

Museum  
Leuven



# ALEXIS GAUTIER

17.09.21  
→ 20.03.22



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## INTRODUCTION

### L'Heure de la Soupe

Alexis Gautier often opts for a collective approach in his artistic practice. Out of an interest in the ways in which people or things are connected, he creates an oeuvre with varying protagonists through a reciprocal engagement. He provokes encounters and dialogue, researching the impact of relationships and their entanglement. In M, Alexis Gautier explores boundaries and ambiguities between fact and fiction, freedom and letting go of total control of his own work. The exhibition rooms could be seen as a film set, presenting a collection of new works born of a collective fiction.

The creative process is coincidental, forming ideas and objects merging with the collaboration of several co-authors. Gautier invites colleagues, craftsmen, museum employees and namesakes to contribute to the creation of an overarching story. For this exhibition he collaborated with Shi Chunping, Anita Devi, Indu Devi, Minu Devi, Minu Devi, Reena Devi, Sanju Devi, Vibha Devi, Alexis Gautier, Alexis Gautier, Shi Jian, Abhishek Kumar, Anupam Kumar, Annu Kumari, Pinki Kumari, Saumya Kumari, Shilpee Kumari, Tannu Kumari, Shen Runzhong, Kanchan Singh, Richard Tuttle, Shen Weixing, Fang Yaqi and the museum attendants of M Leuven.

The collections of various patterns, embroideries and work together, a site-specific floor work site an outdoor installation with spinning kites.

Curator: Eva Wittocx

The exhibition is a collaboration with CIAP Genk and was realized with the support of the French Embassy in Brussels (as part of Extra) in LVD Group.

## BIOGRAPHY

Alexis Gautier (°1990, France) lives and works in Brussels and Brittany. He studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt Am Main (Germany) and is currently a researcher at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp. He has shown his work at BOZAR (Brussels, 2017), Blue Mountain School (London, 2018), Basis (Frankfurt Am Main, 2019), ISLAND (Brussels, 2020), The New Wight Biennial (Los Angeles, 2020), MANIFESTA (Marseille, 2020), Goethe-Institut (Dublin, 2021) and at M Leuven in the group exhibition The Constant Glitch (Leuven, 2021). He is supported by the Fondation des Artistes and the Günther-Peill Foundation. In 2022, Gautier will become an artist in residence at WIELS, The Center for Contemporary Art in Brussels.



Photo: Miles Fischler

## L'HEURE DE LA SOUPE

*A car rushes backwards through the street, lights off at dawn. As it quickly disappears around the corner, my mind follows it through the narrow streets. Fumes coming out from the slightly open windows - it's no fire smoke, but something closer to a smoke machine running inside the car. Driving past the fruit shop, it slows down and stops. As the engine stumbles and waits, the moustached driver lays his heel on the paved road and slowly walks to the stall. He grabs four oranges, and cuts a fifth one in half. Going back to the car, he carefully places one orange through each open window, firmly stuck between the glass and its frame. Holding one half orange in his hand, he slowly walks around the car, firmly pressing the fruit against it. Squeezing its juice as he walks, it leaves a lush trace, looping above the wheels. Burning his tyres away in circles, he then disappears around the next corner, leaving behind a smell of burnt rubber.*

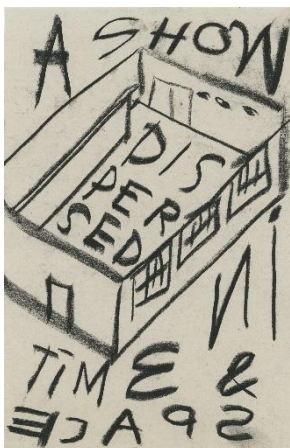


© Alexis Gautier  
Photo: Miles Fischler

L'Heure de la Soupe is an outcome of what Alexis Gautier calls 'collective fiction writing'. The creative process is partly accidental, melding ideas and objects with the collaborative participation of several co-authors, who become protagonists in the exhibition. Gautier invites colleagues, craftsmen, museum employees, and namesakes to contribute to the creation of an overarching narrative.

### Second museum

In recent years, this exhibition room has been dedicated to the projection of video works.



©Alexis Gautier

The windows had been darkened and the long wall extended up to the ceiling. While returning the room to its original state, Gautier hoped the space would retain a sense of the cinematic and could be thought of as a film set in which a narrative can unfold.

“While lowering back the wall, we realised there was light inside of it. When architect Stéphane Beel designed the building, the staff requested a hidden corridor running through every wall. This allowed them to navigate the building discreetly, and over time it became a sort of ‘second museum’ curated by the staff, displaying forgotten works, unclaimed frames, and even personal paintings.”

