



# GALLERIACONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING **LES MOULINS** HABANA

46, rue de la Ferté-Gaucher, 77169 Boissy-le-Châtel, France  
Tel. +33 (0)1 64 20 39 50 / lemoulin@galleriacontinua.fr / www.galleriacontinua.com  
Open from Wednesdays to Sundays from noon to 6pm and by appointment.

# LES ÉQUIVALENTS

Group show

Juan Araujo, Chen Zhen, Shilpa Gupta, Ilya & Emilia Kabakov,  
Kan Xuan, Kiki Smith, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Sislej Xhafa, José Yaque

Opening on Sunday, May 13, 2018, as from noon  
Exhibition until September 30, 2018

Between 1925 and 1934, the American Alfred Stieglitz made a series of more than 350 photographs of clouds, which he called *Equivalents*, images that could be synonymous with his thoughts and feelings. A central figure in the American avant-garde, Stieglitz was fully conscious of the foundational act tied up in such an experience of radical subjectivity. The images are in fact a manifesto of abstraction, achieved by a medium the artistic quality of which he would champion his whole life. With his Graflex camera, Stieglitz got rid of all spatial bearings. Without horizon line, without scale or orientation, he chose the sky as the absolute expression of his interior world.

Through the works of ten artists from different generations and from very different backgrounds, we have modestly tried to establish a series of comparisons, using verticality as a common point of reference, in order to attain something always out of reach.

Photography is perhaps the medium that sustains the most tension with the problematics of time and history, whence the obsession with escaping into abstraction. Hiroshi Sugimoto demonstrates a great technical mastery. Choosing a very long exposure time and working exclusively in black and white, he shows here the Duomo in Sienna, masterpiece of the thirteenth century. It rises into the sky, cut out of the night in muted shades of grey. The unreal image of the Romanesque edifice, monk-like in its austerity, is Sugimoto's questioning of the capacity of the photographic medium for precision, for fidelity—time caught in a drag net.

Kiki Smith also delves into the night, in order to create, returning from voyage to Alba, a constellation of nine

bronze stars, which she pins to a wall with fine metal pins, like a collection of insects or butterflies. She works over the bronze patina, giving it a somewhat effaced, melancholic colour. The piece, entitled *Expectation*, is a pagan ode to our expectations faced with the stars, potentially faded lights.

Sislej Xhafa shuts up shards in an old closet like you might put a secret under lock and key. *Fireworks in my Closet* is a metaphor for a joyous violence, ready to burst through doors that have been lacerated by a saw. An irrepressible feeling, hemmed within the borders of the established order. Xhafa, the eternal immigrant, has for a long time questioned the mobility of people through a language tinted with irony.

Chen Zhen has also experienced what it is to be in permanent transition. *L'Attraction / L'Illusion* is made up of a typewriter and old newspapers placed in a glass box on which a slide is projected. The planetary information flow and the materiality of consumer society are confronted with human spirituality, but this relationship is in fact as fluid as it is contentious.

Spirituality, an essential element of his body of work, initially showed itself in his painting practice, before he turned instead to objects and installations. Chinese philosophy is better suited to the mobility of the mind than to the so-called authority of an argument based on a single theory. For Chen Zhen, every object is a symbol, and every state is transitory: 'In China, we used to say that there are two ways to expand one's vision: climb to the summit of a mountain to see the rest of the world, or distance oneself from the mountain in order to see it in its totality. The essential thing is to remain in movement, in order to see better.'<sup>1</sup>

1. Interview between Chen Zhen and Eleanor Heartney (2000), *Artpress* n. 260, p. 22-26.

*Object* is the title of a video by Kan Xuan. A succession of shots shows drops of milk and coffee, an apple, sugar cubes, and a coin. All these objects fall into water. A voiceover whispers the colour of the object, which either dissolves or returns to the surface. But submerged in a black and white film, the colours can only vary from white to black, through grey (the colour of tomatoes, according to the artist). In this way, the piece puts us on our guard against our definitively altered vision of things. What is the true colour of an object? Has our eye become that of the camera? We let ourselves sink through this filter into an work of disarming beauty.

