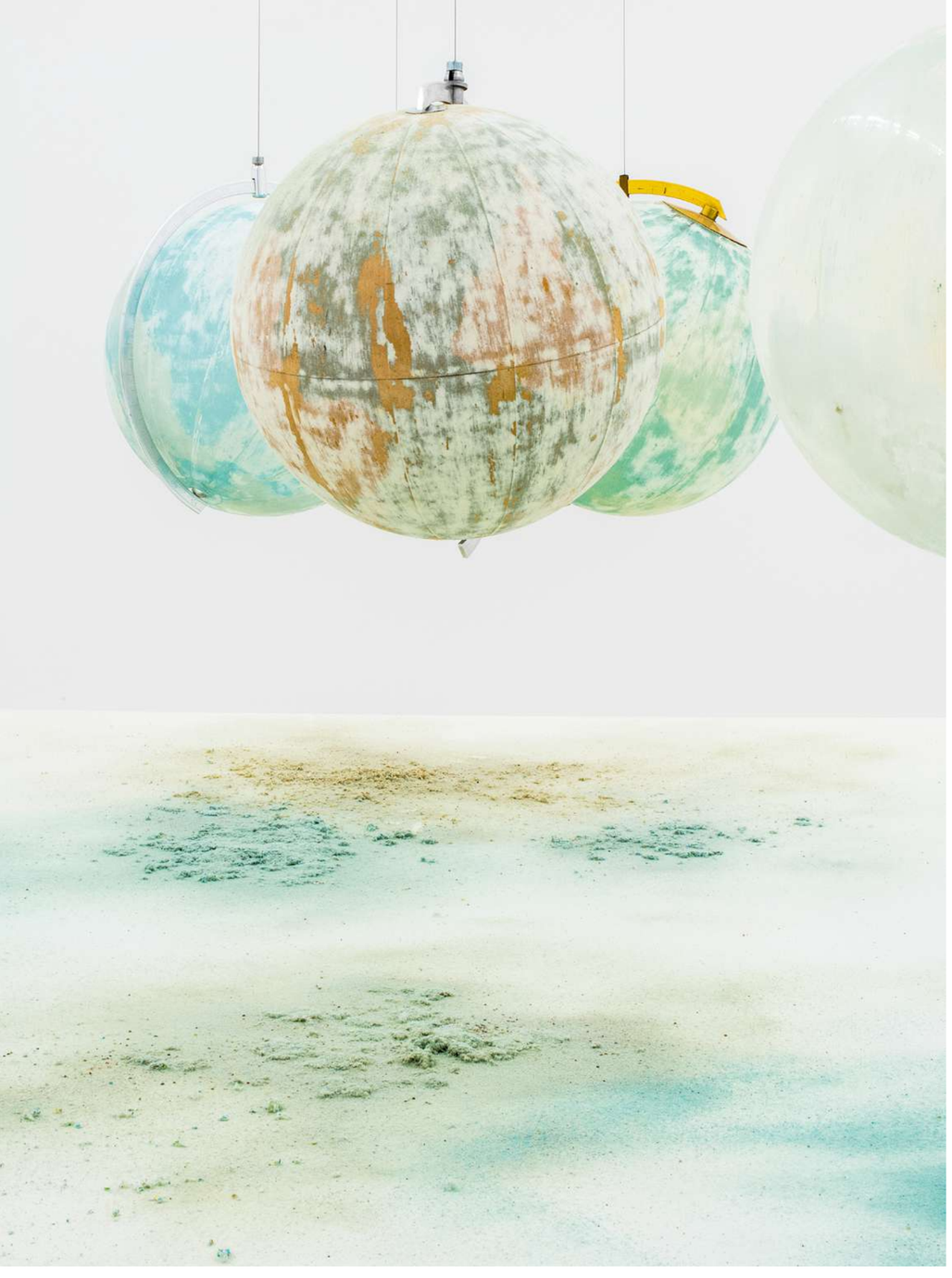



PASSAGE

76–85
Somehow, They Never Stop Doing What They Always Did, 2013
Concrete, plaster, nutrients, water from 10 rivers. Vitrine: steel, double-glazed glass
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Les Modules du Palais de Tokyo at Biennale de Lyon, France, 2013







86–89
We Are All Astronauts, 2013
13 found globes made of glass, plastic, paper, wood, steel base,
MDF tabletop, dust from sanded globes and international mineral sandpaper
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, France, 2014

90–95
The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories I, *II* and *III*, 2013
Photographs, archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle photo paper
160 × 240 cm (63 × 94½ in)

96–99
On The Sidewalk, I Have Forgotten the Dinosauria, 2013
80-metre-deep compressed core-drilling from Berlin
20 × 554 × 15 cm (8 × 218¼ × 6 in)
Installation views at DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany, 2013

And the Post-Modern Collapse of Time and Space, Iceland, 2013
Full HD colour video with sound
Duration: 1:53'

Film stills

Julian Charrière Interviewed

by Ziba Ardalan

Ziba Ardalan: Julian, I still vividly recall our first conversation and would like to take it as a cue for our discussion here. At the time you said something like: within this technology-dominated world, you felt almost envious of older generations, because in some ways they were more in control of their own actions, while your generation is almost totally dependent upon or even controlled by technology. From my point of view, we humans are where we are today because advances in technology have benefited us in so many ways but have at the same time been somewhat destructive of our quality of life and our ability to interact human-to-human. I would like to hear how you define the human condition of your generation, that is people who are more or less in their late twenties and early thirties? What do they look forward to and what can they do to improve their quality of life?

Julian Charrière: Well, I do remember something of what we talked about. But I think the issue of the human condition goes beyond the parameters of technological progress. I also remember getting a bit nostalgic about my childhood. A time, when, as anyone of my age will remember, things were starting to change but had not yet undergone the massively accelerated pace of change that continues to happen now.

