

Surfaces of you

21.01–10.04.2016

Opening Wednesday 20 January, from 6 to 9pm

Camille Blatrix, Barbara Bloom, Christian Boltanski, Simon Dybbroe Møller, Jean-Pascal Flavien, Judith Hopf, Karl Larsson, Shelly Nadashi, Anouchka Oler, Stuart Sherman and James Welling.

Guest curator : François Aubart



Stuart Sherman, *Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*, c.1979

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Press Release

The prop master places the objects essential to the story on the set where it will unfold, but must the story necessarily be told? Props aim at making up an environment and at creating the conditions for the action, in the absence of any actor. Thus both a scene and a narration are established, based on elements placed one after another, one on top of each other, one behind the other. They are interpreted as elements of a story tinged with the way they were used (Jean-Pascal Flavien), as a linguistic syntax (Karl Larsson), or as a magic trick (Stuart Sherman). In any case, the boundaries between these categories become porous as soon as the accessories replace the actors.

The stage on which they perform (Barbara Bloom) or the effects that occur when they appear (James Welling) can also literally give them a part to play and a story to tell. The way we understand this story depends on our capacity to interpret the accessories as we would pieces of evidence or items from a collection. One could call this « *l'esprit de l'étagère* » (the shelf wit) – unlike *l'esprit de l'escalier* (the staircase wit), one does not think of a reply too late but instead finds personal qualities in objects that are physically devoid of them. Whoever is able to perceive these will recognise the portrait of their owner (Christian Boltanski) or the contradictory desires that haunt such common items (Simon Dybbroe Møller).

In short, the spiritual complement that we give objects belongs to us alone. We invest them with our intuitions and emotions, sometimes to the point where subjects and objects seem indivisible (Judith Hopf) or incomprehensible one without the other (Shelly Nadashi). On occasion, we notice that they are endowed with a kind of autonomy, with an existence of their own (Camille Blatrix), or are driven by feelings (Anouchka Oler).

Thus we are used to objects fulfilling functions other than what their original design intended – it is this observation that brought the artists of this exhibition together. They all present objects that are easily recognisable for what they are, and which also evoke a narration or feelings. The importance lies in the 'and', in the overlapping. This is where an entirely new relationship is built, where our emotions give objects their evocative power. These works can be seen as just so many moments in which our feelings harmonise with our environment in a way that is both irrational and unexpected.

François Aubart

François Aubart is an art critic and an independent curator. Some of his texts were published in reviews such as *May*, *Flash Art*, *Art Press*, *Art 21*, 2.0.1, 02, 04. Recently he organised the exhibitions *L'appropriationniste (Contre et avec)* and *Joe Scanlan, Classism* at Villa du Parc (Annemasse), *L'écho des précédents* at Cneai (Chatou), *On ne connaît les chiffres que d'un côté du plan* in Art3 (Valence), *An Ever Changing Meaning* at the Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff) and *Profonde surface* at Shanaynay (Paris). He teaches at the art school of Lyon and is the co-founder of the review $\Delta\lambda\phi$ and of the editorial project <0> future <0>.





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Short descriptions

By François Aubart

Camille Blatrix

Born in 1987 in Paris (France)
Lives and works in Paris

Camille Blatrix creates attractive objects with shining surfaces and perfect finishes. Drawing on a wide range of precious materials chosen for their intrinsic qualities, their making betrays great artisanal skill. They often represent tools for long-distance communication such as intercoms, mailboxes or ATM machines, their apparent purpose sometimes underlined by references to other, remote places suggested by recognisable yet unexpected forms, as though belonging to a dream or a fiction.

Besides their formal qualities, many of Blatrix's works seek to evoke and produce emotions inherent in the narratives accompanying the objects, resulting from our confrontation with them, or emanating directly from the objects themselves. *Tosch 3* and *Tosch 4*, for instance, seem have been conceived specifically to arouse the viewer's desire. Their function ultimately remains a mystery, despite several, partly contradictory clues (an On/Off cursor, a printed ticket, cutting tools ...).