*We are also weary* is a simple, limpid sentence written on the wall like a response to our shared state of feeling overwhelmed. The Kabakovs make use of a certain generalised lassitude, all the way to the flies that make the sentence. A constant ally of the Kabakovs since the sixties, the fly is at once the unclean insect associated with trash and a symbol of freedom, able to pass through a trap and escape.

Shilpa Gupta's photograph, *Untitled (Border Sky)*, is the work in this selection that most closely resembles Stieglitz's series. Five sky tonalities indicate geographical demarcations in their titles, each image having been made in a different country. The ideal of the nation state finds itself intertwined and blurs with the interior state Stieglitz was looking for. If borders can be traced into the sky, do the clouds obey them? Another work of Gupta's, *Untitled (There is No Border Here)*, cries: 'I tried very hard to cut the sky in half. One for my lover and one for me. But the sky kept moving and clouds from his territory came into mine. I tried pushing it away with both my hands. Harder and harder. But the sky kept moving and the clouds from my territory went into his. I brought a sofa and placed it in the middle. But the clouds kept floating over it. I built a wall in the middle. But the sky started flow through it. I dug a trench. And then it rained and the sky made clouds over the trench. I tried very hard to cut...'

Sislej Xhafa has also attempted to delimit a space of freedom. Using an old neon sign, Xhafa calls it 'PARADISO', and places a table and a few chairs around his utopian zone. The plastic chairs and the umbrella summon up images of working class summer nights... If Gupta's sky is indivisible, what about paradise?

At a distance from Gupta's and Xhafa's political concerns, those of José Yaque are invested in a more material register. His technique is closely linked to the subject of his paintings, his investigations into colour and pigment. Yaque unearths the subterranean, bringing into the light a buried repertory of rocks and minerals. Mixing the colours directly with his hands on the canvas, Yaque creates materials with regular and undulating forms that indeed recall those of the surface of the earth. *Azufre I* and *Azufre II* show the yellow crystals of sulfur, a vital but ambivalent mineral, with its

destructive potential as the constituent of gunpowder. Choosing an element that is present both in nature and industry, Yaque acknowledges a duality that is close to his own artistic practice: as he paints layer upon layer of earthly materials, he tips over into abstraction.

Juan Araujo works with superimposition. He uses of appropriation as a tool and as an end in itself, working with library archives, painting, architecture, and cinema, in an attempt to reinterpret modernity. In the series of works currently on exhibition, he has followed the formulation of Rothko's *Seagram Murals*, a series of canvases painted at the end of the 1950s after Rothko's trips to Italy, and the correspondence with Antonioni, the poster for whose film *Eclisse* Araujo has borrowed. In the film, Antonioni gives a major place to colour and architecture of photographic quality. Araujo focuses on the multitude of influences the iconic Rothko series has emerged from. The images are projected on the wall, adding another intermediary between the spectator and the original, in an endless chain of reference.

Throughout these works, correspondences emerge either through common investigations or more spontaneous affinities. Number prevails over the force of pre-determined directions. Following a serial logic, like a ritual affirmation, the desire for making a collection or an inventory, in this way these artists assemble the spine of their bodies of work.

Stieglitz's sky photographs were a triumph of subjectivity. Art and technique became two dialectical poles for the transposition of the world into its equivalent. This is also the way that artists collect stars, dig into the earth, lacerate wood, or set up paradise, all in an attempt to translate their interior states of being.

Juan Araujo was born in 1971 in Caracas, Venezuela. He lives and works in Lisbon, Portugal ; Chen Zhen was born in 1955 in Shanghai, China. He died in 2000 in Paris, France ; Shilpa Gupta was born in 1976 in Mumbai, India, where she lives and works ; Ilya Kabakov was born in 1933 in Dnepropetrovsk, in the USSR, Emilia Kabakov was born in 1945 in Dnepropetrovsk, in the USSR. They live and work in Long Island, USA ; Kiki Smith was born in 1954 in Nürnberg, Germany. She lives and works in New York, USA ; Hiroshi Sugimoto was born in 1948 in Tokyo, Japan. He lives and works in New York, USA ; Sislej Xhafa was born in 1970 in Peja, Kosovo. He lives and works in New York, USA ; Kan Xuan was born in 1972 in Xuancheng, Anhui Province, China. She lives and works in Beijing, China ; José Yaque was born in 1985 in Manzanillo, Cuba. He lives and works in Havana, Cuba.