I believe the human condition transcends the technological and in this I pretty much agree with Schopenhauer and consider the human condition to be something conflictual.[1] I like his metaphor of the clock oscillating between the boredom of a desire and the desire of a boredom. That is a pretty strong image which makes even more sense in the hyper-capitalistic society of today.

We are still far from a real state of trans-humanity, one able to redefine humanity and its existence. But there are already some tools, gadgets and diverse technologies that are changing the way we see and acquire information and, more importantly, the way we perceive and interact at a social level.

Here I am, in Berlin, sitting in front of a screen, typing answers to your questions from data delivered to me via optic fibre from London, where you yourself will subsequently read and comment on what I say and finally come back to me at wherever I am at that moment and from where I will reply to you.

There is something magical about the speed, accessibility and ease of such transference, but it also seems strangely uncanny. Somehow, it becomes less personal. As we discuss my work – tangible objects that exist in real space – I find myself wishing that I could explain my pieces while standing in front of them with you in my studio.

Funnily enough, this 'conversation' will be published in a book, which will in turn reach many other people, who will experience my work without necessarily having met me or seen the exhibition. All this, in the form of a book,

made of real cut trees, which grew in real forests that took 30 years to reach maturity.

I think what I was trying to articulate back then was more focused on society and its implications within a larger social network. I definitely don't think that my generation is controlled by technology, but we have grown up parallel to a cybernetic revolution that ranges from the phone, to the cell phone, to the smartphone, etc. Rapid technological transformations that inevitably affect the way we perceive reality.

Given my particular condition and situation, it does feel 'natural' to be able to converse with a friend in New York, while flying to Paris, while looking at an image of the west American desert on my computer screen. Does this mean I am being controlled? I think there is a conflict there. Of course we are being observed and our actions recorded and stored somewhere on some server in some part of the world (the NSA|National Security Agency, etc.). But this interconnectivity and fluidity of information is what formed the basis of the Internet, what we today regard as the freedom machine that fulfils our utopian dreams and ideals for the absolute circulation of information. Nevertheless, this 'machine' has also been developed for completely different purposes, as part of military technology. At the time, for private users not to have realised that highly intrusive levels of freedom could be acquired through such a machine could seem naïve, but it is exactly due to that possibility and our own capacity to project it at a another level that enables us to achieve a real life quality.

You have travelled the world, Julian, from the rare-earth mining regions of China to the deep soils of Ethiopia, from Stalin's nuclear testing grounds in Kazakhstan (formerly part of the Soviet Union) to the vast El Salar salt deposits in South America, and much of this in search of the rare earth elements and lithium used in all those pieces of electronic equipment that supposedly make our life easier and allow further technological advances. Several writers have compared your activities to those of the nineteenth-century explorer, Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859). May I hear from you how you consider the nature of your artistic activities and what do these activities really mean to you?

I come from a small village in Switzerland. A place where I grew up next to the mountains, close to the trees, surrounded by birds and fishes, which to this day I can still name and categorize. I believe there is a certain legacy from this time evident in my first artistic experiments. Travelling for me is a way of being able to send messages, charged with both rational and subjective meaning while being closely linked to experience and life. My interests lie not only with the information but with the physicality, the territorial or geographical characteristics of these meanings, the spaces in which they evolve and the feelings they evoke.

I need to evolve within a landscape, to engage actively with it in order to extract something from it. Taking pictures and recording sound and video

was never enough for me. That may be due to our living in a time when one can simply key in the name of a place on a computer and a powerful algorithm sorts out for us all the available documentation about it. In some ways, one might say that geography has never been as democratic, as accessible, as it is now. I find it both mind-blowing and frightening how much access we have to territorial and spatial knowledge, which we can retrieve, and how it is all reduced to an interface on a surface.

Nowadays, one can travel *virtually* from one point to another, say from Dakar to Zanzibar, by using accurate satellite information maps, where time and distance between points can be calculated in minute detail. But, in the end, all this virtual information merely constitutes a method of representation. In this sense, one could speak of the end of geography. Distances disappear under the scrutiny of technology as, today, the movement of the body in space and time, the haptic exploration that triggers our awareness of an environment, can be reduced to a few clicks.

So, yes. The only way for me to engage with all this is to experience places physically. Which is why going into a landscape as part of my artistic practice is more similar to the idea of fieldwork, a term that refers to a particular scientific research methodology, but is also employed to describe work in other fields such as, for example, journalism. Only in my case, I am not reporting but re-signifying through interferences. Somehow, there is something romantic about going out there, allowing those places to resonate with me, and from time to time, bringing back some exponents to the gallery. It is very similar to storytelling where the landscape acts as context and the objects as words.

To be compared to Alexander von Humboldt is extremely flattering, yet quite far from the truth. Nevertheless, I believe that in this world of specialisation in which we live today, where every expert spends their whole life exploring and digging deeper and deeper into a single corner of knowledge, art is one of the few professions able to provide an overview. An artist can be a sort of social sponge, able not only to absorb a large range of information from diverse fields of knowledge but also to establish new links between them by intuiting a larger picture. I think I once took the allegory of the 'Sunday painter' to exemplify this. The artist jumping from one field to another looking for the perfect source is kind of a Sunday painter of various disciplines. And although there is no fixed direction, each move, each jump is precisely calculated. The collection of which, draws a completely new horizon.

Julian, I agree that geography has never been as democratic and available, but also it has never been so fleeting. I am fascinated to hear that actual 'physicality' is so crucial to you in your work and appreciate the tremendous difficulties and confusion it might cause to reconcile physicality when one is dominated by digital technology. May I ask how you define your activity when you climb a 30,000-year-old iceberg in the Arctic sea and try to melt it using only a blowtorch? How do you see yourself: as an explorer, an adventurer, a performer, a man engaging in a futile act that proves our inferiority when faced with the enormity of nature, or perhaps as someone endeavouring to make us aware of how brutally we have changed our planet?

