

18/11/16

Le Quotidien de l'Art – press clipping

La Samaritaine, patron of young photographers

Interview by Natacha Wolinski

For the fourth consecutive year, La Samaritaine has given *carte blanche* to a dozen young photographers and videographers, in partnership with Le Fresnoy - National Studio of Contemporary Arts. The exhibition will take place from November 4 at the store's Rue de Rivoli and Rue du Pont-Neuf locations in Paris. Marie-Line Antonios, La Samaritaine's General Manager, Christian Caujolle, curator of the "Ma Samaritaine 2016" exhibition, and Alain Fleischer, Director of Le Fresnoy, introduce the project.

MARIE-LINE ANTONIOS, GENERAL MANAGER OF LA SAMARITAINE

Natacha Wolinski : *Why did La Samaritaine embark on a four-year photographic project?*

Marie-Line Antonios : As a continuation of the great photographic campaigns that have documented the life of the store for over a century, this is a living record of La Samaritaine, both the process of the transformation itself and the store's renewed appearance, created by giving free rein to both young designers and big names.

NW : *Are you aiming to create an annual cultural event with this new exhibition?*

M-LA : Once again we're becoming a major player in the Louvre-Samaritaine district. By including the Rue de Rivoli as part of the Paris Photo and FIAC exhibitions, we want to introduce an artistic dimension to what is basically a commercial thoroughfare. The 5,000 visitors who saw "Ma Samaritaine 2015" are proof that there's definitely an interest.

NW : *What's new this year?*

M-LA : We're giving Parisians an artistic journey along the Rue de Rivoli, with a detour into the Maison du Projet in the Rue du Pont-Neuf where videos and the winning photos are on display. This initiative aims to raise awareness of art to an audience that might not otherwise spontaneously visit an art gallery.

ALAIN FLEISCHER, DIRECTOR OF LE FRESNOY - NATIONAL STUDIO OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS

Natacha Wolinski : *How did this partnership between Le Fresnoy and La Samaritaine come about?*

Alain Fleischer : Le Fresnoy aims to continue actively supporting its graduates with their projects, even after they've finished their courses. As part of this mentoring, the school is open to both public and private partnerships, which allow young creators to practice their art while responding to commissions.

NW : *How were the photographers and videographers selected?*

AF : With Christian Caujolle, we decided to choose five photographers and five videographers. The selection was based on the desire to highlight the diversity of images and words created at Le Fresnoy, ranging from documentary to more experimental formats.

NW : *What do you think of the work that's been produced?*

AF : It's quite surprising, as several artists have moved away from their usual genres for this project. But this is precisely what makes this type of assignment so interesting, as the constraints, linked as much to the place as to the shooting conditions, mean that each student has to be particularly creative.

CHRISTIAN CAUJOLLE, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF "MY SAMARITAINE 2016"

Natacha Wolinski : *You've been the artistic director of the La Samaritaine photographic commission for four years. What's your view on this year's entries?*

Christian Caujolle : The introduction of video this year adds an extra dimension. It accentuates the appeal of both documentary and fiction – or perhaps the fine dividing line between the two. The building work, demolition, transformation – all are extremely conducive to the contrasting desire either to show it as it is, or to use as a starting point for a more literary approach.

NW : *With both still and moving images submitted this year, is 2016 more experimental than previous years?*

CC : Absolutely – but that's to be expected, given the training of these young artists at Le Fresnoy, which is a progressive “laboratory” for analysis and experimentation.

NW : *Were you surprised that most of the artists this year focused on the building?*

CC : Not really. For the last two years there's been the frustration of not being able to enter La Samaritaine's site, and so what strikes me this year, as opposed to previous years, is the fact that the artists are no longer intimidated by the sheer monumentality of the place – rather they've approached it in extreme detail, almost physically taking over the building, even down to collecting debris to use in their work.

ANAÏS BOUDOT WINS LA SAMARITAINE GRAND PRIX

The La Samaritaine Young Photography Prize 2016 has been awarded to Anaïs Boudot. The jury, chaired by Sarah Moon and Antoine Arnault, included Marie-Line Antonios, Raphaëlle Pinoncély, Guillaume Foucher, Jean-Jacques Guiony and Marin Karmitz. Ms Boudot was awarded a prize of €15,000, while SMITH (Dorothee Smith) received a special mention by the jury for her video, representing a new direction for La Samaritaine.