The title of this series – a contraction of the brand names Macintosh and Toshiba – hints at the dominant production cycle in the computer industry, based on a succession of models. As a new generation of the same machine replaces an existing one, it presents itself as more practical, more efficient, and hence more desirable. It is therefore to our irrational desire for novelty that these two sculptures allude, suggesting that in our relationship to technology, we consume functionality as much as design.

Exhibited works : *Tosch 3*, 2015 ; *Tosch 4*, 2015

Barbara Bloom

Born in 1951 in Los Angeles (United States)
Lives in New York

The work of Barbara Bloom revolves around collecting and presenting objects, and exploring the history they allude to. It invariably seems as though Bloom's exhibits were waiting to be activated by the observer, who is assigned the role of a detective trying to find out what has happened or of a learned guest establishing their provenance or destination. What the artist hints at is not so much that which is visible as rather the connections, projections and narratives summoned up by the objects on display.

The appearance and disappearance of these objects is carefully choreographed. In *Absence-Presence*, for instance, the first visible element is a translucent screen on which one makes out





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the outlines of a group of objects – a reading desk, an easel and a coat rack – behind it. The function of these objects is to support other objects, which are not present; facing them is a row of photographs depicting the missing objects. Opposite the shadows of the carrying elements is a series of flat paintings, applied directly onto the wall, in the dominant colours of the photographs of missing objects. *Absence-Presence* thus stages a play with appearances in the photographic image as revelations of a presence that has already disappeared – an impression further underlined by the mystery that surrounds the represented objects, whose function sometimes remains obscure, leaving spectators to guess by association.

Exhibited work: *Absence-Presence*, 2006

Christian Boltanski

Born in 1944 in Paris (France)

Lives and work in Paris



In his work Christian Boltanski merges collective and personal history. He questions the concepts of memory and narrative by staging himself or presenting personal elements, such as childhood memories, in an ambiguous fictional context. While this imaginary element introduces a certain distance to reality, it also allows him to fill the gaps and recreate what has been lost. Signifiers of commonplace, such as clothing, punctuate his work, which is marked by processes of archiving and inventory as well as highly elaborate theatrical stagings. Boltanski's practice of colour photography dates back to 1975. A medium then hardly used in art, it is closely associated with daily and intimate practices, while simultaneously referring to advertising. In Boltanski's work, the photographic representation, whose purpose is to seduce viewers by kindling their desires, becomes a means to ask if art appeals to less vulgar emotions and to question the concept of good taste.

Cultural stereotypes lie at the heart of Boltanski's series of *Model Images*. Imitating clichéd representations such as children's portraits or travel photographs, these images plant seeds of doubt in the spectator's mind: when we take a picture, is it a personal gesture or simply the expression of our desire to approximate a cultural model?

These archetypes, combining with a kind of cool commercial perfection, are also at the origins of Boltanski's series of *Photographic Compositions*. A title chosen because it suggests a conscious aesthetic arrangement, it equally hints at the kind of empty, meaningless beauty we have become accustomed to, thus reflecting the artist's attempt to represent common stereotypes in everyday life.

Exhibited works : *Le nounours bleu*, 1977 ; *Les boîtes de couleurs*, 1977 ; *Les outils colorés*, 1977 (série *Les Compositions photographiques*, 1977-1984)



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Jean-Pascal Flavien

Born in 1971 in Le Mans (France)
Lives and works in Berlin (Germany)

An important part of Jean-Pascal Flavien's work consists of conceiving and constructing houses. Designed and built as places of dwelling, each of his constructions offers its inhabitants a unique life situation. In this regard, Flavien's approach differs from that of most architects: whereas they build in order to solve problems, he posits problems and offers to experiment with them.

Six of his designs have been implemented to this day: *Viewer* in Rio de Janeiro in 2007, *No Drama House* in Berlin in 2009, *Two Persons House* in São Paulo in 2010, *Breathing House* at Parc Saint Léger in Pougues-les-Eaux, France, in 2012, *Statement House* (temporary title) in London, and *Folding House (to be continued)* in Monaco, both in 2015. Each of them was conceived as a proposal to invent specific gestures, movements, and modes of utilisation or thought.