As previously explained, a large proportion of my work is developed during what could be considered 'field trips'. I am very interested in landscape, but photographing or filming it is not enough – I have to physically engage with it. This physical involvement can take different forms and sometimes I exhibit the result of such an interaction as a work of art. Through research and intuition I define where these interactions are to take place. To relay my message clearly it is sometimes necessary to bring a human figure into the picture. The fact that I appear as an actor is more about bringing a human scale into the constellation than about presenting myself as an explorer or a performer. I am not actually interested in any epic aspect of these actions. For instance, in *The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories*, 2013, [pp. 90–95] it is really important that there is a fragile silhouette, the image of a man melting the ice beneath his feet. The person in the picture acts as a catalyst, as a projection surface, which invites every spectator to imagine themself as the protagonist.

Now that we are living on a cultural planet, every part of our globe has been changed through human activity. Some of these modifications have been of a brutal nature, but the whole process has had more to it than that. It probably started around 2.5 million years ago with the beginning of the ecological dominance of *Homo habilis*. Only relatively latterly has it become more radical.

I have always been fascinated by spaces that remain non-appropriated by humans, no matter whether that is due to their geological condition or because they have become so as a result of some destructive human action.

There is something very special about the Poles, something that has always fascinated humanity and has a strong romantic aspect to it. So out of reach of most people, the Poles secretly attract us. And now, images of them form part of day-to-day news reports. So I decided to go to the north.

To watch icebergs transform from a solid to a liquid state is a hypnotizing sight. I feel the same strange stillness that I do when visiting a cemetery. Air and time grow thicker there. Thousands of years of information that is contained in the ice is slowly disappearing into the immensity of the Arctic Ocean.

A feeling of hopelessness emanates from this vanishing landscape, the hopelessness of mankind observing its loss while simultaneously dwarfed by its overwhelming magnificence.

For me, standing on that enormous piece of ice, trying to accelerate its slow disintegration, was also an attempt to reverse a certain twisted distinction some people may still have of humanity being apart from or somehow superior to nature, an inherited trait from the Romantic era. I try to reincorporate humankind into the landscape by showing how interconnected we are.

What we have discussed so far are mainly philosophical questions. Am I correct in saying that deep down you are hugely worried about the survival of humankind and are vehemently asking yourself, 'Where are we?' I say this because the technological advances that apparently control the world of today also seem to be compressing the present. I believe your curiosity about the present is peripheral to your greater interest in the past and future. Perhaps because you see the present as being under threat?

I have definitely developed a strong interest in the past and the future. From the perspective of an archaeologist, the past is key to understanding the present. But I also endeavour to conclude from it projections of the future.

I am very interested in things which have a different temporality to we humans – things that teach us simultaneously about both the past and future. These 'things' can be as ordinary as stones or mould, but also they can be less familiar, visible or complex, for example an iceberg or radiation. For me, they act as temporal bridges: with close scrutiny they have the potential to open doors towards timescales that the human mind cannot grasp. Even attempting to reflect on life two generations before our time becomes a very abstract process, so how can one grasp past time-spans of thousands of years?

'Hyperobjects', as described by Timothy Morton, expand in both directions of a timeline at the same time and thereby transcend our human imagination. It is comparable to the light of a star spreading from the past into the future. Time is really a matter of perspective, which is why I am interested in places like Semipalatinsk, the nuclear test site in Kazakhstan, where I went in 2014 [*Somewhere*, pp. 24–29, and *Polygon* pp. 18–23]. Such places are 'future fossil spaces', where something that began in the past continues to have an impact on now and the future.

I am not directly interested in the question of human survival, but rather more in the traces that humans leave behind, marking their presence. Something which is somehow related to the question of survival, or at least to the question of presence and legacy, the need for the projection of oneself into the future.

This is strongly linked to another field of investigation which I could call decay. Regardless of whether it is the decay of our own body, of political spheres or of micro-organisms observed under a microscope, life is in a perpetual state of decay. Observing these processes is the easiest way to perceive what we commonly call *time*.

But let's get back to the present. The present insofar as it exists is interesting, as we live in what I would call 'now' or what we talk about as 'contemporary'. The present does not really exist, in the sense that it is just what we reflect on as history between the past and the future. As I type these thoughts, what I 'presently' see on my computer screen is no longer part of the present from the moment it strikes my retina. The present is rather a philosophical term, something which is no longer too closely related to reality.

I guess your thoughts about a threatened present are therefore more a question of velocity, the acceleration of our history through processes, which I mentioned earlier.

In some weird way the present has never been so present, as history has never been as comprehensive as it is today. Everything is constantly being archived. Actually, more is probably archived than would actually be consistent with reality. Looking back from the future, our 'now' will never have been as dense as it has become today.

Geography is in a deeper struggle, since the links between body and time and space are being ever more dissolved. Already in the nineteenth century, people saw an end to geography: they were afraid of the train, because it reached velocities at which the human eye was no longer able to perceive the environment as it actually is. Today, we find ourselves in a similar situation. We quasi-live in a post-railway reality, denominated the digital world. I am very curious about it, not afraid of it, and even less nostalgic about 'back then'.

Julian, what you said about humans leaving behind traces is a fabulous subject for discussion. To me, it is also the most important component of artistic creativity, obviously more evident in the work of some artists than of others. Now, to continue our discussion about time, within our own generationally linked memories of recent centuries we can define a couple of periods of important change, the first one being the late eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century, the time of the Industrial Revolution, and the second is the end of the twentieth century into the early twenty-first century, now defined as the Digital Era. However, as we said earlier, time is an important element in your work. Focusing on this for a while, let's talk about your work called *On the Sidewalk*, 2013, [pp. 120–123] which is a series of compressed soil cores drilled from beneath a footpath in Berlin, showing layers of time-past physically evidenced in a vertical timescale. While manifesting the past they also, when considered from the deepest layer to the top surface layer, link the past to the future. Or let's take another work you executed with Julius von Bismarck called *Clockwork*, 2014, [pp. 58–63].

These are two good examples to illustrate my interest in different temporalities and the accumulation of time. The objects I work with often have a strong connection to the past and project something into our future.

