

VALLOIS

GALERIE
Georges-Philippe
& Nathalie
Vallois

ALAIN BUBLEX *backdrop (arrière-plan)*

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Organising an exhibition can be seen as testing out a hypothesis which can only be presented - and defended - by establishing a convincing relationship between the works it has recourse to. A hypothesis, then, cannot be a clearly formulated theory demanding verification, and even less so a discourse whose lofty sentences are appropriately interconnected by the exhibits. It is either a promising idea still lacking a concept, an intuitive sense of a novel and hopefully fruitful interrelationship, or a group of works one would like to bring together to observe how this juxtaposition changes them.

A dual hypothesis, then: as to what would be (should be?) an exhibition and as to what an exhibition actually does. Since the first part can't be gone into here, let's take a look at the second, with Alain Bublex proposing, in *backdrop (arrière-plan)*, to test out a hypothesis in the way mentioned above. To put it briefly: 'The creation of a «national» political and cultural space most often goes hand in hand with a trend towards representation of its landscapes.' Or in other words, as soon as a people endows itself with a common future (and invents for itself a shared past), it feels the need to portray what surrounds it and what has preceded it. It then does two things that are only seemingly contradictory: it portrays the irreducible strangeness of these landscapes while at the same time recognising them as its own. Thus a landscape - whether painted or natural - is not solely a visual transformation of the natural environment; it is also an assertion of the strangeness of what is there. One of the works Bublex has opted for in *trompe l'oeil* form is a landscape by Albert Bierstadt, a painter of the American West and its wilderness. Interestingly, it was Bierstadt's paintings that led Congress to pass the Yellowstone Park Bill in 1872 and so create history's first national park. Bublex is not trying to say that a pictorial space is also a political space - in itself a truism - but rather that the establishment of a country as a political space involves that country's representation of landscape. And this representation changes with time: the time of history and the time of art. After Bierstadt, *backdrop (arrière-plan)* presents pictures by Charles Sheeler and Morris Louis, offering a curious history of American painting from wilderness to Abstract Expressionism. This placing of a Morris Louis picture beside an industrial landscape by Sheeler the modernist speaks eloquently of the intuitive aspect of the hypothesis. The first major style produced by American painting, Abstract Expressionism is, as much as Bierstadt's *Rocky Mountains*, part of the cultural landscape in question; and a trained eye will not fail to detect in the overlaid strips of colour of Louis 'veils', diluted to the point of translucency, the distant heritage of Bierstadt's spectral backdrops: trees and mountains given a strangely ghostly look by the scorching sun rising over his landscapes.

There remains, however, the question of how the hypothesis is actually put to work: of the 'rigging' (as Bublex calls it) which underpins its structuring, which renders visible an exhibition whose construction has been halted - abandoned or gone to ruin - and which thus refers all the exhibits back to the contingency of their finish. We must not conclude, though, that all landscape is ruin; simply, rather, that it captures and as a result ultimately effaces the strangeness of what is there. 'Rigging' - also to be taken here in its nautical sense - consists in making discernible the activities that art presupposes and often conceals; which is also the message conveyed in their own way by the original works Bublex has dotted throughout *backdrop (arrière-plan)*: landscape photographs in which a part - a freeway, Mount Fuji, etc. - is reproduced by vectorial drawing, as additions whose obviousness (they in no way interfere with the image) testifies to the familiar artificiality of our surroundings.

Alain Bublex has never stopped making landscapes in a country that has produced none since the end of the Ancien Régime (with some notable exceptions: the ghost of Albert Marquet haunts the exhibition) Republican France took shape without offering any image of itself; which is probably why, today, we find it so hard to look at her without nostalgia.

3 October

8 November

2014

OPENING

Thursday 2 October
from 6:00 pm

/

GALLERY NIGHT SIGNATURE

Thursday 23 October
from 8:00 pm

The future does not exist :
Retrotypes
with Elie During
Ed. B42

GALERIE
Georges-Philippe
& Nathalie
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JEAN-YVES JOUANNAIS

Systema naturae

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The two series of talks titled *Encyclopaedia of Wars* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris since 2008 and the La Comédie theatre in Reims since 2010 have taken up the challenge of providing an ABC of every aspect of every conflict from the Iliad through the Second World War.

This long-term venture approaches the oral as a path to literature. *Encyclopaedia of Wars* is a novel assembled out of quotations and collages. A number of legends have grown out of this improvised narrative: I gradually invented, for example, a role for my paternal grandfather, Jean Jouannais, building a fantasised family history in which he told me of his military exploits. Out of this emerged the intuition that I was practising a kind of ventriloquism, speaking for a grandfather who was relating the history of wars to me: by creating what should in fact have been passed on to me by someone else, I made it my own. In brief, let's say I'm a kind of researcher out to invent the subject matter of his own investigations.