Installed in the garden of Gitti Nourbakhsh Gallery, the *No Drama House* is one metre large and two storeys high, its upper floor accessible only by an exterior ladder. The narrowness of the building restricts its users' movements. The fact that one constantly has to shift the objects inside the house in order to move around creates a succession of situations over a given period of time. For the artist, these situations are sequences or phrases that articulate specific activities.

The "writing" emerging from the daily use of objects is also the subject of the three works shown here. Standing next to each other, the items of furniture listed in the title could be the result of actions involving their use. In this regard, they also constitute a kind of syntax. In Flavien's work, the acts of displacing, arranging and storing form a grammar of objects.

Exhibited works: *Sequence (chair, table, chair, table, chair)*, 2014 ; *Sequence (chair, interval, stool, table)*, 2014 ; *Sequence (ladder, interval, chair, bed, chair)*, 2014

Judith Hopf

Born in 1969 in Berlin (Germany)
Lives and works in Berlin

The work of Judith Hopf examines our social environment and the conventions by which we relate to other people and objects that shape our existence. By doing so, it essentially explores the relationships between subject and object. Many of Hopf's sculptures consist of manufactured objects or products whose supposedly sublime nature is hollowed out, such as a series of vases with depressed faces, or melting objects that are returned to a state of plain matter, oscillating between their status as object and that which we would like them to be, namely, the fiction we project onto them to make them more attractive.





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At first glance *Untitled (Laptop 1)* and *Untitled (Laptop 2)* resemble items of urban furniture. But they are in fact anthropomorphic sculptures of figures whose position seems determined by the laptop they are using. The two elements that make up the sculpture merge to a point where it becomes impossible to distinguish between user and tool. Instead, they appear as an entity, as one large piece of functional furniture.

Exhibited works : *Untitled (Laptop 1)*, 2010 ; *Untitled (Laptop 2)*, 2010

Karl Larsson

Born in 1977 in Kristianstad (Sweden)

Lives and works in Malmö (Sweden)

Karl Larsson sees his practice of poetry as a means to break up prose. The aim to give one or more new meanings to the language we share, but which doesn't belong to us, is the starting point of his writing.

The strategies and processes he applies to language – for instance, repeating a word until it loses its meaning or reiterating it in order to obscure its significance – are also at the heart of his sculptural practice, in which he uses everyday objects. In both cases, the artist's aim is to un-familiarise us with the things surrounding us.

Stamped on boxes or cardboards, the pictogram urging users to keep an object in a dry place – an umbrella – changes its meaning when it is accompanied by the mention 'umbrella', which creates a new relationship between the represented object and its significance; by replicating the same silk-screen print six times, the loss of meaning is further emphasised.

Reinvesting an object with meaning by way of different meaning is another method often used by Larsson, most notably in the titles of his works. A concrete shape normally used to manage traffic flows is thus shifted into a different context by its title, *You Must Be Able to Interrupt a Friendly Conversation at All Moments*.

In fact, Larsson likes to deviate the meaning of common objects, precisely because it is difficult to distinguish between what they are, what they represent, and what they suggest. In that sense, they are like actors who assume different personalities. Seen in this light, Larsson's sculptures and poems are open to a wide range of sometimes contradictory interpretations.

Exhibited works : *Binding Light*, 2013 ; *The dangerous beauty of an empty room*, 2010 ; *Umbrella*, 2012 ; *Escaping mathematical nightmares*, 2011 ; *Ma voix va maintenant venir d'une autre partie de la salle*, 2015 ; *You must be able to interrupt a friendly conversation at all moments*, 2015





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Shelly Nadashi

Born in 1981 in Haifa (Israel)
Lives and works in Brussels (Belgium)

Using a wide variety of mediums, from cinema and performance to handmade objects, Shelly Nadashi's work often comments on the social role of the artist and the mechanisms regulating the relationships between the artist, the work of art and the spectator. A trained puppeteer, Nadashi animates objects with her hands, her voice and texts, or by staging them in expansive performances. Doing so, she often creates situations of control and ascendancy of one person over another as a means to confuse identities.

The installation *Water Feature* is composed of a wall clad in ceramic tiles with a bas-relief formed of eight clay tiles representing a human figure. In front of the wall stand two metal plinths carrying a clay bowl and a clay fountain respectively.