Art is not empirical, but can still use the tools of science. Through subjectivity and my actions I try to create afterimages, which do not actually exist in an empirical space – but potentially could do so. I think it is a process that could at times be compared to science fiction writing.

In the case of my work with drill-cores, I attempt to mimic the work of a historian by stressing the concept of chronological linearity, which we commonly call history. Extracting frozen moments of a timescale, cutting them out, making a selection and re-arranging them is a way of challenging the historical construct that humans envision to make sense of their immediate environment.

The verticality of the empirical geology tells us everything and does not hide information. Art allows me to play with this, to manipulate, to create my own stories. In some of my 'Time collages' there is a core sample of a mountain, a sample of concrete made out of a mountain and even some samples of a riverbed, where the result of the erosion of those same objects has become sedimented and compressed. This explores the idea of an eternal recurrence.

In *Clockwork*, too, there is an interesting relation between past and future. Working with Julius, we collected fragments from different human constructions, trying to physically map an urban environment through its materiality: stones taken from nature that had been formed into geometrical, mostly rectangular shapes by human action for the purpose of building architecture. Within a city, rock and soil act simultaneously as storage of natural and cultural history, from earth to brick and from brick to culture.

Omnipresent decay would slowly erode a block's right-angled edges back to a natural rounded form, a slow process usually beyond our perception. But for *Clockwork*, we used 12 concrete mixers as 'erosion-machines', reversing the purpose for which they had been created. The architectural chunks placed in the tambour of the rotating mixer, hit and erode one another, hastening them towards prematurely reaching a future state. A post-human condition linked to a past natural state.

What about *Tropisme*, 2014, [pp. 2–17] your refrigerated glass vitrine in which a series of shock-frozen ancient species of Cretaceous plants are displayed? For this work, the plants were dipped in liquid nitrogen to freeze them, then mounted and kept frozen inside a refrigerated display case.

Somehow, all these works identify you as a person formed in a technology-dominated time from which the present seems to have been squeezed. Do you feel any regret in all this, or ought we see you as a romantic working in a romantic area? It seems we are somehow still in that kind of timescale.

Many of my works draw on a romantic aesthetic and the ideas behind the Romantic Era. Indeed, we do in a way still live in a romantic age, one that overlaps with the geological time period often referred to as Anthropocene. There is a certain duality inherent to the idea of the Romantic Era. On the one hand, nature was regarded as something sublime in the distinction between nature and humans; on the other hand, an urgent need for human domination over nature was also expressed.

This is still very much the case today. In the classical Romantic Era of the early nineteenth century this mastering of nature could be materialized by, for example, climbing the highest mountain or crossing an ocean. It was a time of great exploration. Scientists and explorers of the Romantic Era – like your previously mentioned example, Alexander von Humboldt – still reflect nature on a human scale. Today, this human measure no longer plays such an important role. Investigations of science and the tools used by it have shifted into micro- and nano-scales. Still, the basic idea and the mechanisms of this exploration/domination have stayed the same.

One can definitely see these thoughts materialized in *Tropisme*, which also addresses the inherent dependency upon the controlled space in which the plants are set in an artificial immortality, but only for as long as the refrigerated unit is kept powered and taken care of by humans.

For me, this piece is very much about the vast and unimaginable temporality of these plants, which actually originate from the Cretaceous Period, since when they haven't or at least have barely changed whilst outliving so many epochs. Taking into consideration that our species *Homo sapiens sapiens* is just about a hundred thousand years old, raises our awareness of the ephemeral character of our own human species.

I developed an interest in these plants, not only because my grandmother had many orchids in her house and would play music to them, explaining to me that this would have a positive affect on their growth, but also because they were omnipresent – at the dentist, at school, at the supermarket – somehow taking over my childish reality.

Years later, reflecting on the subconscious appeal these plants seem to have for us, despite their origins dating way back before ours and the fact that they belong in a completely different geographical context, I had to think about the possible remains of a proto-reptilian part of our brain. Unconscious memories of a reptanting past.

Julian, how do you go about choosing a location for your projects? Does the research guide you to a location or does an actuality lead you to research it?

Actually, personal interest and actuality often intersect. So it happens that some works derive from this coincidence. Like, for instance, my investigation of what is nowadays called the 'lithium triangle' in South America, which could rapidly become another area being plundered for its natural resources, as has been happening for many years in the Persian Gulf region.

It is difficult to describe my mode of operation, because there is no fixed set of rules that dictate this or that to me. I have, rather, a range of interests which appear again and again in my work. Some of which are bound to particular places and my visiting and travelling experiences in them. I am particularly interested in what I could call a 'culturally energetic landscape', somewhere I would consider to be culturally loaded. It doesn't matter whether it is connected to natural resources, cultural history or is just an anecdotal fact, like a telephone box in the middle of the Mojave desert.

In some environments one perceives that radical changes have occurred through the intervention of humankind. This could happen at a physical level – a manufactured landscape where natural resources are or have been extracted – but equally on a conceptual level. Places that haven't been radically changed by an action but have acquired a different aura through the general perception of history suddenly holding a new meaning.

These are fertile terrains for artistic investigation, largely due to their inherently complex, multi-layered realities. Such places are somehow more universal than others and therefore more appropriate to accurately look into.

By identifying with them, I may reveal some of their inherent issues. I do not consider myself an activist and by implication try to stay as neutral as possible. My goal is not to make a point or to criticize but is more about proposing a work as a catalyst for people to react to and develop their own opinion.

Much of your work has to do with soil, land or the ground on which we stand. Were you at all influenced by Land Art artists, such as Michael Heizer (1944–), Robert Smithson (1938–1973) and others? Did any particular art movement influence you?

Definitely. When I was studying, those guys were my heroes! And not just because they were working in an open environment with the element of their choice, but because they themselves were actually confronting the landscape. An interaction that often became violent. In order to create ecological awareness and to elevate certain territories to a cultural level, the artists used methods that would seem aggressive to critical opinion today. A violent action could be undertaken within the natural sphere as a cultural act led by a single individual.