### Storyboards

Over the last six years, Gautier has developed a series of works in collaboration with a group of women from Manipur Busra, in the region of Bihar. While most of their work uses embroidered silk as a diary - recording personal, social, and political life in the village through figurative scenes - some create an imaginative space of speculation. The textile

works in the hallway employ this tradition of fabulation. The head of the group, Sanju Devi, was provided with two lists: one with the works in the exhibition, and another of its protagonists. Weaving threads and connecting dots they collectively wrote a visual narrative, an ongoing storyboard to be enacted by the artist and the curator of the exhibition over the duration of the show.

This series of textiles is open-ended and will grow over the six months of the show, with chapters added and new connections made.

### Collecting ambiguity

Gautier invited a team of ceramists from Jingdezhen, the famed 'porcelain capital', to take part in the narrative. The city's reputation for fine craftsmanship and trade routes to the West evolved into a longstanding tradition of "works on commission" for European customers.

The ambiguous greenish-gray seen on several of the porcelain sheets is known as celadon, a historical colour discovered accidentally in the firing process. Never defined, ever enigmatic, for centuries celadon ceramics were not crafted for practical use, but rather for pure contemplation.

Through mutual friends, Gautier met Fang Yaqi, one of the ceramist. During their conversations on social media apps, she mentioned her unrealized project of making porcelain doors, an idea that Gautier had drawn during his first visit to the city. Using the coincidence, Gautier invited each co-author/protagonist of the exhibition to write a description of their own door, to act as a starting point for Fang's doors making, free manuals for interpretations.

Rather than interpreting each door in a figurative depiction, Fang decided to translate them into colours. As she visited shops in the historic 'glaze street', at each desk she asked for a shade of celadon. Choosing from the resulting set of colours, she attributed them to the various characters. Displayed throughout the room, the porcelain sheets embody a space between displacement and binary systems.

"I remember seeing Dominique Mercy – a dancer of the Tanztheater Wuppertal – tapping the ashes of his cigarette in his coffee and drinking it. Shi Jian, a friend of Fang, has it differently: he lets his cigarettes burn slowly, endlessly, held between his lips as he fabricates a porcelain sheet larger than his own door but thinner than his little finger. When his cigarette ash falls unnoticed onto the clay, it turns into light brown glass during the firing process. This time, we decided to do it deliberately: In a smoke-filled room, Shi Jian fired the ash from 8 kilograms of cigarettes on a single sheet of porcelain.



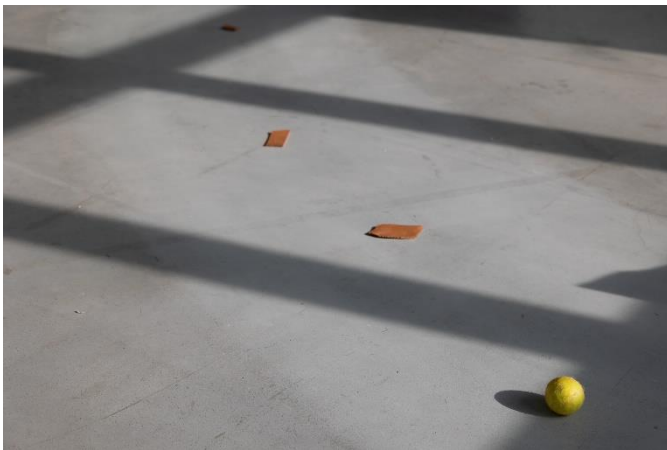
© Alexis Gautier  
Photo: Lien Wevers

Museums are all about doors. We should replace a few of them with their porcelain counterparts, scattered through different corridors, dispersed through various exhibitions. A work speaks of its own impossibility, contains all possible variations.”

## Sailing

For the show, American Artist Richard Tuttle was invited to contribute by engaging with the windows of the exhibition room. Bypassing the question, Tuttle replied:

“It could be drawing? It could be paint? It could be the floor itself? Who knows? It is large, circular swaths of gray marks of some kind that can be followed. Down the center,



© Alexis Gautier  
Photo: Dries Lievens

between each row of their ridges, tiny, 10cm, little mountain ranges are placed 1 foot from each other. This is done in a terra cotta color with a still wet material (an air-dried clay?). It is done slowly, deliberately. (...) The little ship-like segment can ‘sail’ through the circular arcs. Some of these would be stepped on during the exhibition, grinding into the grey dust-- it could be quite beautiful! But mostly, people would try to avoid them. This would create a general nervousness, like love, walking through the exhibition. They can be walked upon until dry,

then, left forever, because they make a new floor lying over the old.”

## Hire me, hire me Marieke!

At M, the attendants aren’t guards like the staff of other Belgian museums. They don’t wear uniforms, and instead of looking after the works they are instructed to keep an eye out for suspicious behaviour. Marieke accepted me temporarily as a museum attendant, among the twenty-four others.

“One can’t differentiate patients from doctors,” says Gunnar – one of the full-time museum attendants – referring to the La Borde psychiatric clinic. “To bypass alienation, there were no locked doors, no fences, no uniforms. When one visited the clinic, it was often difficult to know who was who.”