The ceramic objects are unglazed. They were created using the so-called 'naked clay' technique, which consists of leaving the clay untreated after firing, as a potentially living organism. The handmade clay tiles differ from the industrial equivalents behind them, which act as a skin protecting the wall and delimiting the space.

All the elements in *Water Feature* concur to suggest a bathroom, a Turkish bath or a swimming pool environment. They also highlight the permeability between solids and liquids. This is precisely where the fable imagined by the artist takes root, relying on the potential of a few objects to suggest an environment and construct a stage where all the events unfold in an instable and equivocal arrangement – another way for Nadashi to explore the possibilities of bringing objects to life.

Exhibited works : *Water Feature*, 2015 ; *8 Tiles*, 2015 ; *Bowl*, 2015

Simon Dybbroe Møller

Born in 1976 in Aarhus (Denmark)
Lives and works in Berlin (Germany)

The work of Simon Dybbroe Møller plays with the possibilities offered by free associations of meaning. From exploring our environment, and more specifically the products we consume, Dybbroe Møller derives interpretations which, paradoxically, are relatively close to the affective bond that connects us to them. One of his works consists for instance of a series of sculptures of culinary dishes (beef stroganoff, stew, goulash) hanging on the wall as though material manifestations of the kind of food photography that is ripe on social networks.

Animate U is a video showing Renault's short-lived Avantime model, a luxurious people carrier notable for its stylish avant-garde design. Dybbroe Møller's film uses all the traditional elements of advertising: close-ups, a loud, upbeat soundtrack, off-screen commentary, etc. But to the ideas we usually associate with this kind of car (luxury, social success, comfort), he adds other, more unlikely ones, namely, other commodity objects, less presentable desires, or





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personal stories. By doing so, he exploits the advertising narrative, which aims to create desire for a given object, in order to construct a more complex phantasmagoria. The same process is at play in the compositions in which the artist uses foldable strollers: revealing a surprising content when folded up, these signifiers of parent responsibility open up to less natural histories.

Exhibited works: *Animate U*, 2012 ; *Untitled*, 2016

Anouchka Oler

Born in 1988 in Saint-Malo (France)
Lives and works in Lyon

Anouchka Oler describes her work as follows: 'With the help of the objects and sculptures that I produce or choose, I lead a live investigation into the non-linguistic communication of forms and that which attracts our attention to it.' This exploration leads Oler to let the objects do the talking: by inserting them in different narratives, she endows them with character, emotions and desires, thus complicating our relationships to the inanimate world.

The video *Episode 2* shows a group of decorative or utilitarian sculptures contesting, questioning or refusing the functions normally assigned to them. The film considers their usefulness not only from a functional, but also from a social standpoint, to the extent that the objects play specific roles for the person exploiting and thereby communicating with them. A metaphor of the relationship between the artist and his creations, *Episode 2* is also a humorous exploration of the various contexts in which works of art appear. More specifically, it appears that the changing roles of these objects mask a wider attempt to blur the limits of the subject. Spectators are invited to sit on the furniture conceived and built by the artist for the purpose of the screening as functional objects that also express emotions, blushing or blinking their eyes. Rebelling against their role as items of furniture, they set free their desires to express their true, non-standardised nature.

Exhibited works : *Episode 2*, 2014 ; *Les feignants et les feignantes*, 2016

Stuart Sherman

Born in 1945 in Providence (Rhode Island, United States), died in 2001 in San Francisco

After acting in several films directed by Richard Foreman, Stuart Sherman decided to make his own films. But rather than trying to develop his own style and handwriting, he chose to work with what was at hand, namely, his own body and the objects surrounding it. This is how he started the series of works brought together under the generic term *Spectacles*. The title is ironic, since the only action in the films consists of himself manipulating any number of banal objects – or 'cheap artifacts', as he calls them – lying on a foldable table; the plain setting





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indeed thwarts any potentially spectacular effect.