What fascinates me is not only this particular kind of interaction but also the places they chose in order to experiment, to create new meanings and what I consider to be some of the strongest artistic statements of the second part of the twentieth century. Often misunderstood, these artists were frequently reduced to their practice as outdoor artists playing with large tools and machines, their critics completely overlooking the sophisticated narratives being created. Narratives where landscape acquired new meaning through the cultural practices and our human relationship with it.

Many of these works took place in the vast blankness and vacuum of the 'west American desert' – a place whose connotation changed completely during the postwar years, from a symbol of wilderness, a natural and national treasure, to a technological dystopia. A new cultural space was being created as a result of displaced technology, multiple atomic tests carried out on desert sand, a faked moon landing and a tentative attempt to break the sound barrier. Political, economic and social events slowly converted this natural space into one of desolation and ruin, reigned over by the physical forces of the machine and the invisible forces of technology.

On the other hand, this landscape is also home to psychedelic minds and utopias, a fertile terrain for science fiction. What really fascinates me about all those Land Art artists is their awareness of the parallels and their mediated choice for such a beautifully violent altercation with the environment. In the sixties, land artists symbolized a new era in which humankind could affect on an earthly scale and dimension their geological reality.

Far more than reenacting art history, I am interested in the legacy of their methodologies and even more in the way, 40 years after their stories, the landscape and our conception of it is shifting.

Your obviously inquisitive mind has led you into much research and resulted in works about rare earth elements and lithium, all necessary metals for use in our cell phones and computers. I have read that to obtain a small amount of, for example, lithium, it is necessary to dig extensively into our earth and turn over a massive amount of soil. How consciously are we doing such mining? What are the social implications of all these human actions?

To be honest these questions are too vast and I believe they cannot be answered by any individual expert, let alone by me. As little as a month before the 2015 COP21 climate conference, even national states were unable to answer some of these questions.

Latterly, a certain ecological awareness has been arising worldwide, which is a good thing, although simultaneously there is a considerable amount of hypocrisy about it. A lot of ecological discourses and criticism remain stuck in the archaic anthropocentric concept of duality between us and nature. Nature is celebrated as a concept in which humankind doesn't belong.

For me, all the inquisitions about these specific materials and the landscapes from which they come were more about finding the places where the minerals – which are somehow sustaining what we are accustomed to calling the digital world – are associated with earth. I am interested in looking into the places where the elements are extracted because we sometimes forget that we could be walking over them.

In order to encounter the gap between deep geological time and the speed of light reigning over our society of information, I decided to go to where the material, which somehow connects us all, is quarried. This place is, for me, a sort of theatre of inverted reenactment of the myth of the Tower of Babel.

These minerals strictly arrayed in anthropogenic crystal form, called a computer or smartphone, are what make possible the same technological revolution that has compressed the temporality of our own reality and how that is inscribed in a sedimented world.

There is something uncanny about holding a smartphone or typing on a laptop while imagining the origins of all these minerals. One doesn't normally think that most of the people in our technology-dependent Western society carry a few grams of an element dug from a huge hole excavated in the deep steppes of Inner Mongolia.

I have been quite amused by the titles you give to your works, Julian. A concept that springs from most of them is an interest in fossils, dinosaurs, an attachment to the past that is remarkable. Could we talk about that?

I am very interested in the traces of humankind, traces that our generation will similarly leave behind and I try to reflect this by taking into consideration the traces that other life-forms have left behind. That is why my work often deals with fossils. For me, fossils are not necessarily something petrified. Being something subterranean and hidden from view, they rather work as a metaphor for some important meaning within artistic practice, that is, digging deep for something concealed and exposing it. To reveal, to make visible what was hitherto invisible.

Technological advances have made it possible for us to see things which no longer even exist. They can be accurately dated to a time that does not only precede human existence but even the creation of the earth.

You have collaborated with Julius von Bismarck on several projects, including dyeing pigeons in various colours and releasing them into the sky during the 2012 Architecture Biennale in Venice [*Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others*, 2012, pp. 124–131]. Why did you do that project and what did it mean to you?

I have had an affinity with birds since my youngest age. Back then, I participated in an ornithological group where we would count the birds in the *Arc lémanique*,[2] sometimes even putting rings on them. And while I was still at art school, pigeons became an important field of interest for artistic purposes and a few projects materialized around them. In fact, pigeons are a perfect example of an anomaly among opposing spheres, the cultural sphere versus the natural one. After the dog, pigeons are the second species of animal to have been domesticated, and this happened more than 5,000 years ago. Stolen out of nature, pigeons became a cultural 'object', and optimized through breeding techniques to such an extent that they became devices of communication.

But smartphones and laptops have replaced them. Nowadays, denied a purpose, pigeons have escaped to colonize our urban sphere, substituting our buildings for their native sea cliffs. Pigeons have a wholly other interpretation of and use for our infrastructures.

The project in Venice was also about identity and the idea that there are other citizens whose perception of our environment is completely different to our own; a perception that we can neither comprehend nor relate to, due to our own limited human perception, which in our daily life usually ignores them. By altering their colour, the birds suddenly became individual reference points within the city, contributing to the destabilisation of everyday constructs of human life and allowing for the creation of new connections within our environment.

I think it was in 2011 that you decided to sprinkle some white powder on the piles of rubble near your home in Berlin and photograph them. The resulting photographs appeared to be of snow-covered mountains. I am interested to know why you chose to create a new reality? I understand that creating new realities is the impetus for artistic endeavours. In this regard, Joseph Cornell's exquisite collages from the early twentieth century have just come to my mind. Cornell put together some small boxes, often with collaged images of distant places, which in some way dealt with his own inner state. Could we talk about the concept of the authentic and the fake and the fascination with creating a fake? Why do we do it? Is it simply to give physical form to our imagination?

