

## **Moonlight Dream**

*The light of the moon is indirect, as it merely reflects that of the sun*

Aurélie Romanacce

In *Moonlight Solitude*, Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil suspend time to unfold a narrative of thwarted anticipation. Between obsolescence and retro-futurism, their exhibition unfurls like a silent musical score and transforms the spaces of the Zidoun & Bossuyt gallery into a mineral landscape – the romantic remains of a failed modernity.

Under the moonlight, black and white prevail, our perception is blurred, and forms dissolve to take on a dubious appearance. With *Moonlight Solitude*, Feipel and Bechameil expand on their installation *La nuit sans lune* (Night without Moon), presented at the contemporary art centre le Creux de l'enfer in Thiers. Lying at the heart of their practice, the concepts of site-specificity and topography irrigate their work, which oscillates between reality and fiction. In this particular instance, it is the imposing rock on which the gallery was built that inspired the artists with its forceful presence: symbolising violence and vitality in a structured and organised world, it becomes the steppingstone of a tangible world with impossible features. Paying homage to the spectacular architectural creations of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Feipel and Beichamel duplicate the space so as to better circumvent it, playing with the duplicitous nature of the artifice to create a walkable space in which visitors have to immerse themselves physically if they want to experience the tangibility of their dreams – a mind-boggling paradox with which we are confronted in this exhibition that functions like a box with a false bottom.

## **Archaeologists of modern times**

Taking inspiration from Piranesi, a builder of immoderation and architect of the antique dream, Feipel and Bechameil pay tribute to the Italian master's exuberance and romantic melancholy. It was Marguerite Yourcenar who wrote about Piranesi's *Prisons* that 'this world, factitious and yet grimly

real, claustrophobic and yet megalomaniacal, cannot fail to remind us of the one in which modern humanity imprisons itself deeper every day ...<sup>1</sup> Her description could equally apply to *Monde parfait* (Perfect World), another emblematic work by the young artists' couple that revolves around the ideological disillusion of modernist architecture.

With *Moonlight Solitude*, Feipel and Bechameil continue their exploration into the failure of modernist society, shifting from sculptures of large urban ensembles to a sombre, disquieting landscape littered with obsolete electronic devices. Television sets, a pair of loudspeakers, a hi-fi system and a cassette player sit on the floor at the entrance of the gallery like remains from modern times. The stacked-up objects are cast in Jesmonite, an acrylic resin with a mineral finish, looking as though they had turned to stone once their functionality was lost. By transforming electronic devices from their teenage years into fossils, the artists materialise the melancholy inspired by an era that has come to an end. Their romanticism inhabits the ruins of modernity, this fleeting and accelerated temporality that petrifies new technologies into silent memories.

On the walls of the gallery, drawings of nature as a conquering force that weaves its web in the crevices of these mineralised objects tell the story of an ideology that failed to establish itself durably. Feipel and Bechameil ask what becomes of modernity when it is seen as something in the past – making the (meta)physical answer coexist in the foldings of thwarted time-spaces.

### **The dark side of the moon**

Further evidence of this paradoxical temporality is provided by the photograph of a car with a television set and a radio on the roof that someone abandoned in a field. Titled *At dawn (À l'aube)*, the sculpture it documents is on display in Tilburg, Netherlands, until the end of October. The presence of the photograph in the exhibition at the Zidoun & Bossuyt gallery compresses temporal and spatial distances by anticipating the memory of a work that exists simultaneously somewhere else. Another manifestation of this fragmented temporal narrative is an impenetrable window on the wall, which

eludes functionality by blocking the gaze. This blind opening, which could come straight out of a painting by Magritte, transforms into a source of light that lights up the corridor thanks to a neon lamp hidden behind the blinds. The work entitled *Particule orpheline* (Orphan Particle) also takes the shape of a window, partly concealed by a shutter, behind which two clouds lacerated with reflections seem to rise up. This self-contained antechamber, a metonymy for perception bereft of sensations, further underlines the intense feeling of loneliness conveyed by the exhibition.

Facing the inner court, and mirroring the enormous rock hovering over the gallery, spectators come across an avalanche of rocks obstructing the path that leads towards the staircase. By dissolving the boundaries between the inside and the outside world, Feipel and Bechameil merge the two sides of a simultaneously objectivised and fantasised reality. It is left to visitors to find a way out from their labyrinthine thoughts by grasping the thick rope that someone seems to have left behind – a guiding thread for a blurred perception, as it were.

At the end of this path lined by pretence and subterfuge, spectators discover a melancholy landscape teeming with the exacting silence of a monumental bell. As in a dream, the bell emits not the slightest sound, its clapper, whose movement has been slowed down to the extreme, stroking rather than striking the inside wall. Surrounding the bell, black pools of reflecting water invert the spectators' perspective and let them pass through to the other side of the mirror. Their perception is dazzled by the undulating waves on the surface of the water before reason harnesses it. Reflection becomes truth and meaning becomes a lie, under the light of the fragmented steel moon floating above the exhibition like a satellite from a different reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Yourcenar, *The Dark Brain of Piranesi and Other Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), 120.