Sherman literally offers himself up to the spectacle of others, or rather stages his difficulties to “write”, which eventually give rise to a vocabulary. His gestures are confined to putting objects together; by laying them next to each other, on top of each other, or one after the other, sequences appear. Whether stories, sketches or sentences, the arrangements he formulates call on spectators to analyse or decipher them. Chains of signifiers emerge, although their meaning remains incomprehensible. With his *Spectacles*, Sherman replaces words with associations and confronts spectators with the creation of a language made of objects.

Exhibited work : Selections from *the Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*, v. 1979

James Welling

Born in 1951 in Hartford (United States)

Lives and works in Los Angeles



Since the 1970s James Welling has been working with photographs of folds and folded sheets of aluminium to explore the way in which images are constructed. His early photographs depict identifiable subjects, but simultaneously seem to aim at abstraction, suggesting that Welling is mainly interested in the play with light. In the 1990s he created the series of *Light Sources*, which represent light itself. Similarly, his photographs of architecture always concentrate on plays with surfaces and mirroring effects. One could be led to think that Welling’s reflection of the photographic image consists of dismembering its constituents: on the one hand the surface, on the other hand the object, which reflects the light towards the surface of the film roll. By doing so, the artist lets spectators experience the construction of a representation rather than the representation as such.

Middle Video was made when Welling was still studying and had not yet started his career as a photographer. But all the elements that characterise his later work are already in place, as we see him manipulating various objects in short sequences, using his hands to “frame” the image and modify the lighting. His objects thus become actors in scenes that give them a strange presence and roles, creating a gap between what they are and the way in which they appear in the image.

Exhibited work : *Middle Video*, 1972



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Available pictures



Stuart SHERMAN
Sequence from *Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*, c. 1979
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix



KARL LARSSON
The dangerous beauty of an empty room, 2010
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Nordenhake, Berlin



Jean-Pascal FLAUIEN
Sequence (chair, table, chair, table, chair), 2014
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Esther Shipper, Berlin
Photo : © Andrea Rossetti



KARL LARSSON
Binding Light, 2013
Courtesy galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm



Karl LARSSON
You must be able to interrupt a friendly conversation at all moments, 2015
Courtesy de l'artiste



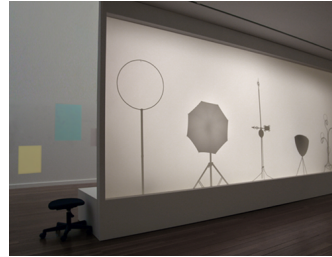
Anouchka OLER
Episode 2, 2014
Courtesy de l'artiste



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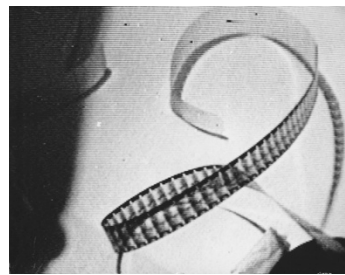
Judith HOPF
Untitled (Laptop 3), 2010
Courtesy galerie Deborah Schamoni, Munich



Barbara BLOOM
Absence-Presence, 2006
Courtesy de l'artiste et de Martin Gropius Bau
Photo : Nadine Dinter



Simon DYBBROE MØLLER
Untitled, 2016
Courtesy de l'artiste et de la galerie Francesca Minin



James WELLING
Middle Video, 1972
Courtesy de l'artiste et de la galerie Peter Freeman



Simon DYBBROE MØLLER
Animate U(extrait), 2012
Courtesy de l'artiste



Shelly NADASHI
8 Tiles, 2015
Courtesy de l'artiste



Camille BLATRIX
Tosch 3, 2015
Courtesy de l'artiste et galerie Balice Hertling, Paris



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Rendez-vous*

The Rendez-vous invite you to come back to le plateau within the framework of the exhibition.

Conversations de plateau

Thursday 18.02.16

7.30pm

Special guests unveil their vision of the exhibition.

With Jean-Philippe Antoine, Géraldine Gourbe and Benjamin Seror.

Uisit with François Aubart

Sunday 27.03.16

5.30pm



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Wednesday 06.04.16

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L'Homme aux cent yeux (revue)

With Julien Bismuth

Thursday 10.03.16 – 7.30pm

* The Rendez-vous are free of charge.



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