In the beginning, *Panorama*, 2011–2012, [pp. 132–139] was a direct reaction to my journey to Iceland, which is one of those countries where one is forced to face a severe distortion of one's own spatial perception. Scale and distance dissipate into the blankness of its stony landscape, with no reference point between one's eyes and the horizon. Once back in Berlin I realized that I could work with that distortion.

Natural forms can be found over and over again at different dimensions and scales. Just as the universe can be found in an atom, a mountain can be found in a pile of rubble. Forms often simply repeat at different scales. *Panorama* plays with these different scales and realities.

Authenticity and fake are probably the wrong terms to use. Everything that is considered fake has at the same time to be real and is therefore another form of authentic. The mountain is just a model of another mountain that likewise constitutes a model of another one, while at the same time being itself a mountain. It is just a question of perspective.

Just as the native inhabitants of an American island were unable to see the ships of Columbus coming, because 'ships' didn't work as a scheme in their brain, we face the same difficulties when we confront realities that exceed our own known schemes. Schemes that have been conveyed by a cultural heritage stretched over generations.

I don't think a portrayal or any image can be fake or artificial. Everything is an object in itself. Even a 'fake' plastic cactus is a representation of a cactus in its own right. We talk about form and material. Authentic, that's what only a philosophically ideal world, a Platonic world, could be. There is no such thing as a master pattern on which reality is built.

There are just as many realities as there are subjects and objects and relations from subject to object and from object to subject. Artists might have a substantial sensibility, which allows them to throw a wide range of perspectives on various realities, giving them the opportunity to build on, to construct their artistic discourse on the plurality present within all dimensions.

Many thanks, Julian, for your insightful and comprehensive answers. It is indeed enormously helpful to have had your views on such various and critically important topics. I am truly impressed by your inquisitive mind, your acute sense of urgency and the need to take action to ensure that planet Earth will survive for a very long time. Yet frankly, like many others, I am unsure where human action is taking us. As someone from an earlier generation than yours, I am greatly concerned that we are leaving behind so many problems for your and subsequent generations.

1 Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), a German philosopher.
2 *Arc lémanique* is a geographical region of Switzerland immediately north of Lake Leman. It is the expanse of land between Lausanne and Geneva, within which Julian Charrière was born and spent his childhood and youth.

114–119
Kunst-Jungle, Mexico, 2013
Kunst-Wald, Germany, 2013
Kunst-Wiese, Germany, 2013
Kunst-Crater, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Dune, Egypt, 2013
Kunst-Lava, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Moos, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Snow, Switzerland, 2013
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck and International Graffiti Artist Group
Archival pigment prints on Photo Rag Baryta paper
Dimensions variable


CRATER


DUNE


MOOS


LAVA


SNOW

120–123
On The Sidewalk, 2013
Core drillings, stainless steel structures
Dimensions variable
Installation views at BAC|Bâtiment d'art contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland, 2013


1335

Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Venice, Italy

Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Copenhagen, Denmark

128–131
Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle museum etching paper
Each 38 × 27 cm (15 × 10¾ in)

Panorama 52° 29' 46" N 13° 22' 16" E, 2011
C-print on Alu Dibond
Dimensions variable

Panorama 52° 29' 55.04" N 13° 22' 18.01" E, 2011
C-print on Alu Dibond
Dimensions variable

Panorama 52° 30' 1.48" N 13° 22' 19.95" E, 2011
C-print on Alu Dibond
Dimensions variable

PANORAMA – Behind the Scenes, 2011
Full HD colour video with sound
Duration: 9' 21"

Film stills

PANORAMA 52° 29' 69" N 13° 22' 17.88" E – Behind the Scenes, 2011
C-print on Alu Dibond
126 × 190 cm (49¾ × 75 in)

Works in the Exhibition

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2–10
Tropisme (hélio), 2015
Rotogravure on handmade paper, series of 9 prints
Each 69 × 54 cm (27¼ × 21¼ in)

14–17
Tropisme, 2014
Frozen plants, refrigerated showcase
620 × 80 × 186 cm (244 × 31½ × 73¼ in)
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France, 2015
Photography: Martin Argyroglo

18–19
Polygon I, 2015
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Medium format black-and-white photograph, double exposure through thermonuclear strata, archival pigment print on Photo Rag Baryta paper
182.8 × 152.8 cm (72 × 60¼ in)
Courtesy Frédéric de Goldschmidt, Brussels, Belgium

20–21
Polygon VII, 2015
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Medium format black-and-white photograph, double exposure through thermonuclear strata, archival pigment print on Photo Rag Baryta paper
182.8 × 152.8 cm (72 × 60¼ in)
Courtesy Private Collection, Reinbek, and DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

22–23
Polygon X, 2015
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Medium format black-and-white photograph, double exposure through thermonuclear strata, archival pigment print on Photo Rag Baryta paper
182.8 × 152.8 cm (72 × 60¼ in)
Courtesy DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

24–29
Somewhere, 2014
Semipalatinsk nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan
Full HD colour video
Sound: Ed Davenport
Duration: 16' 24"
Film stills

34–37
Monument – Fragment of an Approaching Past, 2015
Car tops, steel and glass
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France
Photography: Martin Argyroglo

39
The Key to the Present Lay in the Future, 2014
13 broken hourglasses containing fossils from different periods of Earth's history: Archean, Proterozoic, Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, Tertiary, Anthropocene
Dimensions variable

40–42
The Key to the Present Lay in the Future, 2014
13 broken hourglasses containing fossils from different periods of Earth's history: Archean, Proterozoic, Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Carboniferous, Permian, Triassic, Jurassic, Cretaceous, Tertiary, Anthropocene
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2014
Photography: Clémentine Bossard

48–49
Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni, plaster, enamelled steel basins, lithium brine
Dimensions variable
Installation view at Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany, 2015
Photography: Helmut Kunde and Serena Acksel

50–55
Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni, enamelled steel basins, lithium brine
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland, 2014
Photography: Clémentine Bossard

56–57
Future Fossil Spaces, 2014
Salt blocks from the Salar de Uyuni
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France, 2015
Photography: Martin Argyroglo

