

MSSNDCLRCQ
Meessen De Clercq

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TU - SA 11 - 18h

morceaux de soleil

Benoît Maire

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Meessen De Clercq presents *morceaux de soleil* (pieces of sun), Benoît Maire's second solo exhibition at the gallery. A 'Visual Philosopher', to borrow Mieke Bal's expression, as well as being a painter, sculptor, lecturer, furniture designer, art critic and performer, Benoît Maire is not easy to pin down. In his polymorphous work, plastic forms and concepts meet but elude any hierarchy. As Liam Gillick says in Art Review: «His relationship to philosophy operates in terms of ideas as material. Asking how ideas find material form and how ideas can be used as a way to measure ideas in context. Constantly moving to and fro between measuring, checking and recasting concepts into material form and back again». With *morceaux de soleil*, the artist continues with this method, structuring fragments, and shows that what has epitomised unity since the beginning of time is actually fragmented and continually falls apart. According to Bataille, the sun is the model of another human existence, which he constantly exhorts us to adopt: burning to the point of nearing death. The light that reaches the Earth every day and which is lost in the universe consists of parts of the sun which condition the origins of life on Earth.

In the exhibition spaces on the ground floor of the gallery, *Cloud paintings*, sculptures of *Castles* and of *Sphinxes*, presented on 18th century stone columns, or on tables designed by the artist, share the space with some prints on paper. What is conceived as an entity, the sun, should be interpreted here in the exhibition as fragmented, and is an analogy for his fragmented work. The *Cloud paintings*, a series painted since 2012, are canvases of various sizes, painted in oils, on which the artist shows us clouds painted with a spray can, a paintbrush, a knife, in a liquid material or in a mistier glaze. Motifs emanate from these paintings which transform into figures that question the limits of abstraction by playing with pareidolia - a psychological phenomenon whereby we recognise familiar shapes in looking at a landscape, a cloud or a blot of ink.

The *Sphinx* and the *Castles* are sculptures that set natural objects and others manufactured by civilisation in a context of tension. The artist questions these elements by seeking an association of shapes, colours and materials. Floating seashells appear alongside moulded pieces in crystal, metal structures are fixed to spirit levels, a fossilised rock engages in dialectics with a technical object. The distant and the close are associated in a form of construction, a home for ideas, a mysterious castle where the origin and the end of time play out, or at least its space-time as perceived by humans. On a wall, a hammer and sickle are hung together but are not intertwined: this graphic symbol used on the flag of the USSR from 1923 onward was already used to represent Communism in 1917. It depicts the hammer of the proletariat and the peasant's sickle; their encounter symbolises the union between agricultural and industrial workers. But here, the mere fact of presenting them separately, and not connected, suggests the disconnect within the ideology of unity.

This idea of a fragmented sun enables Benoît Maire to continue his study of Jean-François Lyotard's concept of *differend* which has inspired his work since 2008. The fact that the *differend* is present but nobody can say so or judge it, is actually a motif that the artist focuses on in his research. The first *differend*, the impossibility of saying what one sees, feeds a whole chain of consequences which are extremely productive for artistic expression.

Benoît Maire was born in 1978 in Pessac (France). His work is currently the object of a personal exhibition at Spike Island (Bristol, UK), named *Thebes*, that was initially presented at the CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2018). His work is also visible at the Kunsthalle Charlottenborg and temporary gallery in Cologne. His work is in public and private collections such as the Kadist Art Foundation (Paris, France), David Roberts Foundation (London, United Kingdom), the Nomos Foundation (Rome, Italy), the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris, France), the Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (Paris, France), the Fondazione Giuliani (Rome, Italy), the Fondation Francès (Senlis, France), the Vancouver Art Gallery (Canada).