Systema naturae is a group of documents made up of collages and texts whose 'paternity' I attribute to my grandfather, who was born in 1913 in Saint-Angel, in the Allier département, and died in 1945. A sergeant in the army, he drowned himself during a spell as a reservist in the barracks at Montluçon. Born on the eve of the First World War and dead at the close of the Second, he had developed a weird passion for the paraphernalia of war. A very amateur scientist and a crank entomologist, he limited his reading to a single book, Linnaeus's *Systema naturae* (A

General System of Nature), whose first edition goes back to 1735. Linnaeus had gained acceptance for his system of binomial nomenclature - for botany, zoology, etc. - which used a two-word combination to designate any taxon. This became known as the Linnaean system and provided a Latin-based method that has become the international scientific standard for naming the world's species.

Jean Jouannais journey through Linnaeus book was a kind of epic and ultimately a résumé of his entire life. From 1932 until his death he devoted himself to classifying the materials of war as if they were living species. To take one example: 'Self-propelled cannon rightfully belong to the family of Elephants, unlike tanks, which belong to that of the Rhinoceroses; while armoured cars are to be equated with the ungulates - Horses and their cousins.'

His mental derangement showed through only sporadically, as when he believed he could identify males and females among his military impedimenta. He eventually ignored their industrial pedigree, letting his imagination loose on the sexuality and modes of reproduction of these metal birds and mammals. If we disregard the fact that the fundamentals of his enterprise are fallacious through and through, we find very few actual errors in his notations. No more, say, than in the work of French naturalist Buffon, who claimed among other things that swifts 'also are true swallows, and in many respects truer swallows than swallows themselves.'

Jean-Yves Jouannais

3 October

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2014

**GALLERY NIGHT
SIGNATURE**

Thursday 23 October
from 8:00 pm

Les barrages de sable
Ed. Grasset

FORTHCOMING

RICHARD JACKSON
Dark Rooms
14/11 - 20/12

FAIRS

FIAC 23-26/10
booth 0.A08

ABU DHABI ART 5-8/11

ART BASEL MIAMI 5-7/12
booth S11

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ALAIN BUBLEX *backdrop(arrière-plan)* Post-scriptum to the Press Release

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In *The future does not exist: Retrotypes*, a four-handed publication co-written with Elie During, Alain Bublex writes that the meaning he gave to the name of the project in the 2000s would have been better described by the word 'rigging'. This word would make visible "a relation between pieces that is not one of technic, of manner or theme (series), of space (the exhibitions) or of chronology (the periods)". The rigging would point, he adds, to "the conjunctive milieu of the works".

I was describing this milieu in the press release for *backdrop (arrière-plan)* as a ruin: "There remains however the question of how the hypothesis is actually put to work: of the 'rigging' (as Bublex calls it) which underpins its structuring, which renders visible an exhibition whose construction has been halted - abandoned or gone to ruin - and which thus refers all the exhibits back to the contingency of their finish."

However, this exhibition appears to those who visit it the exact contrary to a ruin: perfectly measured disposition of the images, harmonious proportions of the formats and spaces between them, impeccably white walls, and so on. It has the appearance of a perfect themed or periodic exhibition. When I was writing the press release, end of July, the exhibition was to present itself, and here I quote the artist, "straightaway as a construction": an unfinished installation of interior walls invading the gallery space, drawing through these ghosts of rooms a path exhibiting the problem a nation faces with the representation of its landscapes (see original press release). In short, as Alain Bublex explained in an email written on July 28th: "the ruins of an exhibition project which will not take place".

I admit not having seen a construction in the rigging presented on October 2nd. But three visits and two conversations with the artist later, I am now convinced that *backdrop (arrière-plan)* remains, despite its manifest orthogonality, a ruin.

Let's endorse for a moment the point of view of an innocent visitor opening the doors of Galerie Vallois at random. He first steps into an entrance hall. Three works attract his attention on both sides, three reproductions in vectorial drawing (what Alain Bublex calls "shadows") of American landscapes: *American Landscape* by Charles Sheeler, *Yosemite Valley* by Albert Bierstadt and one of the *Veils* by Morris Louis. In front of him opens up the main room of the gallery but he cannot see, from where he is still standing, any work apart from another painting by Sheeler, closing an exhibition seemingly on the history of American landscapes, from its Romantic and Modern figurations, to contemporary ones with Abstract Expressionism.

One more step, however, and as his horizon widens, strange shadows appear, paintings by Albert Marquet, photographic landscapes enhanced with vectorial motorways; a completely different exhibition is slowly replacing the first one, disrupting theme and period. The ruin is not manifest anymore, it is however still visible in this perspective game, which, from one step to the next, changes the nature of what the visitor sees.

The fabricating of a national landscape as a second nature, more "natural" and original than the first one (which was never seen), does not need a labyrinth to be presented as such, but only an installation falsely thematic but truly rigged. It is a lesson we can learn from this adventure: one can never be sure what one sees, you have to look twice (or more).

You can now run the experiment again and visit Galerie Vallois or wait a few days to assist, at night, to the screening on its impeccably white walls of *36 Miles Drive*, a film directed by Alain Bublex as part of his project entitled *Glooscap*. We can read on these images, which take us on a stroll through a nondescript American town, the legends which incessantly bring us back to *Glooscap*, as if we were at the same time here and somewhere else, in a both real and fictional town, and even more real as it was invented.

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The future does not exist:
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Bastien Gallet