76–85
Somehow, They Never Stop Doing What They Always Did, 2013
Concrete, plaster, nutrients, water from 10 rivers. Vitrine: steel, double-glazed glass
Dimensions variable
Installation views at Les Modules du Palais de Tokyo at Biennale de Lyon, France, 2013
Photography: Serena Acksel and Julian Charrière

86–89
We Are All Astronauts, 2013
13 found globes made of glass, plastic, paper, wood, steel base, MDF tabletop, dust from sanded globes and international mineral sandpaper
Dimensions variable
Courtesy Collection Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland
Installation views at Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, France, 2014
Photography: Martin Argyroglo

90–95
The Blue Fossil Entropic Stories I, II and *III*, 2013
Photographs, archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle photo paper
160 × 240 cm (63 × 94½ in)
Courtesy Collection Lars Dittrich, Berlin, Germany

Other Works

30–33
The Third Element, 2015
Lithium brine, glass, steel
400 × 210 cm (157½ × 82¾ in)
Commissioned by TBA21|Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria
Photography: Jens Ziehe, courtesy of TBA21|Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria

58–61
Clockwork, 2014
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck
12 concrete mixers, stones
Dimensions variable
Installation views at OBEN, Vienna, Austria, 2014
Photography: Lukas Gansterer

62–63
Clockwork, 2014
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck
12 concrete mixers, stones
Dimensions variable
Installation views at OBEN, Vienna, Austria, 2014
Photography: the artists

69–75
Digesting Geometry, 2011–2014
Archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle Baryta paper
Each 20 × 30 cm (8 × 12 in)
Courtesy DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

96–99
On The Sidewalk, I Have Forgotten the Dinosauria, 2013
80-metre-deep compressed core-drilling from Berlin
20 × 554 × 15 cm (8 × 218¼ × 6 in)
Installation views at DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany, 2013
Photography: Jens Ziehe

100–101
And the Post-Modern Collapse of Time and Space, Iceland, 2013
Full HD colour video with sound
Duration: 1:53'
Film stills

114–119
Kunst-Jungle, Mexico, 2013
Kunst-Wald, Germany, 2013
Kunst-Wiese, Germany, 2013
Kunst-Crater, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Dune, Egypt, 2013
Kunst-Lava, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Moos, Iceland, 2013
Kunst-Snow, Switzerland, 2013
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck and International Graffiti Artist Group
Archival pigment prints on Photo Rag Baryta paper
Dimensions variable
Courtesy alexander levy and DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

120–123
On The Sidewalk, 2013
Core drillings, stainless steel structures
Dimensions variable
Installation views at BAC|Bâtiment d'art contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland, 2013
Photography: Serena Acksel and Julian Charrière

124–125
Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Venice, Italy
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck
Documentary photographs: the artists

126–127
Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Copenhagen, Denmark
In collaboration with Julius von Bismarck
Documentary photographs: the artists

128–131
Some Pigeons Are More Equal Than Others, 2012
Archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle museum etching paper
Each 38 × 27 cm (15 × 10¾ in)
Courtesy DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

132–135
Panorama 52° 29' 46" N 13° 22' 16" E, 2011
Panorama 52° 29' 55.04" N 13° 22' 18.01" E, 2011
Panorama *52° 30' 1.48" N 13° 22' 19.95" E*, 2011
C-prints on Alu Dibond
Dimensions variable
Courtesy DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

136–137
PANORAMA – Behind the Scenes, 2011
Full HD colour video with sound
Duration: 9' 21"
Film stills

138–139
PANORAMA 52° 29' 69" N 13° 22' 17.88" E – Behind the Scenes, 2011
C-print on Alu Dibond
126 × 190 cm (49¾ × 75 in)
Courtesy DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

Julian Charrière

Born 1987 in Morges, Switzerland
Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Education

2011, 2007, 2006
Institut für Raumexperimente, Prof. Olafur Eliasson in collaboration with UdK|Universität der Künste Berlin, Germany
UdK|Universität der Künste Berlin, Germany, Prof. Christiane Möbus
ECAV|Ecole cantonale d'art du Valais, Switzerland, Prof. Valentin Carron

Solo Exhibitions

2016
Julian Charrière: *For They That Sow the Wind*, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London, UK

2015
Polygon, Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France

2014
Future Fossil Spaces, mcb-a|Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, Switzerland
Somewhere, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, Germany
Die Welt ist Mittelgross, Kunstverein Arnsberg, Arnsberg, Germany
Clockwork, with Julius von Bismarck, OBEN, Vienna, Austria
We Are All Astronauts, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, France

2013
On the Sidewalk, I Have Forgotten the Dinosauria, DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

2012
Non Sites Sight, Case Studio Vogt, Zurich, Switzerland

2011
Dominions, Program e.V., in collaboration with Andreas Greiner, Berlin, Germany
Horizons, DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

Group Exhibitions

2015
The Forces Behind the Forms, Galerie Taxispalais, Innsbruck, Austria
Stranger Than Paradise, Sies + Höke Galerie, Düsseldorf, Germany
Unter 30, Junge Schweizer Kunst XI, Kiefer Hablitzel Preis 2015, Kunsthaus Glarus, Glarus, Switzerland
Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France
Art Môtiers 2015 – Art en plein air, Môtiers, Switzerland
INVENTO As Revoluções Que Nos Inventaram, Oca – Parque Ibirapuera, São Paulo, Brazil
Swiss Art Awards – Kiefer Hablitzel, Basel, Switzerland
Waterbound – Vom Leben mit dem Wasser, Neue Galerie Dachau/Kallmann-Museum Ismaning, Germany
Fathoms, KIK FIVE, KIK|Kino International Kunst, Berlin, Germany
playing future, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Kiel, Germany
The C Art Collection, curated by Vittoria Broggini, Carnelutti Law Firm, Milan, Italy
Destination Vienna 2015, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria
Systémique, Centre Européen d'Actions Artistiques Contemporaines, Strasbourg, France
The Future of Memory, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria
Rare Earth, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria
Métamorphisme II, Musée d'art du Valais, Sion, Switzerland