MA SAMARITAINE 2016 – exhibition from 4 November at 67-83, rue Rivoli, 1 rue du Pont-Neuf and 8-10 rue du Pont-Neuf, 75001 Paris, <http://www.lasamaritaine.com>

David De Beyter : the boundaries of the readable

To contemplate the dark images of David De Beyter is to enter a pulsating universe where one loses all sense of scale. The foundations of La Samaritaine take on the dimensions of a cave, where space becomes both abstract yet tangible, depths are foreshortened to a flattened rough surface and – like a diseased corpse - the furrowed and tormented material of the walls, the bruising and the scratches of time are exposed. Using infrared black-and-white film to explore the dim light, David De Beyter reveals the 1,001 nuances of black, like the abstract expressionist artist Ad Reinhardt, whose monochrome paintings question where an artwork begins and ends. When does an image become visible and comprehensible? David De Beyter's work searches for limits, awakening the viewer with an experience that is both sensory and meditative.

USING BLACK AND WHITE INFRARED FILM TO EXPLORE PENUMBRA, DAVID DE BEYTER REVEALS 1,001 SHADES OF BLACK

Anaïs Boudot : between reality and fiction

Stairs that lead nowhere, columns emerging from the dark and reverberating in a dreamlike light, strange perspectives opening onto a void, and impossible architectural features and labyrinths, similar to those of Maurits Cornelis Escher - the images of La Samaritaine created by Anaïs Boudot both question and disturb. Faced with a metamorphosing building, the photographer chose to multiply the possibilities: negatives manipulated, images cut and formed into collages, and digital techniques paired with traditional film, while some photographs taken on site are merged with archive images, so that views of the past and the present exist side by side. Anaïs Boudot has reinvented locations in her own way, mixing real and fictional spaces, and playing with the grain of images to take her compositions to the next level. Faced with these photos of faded landmarks and deepening shadows, one is immersed in a cerebral interpretation of the legendary store.

ANAÏS BOUDOT MIXES THE REAL AND THE IMAGINARY TO REINVENT SPACE IN HER OWN WAY

Kai-chun Chiang : the place of re-enchantment

Is it a photograph or a drawing? Somewhere real or a movie set? Will Marlene oh-so-regally descend this Art Deco staircase, Fred tap out a dance routine on that overhead steel beam, or Fellini seize these images to create a romance in these spaces that just scream cinematic history? Kai-chun Chiang's photography is not just a descriptive tool but a wonderful instrument that transforms reality. The colourful mosaics he discovered on La Samaritaine's construction site inspired this work of re-enchantment. A few magic pencil strokes, a flurry of colours, paintbrushes full of light, a sense of illusion, and alchemy happens - La Samaritaine's construction site becomes an enchanted kingdom, as if Kai-chun Chiang is already imagining the golds and luminescence of the soon-to-be-renovated building and is offering us a glimpse of the splendours to come.

KAI-CHUN CHIANG'S PHOTOGRAPHY IS NOT JUST A DESCRIPTIVE TOOL, BUT A WONDERFUL INSTRUMENT THAT TRANSFORMS REALITY

Jannick Guillou : a dialogue between full and empty

Is a building the sum of the elements that make it up? Is it the addition of beams, staircases, windows and corridors? Or does the secret of its success rest in its spaces, its cavities, its fissures? These are the questions we ask ourselves when faced with Jannick Guillou's graphic drawings, which alternate between topographic description and pure visual fiction. Using her imagination and a collection of La Samaritaine's original plans, Guillou had fun carefully recomposing areas, then stripping them back, focussing not only on the blacks but also on the whites in order to restructure the spaces, removing long vanishing lines and making unconnected posts and walls without foundations appear from nowhere. In her enigmatic compositions, viewpoints are sometimes irreconcilable and perspectives impossible. The spaces she visualises seem like the aftermath of a surrealist dream, a floating world, yet where the unbelievable is now plausible.

JANNICK GUILLOU IMAGINES SPACES AS THE AFTERMATH OF A SURREALIST DREAM, A FLOATING WORLD

Dmitry Makhomet : from Samaria to Samaritaine

We see a place riven by machines, rubble, debris and wreckage. The camera never stops its endless panoramic panning, struggling to depict places that reverberate under the onslaught of shovels. A woman's voice rises and describes an ancient site. We are on La Samaritaine's rooftop, currently under construction, yet also in Samaria, the biblical land of archaeological excavations, of tumuli and burial mounds. "Behind the sunset, on the other side of the river, is the country you will take possession of," intones a voice. We are in a space that is both here and there, both near and far, both yesterday and today. Places in turmoil, disturbances of time - Dmitri Makhomet's film connects lost memories, while waiting for La Samaritaine to forge her new destiny.