2014
The Go-Between, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Milan, Italy
De Generation of Painting, Fondazione 107, Turin, Italy
mira mira – Neue Jahresgaben, Kunstverein Arnsberg, Arnsberg, Germany
Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Kerala, India
DAS NUMEN, 3 ½, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany
Festival of Future Nows, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany
TALENT (τάλαντον, balance, weight, currency), 401 Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
Triennale d'art en Valais, Sierre, Switzerland
devant derrière, Trudelhaus Baden, Aargau, Switzerland
Treasure of Lima: A Buried Exhibition, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Academy, Cocos Island, Costa Rica
One Place Next to Another, Winzavod Centre for Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia
Schweizer Krankheit, Terminal P, Balz, Switzerland
Einblicke – In die Sammlung Wemhöner, OSRAM Höfe, Berlin, Germany
Jenseits der Ansichtskarte: Die Alpen in der Fotografie, Vorarlberg Museum, Bregenz, Austria
The Figure in the Carpet, Bugada & Cargnel, Paris, France

2013
< 30 IX Jeune Art Suisse, BAC|Bâtiment d'art contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland
IBB – Preis für Photographie 2013, Investitionsbank Berlin, Germany
Come, All Ye Faithful, Florian Christopher, Zurich, Switzerland
DAS NUMEN – Momentum, Deutsches Architektur Zentrum, Berlin, Germany
Les Modules du Palais de Tokyo at 12th Art Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France
Let's invent a language to narrate my story, Dienstgebäude, Zurich, Switzerland
move – align – avoid. Vom Schwarm als Prinzip und Phänomen, Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg, Germany
Berlin Masters 2013, Galerie Arndt, Berlin, Germany
Jenseits der Ansichtskarte: Die Alpen in der Fotografie, Galerie Stihl Waiblingen, Germany
Accidental Accomplishment, Institut für Raumexperiemente, Berlin, Germany
Unfall am Mittelpunkt Deutschlands, alexander levy, Berlin, Germany
Rules of Attraction, insitu, Berlin, Germany
(n)on site, km temporaer, Berlin, Germany
Ich bin dein Nachbar, Bromer Art Collection, Roggwil, Bern, Switzerland
Lovin' it Symbol and Contradiction, Bromer Art Collection, Roggwil, Bern, Switzerland
Swiss Art Awards, Basel, Switzerland
Junge Positionen: Kapitel II/Berlin, Galerie Rigassi, Bern, Switzerland
Sonor – DAS NUMEN, Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin, Germany
New Works, DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

2012
13th International Architecture Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia, a collaboration with Julius von Bismarck, Venice, Italy
Heiliges Leben, curated by Lukas Töpfer, UdK|Universität der Künste Berlin, Berlin, Germany
Life Clock, curated by A. Kassen, Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, Denmark
Swiss Art Awards, Basel, Switzerland
The World is Not Fair, Die Grosse Welt Ausstellung 2012, Tempelhof, Berlin, Germany
Glasauge, Group Show – Class Olafur Eliasson, Berlin, Germany
2012, DITTRICH & SCHLECHTRIEM, Berlin, Germany

2011
Transformation – DAS NUMEN, Haus am Lützowplatz, Berlin, Germany
Fragments of an unknown city, Krasnoe Znamya (Red Banner Factory), St Petersburg, Russia
Berlin 2000–2011 – Playing Among the Ruins, MOT|Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Japan
Ideas are Motion, MaMa|Multimedijalni Institut, Zagreb, Croatia
Abstract Pocket Collection, Espace Abstract, Lausanne, Switzerland
Über Lebenskunst (the art of living), Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany
Mapping Everything, UdK|Universität der Künste, Berlin, Germany
Kunsthof, Zürich, Switzerland
art&architecture, Espace culturel d'Assens, Assens, Switzerland
Le Grand Final, Kunstamt Reinickendorf, Galerie Atelier-Oellermann, Berlin, Germany
DAS NUMEN DAY LIGHT, 401 Contemporary, Berlin, Germany
100° Festival, Hebbel am Ufer, Berlin, Germany
Without Destination, Reykjavik Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland

2010
Artpoint, Donesk, Ukraine
Tangente, La Placette, Lausanne, Switzerland
Auflösung, die Letzten Grenzen Fallen, Fabian Knecht, Haus am Lützow Platz, Berlin, Germany
Geist III, Unknown place in Berlin, Germany
Rahmenprogramm, Grosse Hamburger Strasse, Berlin, Germany
Let's start to implement little errors, Institut für Raumexperimente, Pefferbergkeller, Berlin
Théorie des modèles, Art & Science: trop simple, trop complexe, Espace d'exposition de la Head, Geneva, Switzerland
DAS NUMEN, .HBC Berlin, Germany

2009
Neutrino/en hommage à mon ami Thomas Baumgartner, .HBC Berlin, Germany
Geist II, Friedrichstrasse 112B, Berlin, Germany

2008
géometria physiké, Galerie-Atelier Oellermann, Berlin Reinickendorf, Berlin, Germany
Das Schilf, Joanna Render Gallery, Berlin Mitte, Germany

2007
Sans Titre, Bevaix, Neuchatel, Switzerland

Awards/Residencies

2015
Kiefer Hablitzel Preis/Swiss Art Awards
Shifting Foundation Grant

2014
Prix Culturel Manor Vaud
Elsa-Neumann-Stipendium des Landes Berlin
Shifting Foundation Grant
Förderbeitrag UBS Kulturstiftung
DAS NUMEN, Catalogue Grant, Kulturverwaltung des Berliner Senats

2013
Kiefer Hablitzel Preis/Swiss Art Awards
IBB Preis für Photographie
Artgrant Award
Regina Pistor Preis
DAS NUMEN, Project Grant, Kulturverwaltung des Berliner Senats

2012
Call for Future, ÜBER LEBENSKUNST, Kulturstiftung des Bundes

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