DMITRI MAKHOMET'S FILM CONNECTS LOST MEMORIES, WAITING FOR LA SAMARITAINE TO FORGE A NEW DESTINY

Hanako Murakami : light memories

Photographer Hanako Murakami has created a mysterious baroque crystalline landscape – but where do these chips of light - like wonderful stained glass – come from? La Samaritaine's corridors were originally paved with moulded glass floor slabs, exclusively produced for the store by Saint-Gobain. Hanako Murakami collected glass fragments, many chipped like flint, and placed them on to light-sensitive paper. Using the photogram technique, she then exposed them directly to the light, without using a camera, creating small optical windows that tell a story of places remembered – no longer just pieces of glass, but precious stones, cut and faceted like diamonds which, presented on a black background, appear illuminated from inside, shining since the dawn of time.

HANAKO MURAKAMI ARRANGES FRAGMENTS OF OLD GLASS FLOOR TILES ON LIGHT-SENSITIVE PAPER

Baptiste Rabichon : the limits of abstraction

From afar, colourful forms emerge from the dark, as planets whirl in the cosmos, while close up, luminous forms play the role of windows, revealing a world flooded with columns, staircases and long-forgotten mannequins. Baptiste Rabichon's images, both dark and luminous, are the result of a strange marriage – an expert in manipulation and visual artifice, he merges photogram and silverprint techniques. The glowing forms are in fact fragments of La Samaritaine's old glass floor slabs, which Rabichon collected and then photographed with a disposable camera. In the dark room, he put the pieces of glass on his prints and then under-exposed them, to obtain these abstract images, which form and disintegrate before our eyes. Between focus and blur, black and colour, shadow and light, La Samaritaine reveals herself to us.

BAPTISTE RABICHON'S DARK AND LUMINOUS PHOTOS ARE THE RESULT OF A STRANGE MARRIAGE

Enrique Ramirez : the construction of desire

Enrique Ramirez visited the La Samaritaine construction site on a rainy day. The ground was waterlogged, the raindrops echoed, and these liquid elements brought back the memory of the "La Samaritaine" water pump - now long gone, it was located on the adjacent Pont Neuf, and the La Samaritaine department store was named after it when it was built in the 19th century. The well was decorated with the biblical story of the meeting of Jesus and Photine the Samaritan at the well of Jacob. This passage, marked by love, led Enrique Ramirez to connect the revitalisation of the La Samaritaine building with the birth of desire. "Constructing a building is like imagining a mountain - the mountain needs the earth, the earth needs our hands and our hands need our desires," states the voiceover as the film opens, with images celebrating the power of love at first sight. La Samaritaine becomes a reservoir of stories where water, rock, sky and desire play the leading roles.

ENRIQUE RAMIREZ LINKS THE REVITALISATION OF LA SAMARITAINE WITH THE BIRTH OF DESIRE

Momoko Seto : man and machine

This film of La Samaritaine's construction site contrasts the hectic with the calm, the din of hydraulic jackhammers splitting stones with the hush of water dripping down walls. The camera lingers on the ravaged stones, on fleeting sparks; it plunges into the dark and reappears in the daylight, exposes the sickening repetition of machinery noises and the insomnia and hypnosis of a construction site that is a monster, a giant ocean liner alive with men who seem tiny and absurdly busy in their Playmobil-like safety helmets. It is this disjoint that Momoko Seto highlights in her documentary film ; this fierce battle between men and the mythical monster – this titanic task, this colossus of stone and iron that suddenly one day will have been conquered and remodelled by the worker ants

MOMOKO SETO FILMS THE STONE AND IRON COLOSSUS THAT WILL BE CONQUERED AND REMODELLED BY THE WORKER ANTS.

SMITH (Dorothee Smith) : the fable of immortality

Workers excavate the bowels of a building that roars like a beast awakened from its sleep. From the belly of this huge building is reborn "Unda", a young woman with a haunted face - a lost soul, the little sister of Ophelia, or the young Inconnue de la Seine - who drowned in 1900, an enigmatic smile on her lips. What is Unda looking for? Why is she wandering like this? Outside, the river rises and swirls, and the building is reflected in the floodwater. Unda is passing. The workers woke her up, and one of them will help her to return to the river that is her tomb. Between the darkness of the depths and the picture-postcard Parisian moonlight, in a diffused and opalescent light, a story is played out that links life, death and eternity. A strange cycle is established - the great floods of the Seine, which return once each century, and La Samaritaine, who is reborn from a long slumber. From this fable, Dorothee Smith has created a film and photographs with hypnotic power, a visual narrative that ushers the viewer from noise to peace, from chaos to immortality.

**DOROTHÉE SMITH CREATES A VISUAL NARRATIVE FROM NOISE TO PEACE,
FROM CHAOS TO IMMORTALITY**