## Pocket Works

Alex, a museum attendant and former candidate to the priesthood, swims down the corridor and slowly takes a tennis ball out of his pocket. Almost whispering, he tells me that a silkworm has spun a continuous thread of nine hundred meters around it. Softly caressing the ball, he insists it is a colour you have never seen before.

Two taps, a single shot. Fired through the space, the smell of burnt rubber disperses through the air conditioning system. Dispersed under a sole, in the lining of a jacket, or in a pocket. Who’s the museum attendant? Who is the artist? And how to navigate entangled realities?

## Namesakes

Gautier's friend and fellow artist Peter Schamaun recently sent him a computer screenshot. It showed a website dedicated to sports gambling, where a professional tennis player named Alexis Gautier was represented with a picture of Alexis, the artist.

"While updating the scoreboard, someone must have pulled the wrong image of Alexis Gautier, or rather, the image of the wrong Alexis Gautier, off the Internet," writes Alicja Melzacka, curator at CIAP in Genk, where a new chapter of the story will unfold next year. And so, Alexis the artist transformed into Alexis the tennis player, at least in a world of disembodied images. Taking this identity slippage as a starting point, Alexis decided to look for and contact other Gautiers. Precisely because of its seeming irrelevance, the name makes for an interesting parameter to use when looking for new collaborations. It is yet another instrument for the artist to give up control in favour of collaborative modes of working, inspired by Glissant's archipelagic thinking and characterised by unpredictability, improvisation, and relationality. (...) In this case, it is the real name that brings together a group of, on the surface level, unrelated people and inspires that mutuality, or perhaps, harnesses and makes visible the entanglement already present in the world.



© Alexis Gautier  
Photo: Dries Lievens

For the finissage of the exhibition in March 2022, the room will softly merge into an improvised tennis court, a field where Alexis the artist is inviting Alexis the tennis player to perform a match, refereed by the staff of the museum – a bridge to CIAP, where namesake connections will be pursued further.

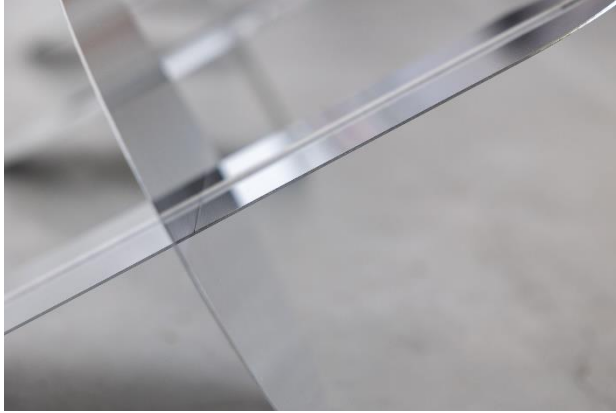
Sanju Devi, the Bihari embroiderer, described the scene in one of her pieces:

"A horse rider, a taxi driver, a tennis player, and a bike rider come together. Sitting down at a table, the center of which is missing, they each pull out a book, and suddenly realise that all the books have the same title."



## Diptyques

The relationship between cinema and landscape is also explored on the rooftop terrace. Activated by the wind, a hundred aluminium modules, based on Chinese rotating kites, are assembled into a frame. Each module has a polished side that reflects the



surroundings as it moves. The other side is brushed, appearing as an object while absorbing light. In cinema, the minimum amount of frames to which one could reduce a moving image is two. With the endless flipbook of inward and outward faces, a sculptural film unfolds.

© Alexis Gautier  
Photo: Dries Lievens

Tuttle sums things up nicely:

“The floor piece can be called, ‘Welcome’. Yes, please use quotations from my emails, as you like. Maybe it will help others to understand and see what is behind what is in front, which is what I think you are offering people and the ‘reason’ for it, all in one.”

## THE CONSTANT GLITCH

Alexis' work was previously featured in the group exhibition 'The Constant Glitch' at M.

His textile works were made by weavers in India and Nepal who interpreted Gautier's open instructions and translated them into their own practice. In black sheep's wool we see a schematic representation of a village plan, which through the conversion, through the interpretation of the weavers, became an abstract composition. The smaller, hand-embroidered works on silk function as a diary of Gautier's collaborations, showing stories and anecdotes associated with them. The local craftsmen started here from written stories and were invited to appropriate them and then work them out freely on canvas, as a process of collectively writing fictional stories.



© Alexis Gautier & Ang Diku Sherpa. Village Map (Black Sheep), Patan. After a painting in collaboration with Kasper Bosmans, 2018, M Leuven

## PUBLICATION

In 2022 Gautier will exhibit a new chapter of his work at CIAP Genk. Parallel to the exhibitions, M, CIAP and Track Report (the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp) will publish a new book, designed by Nico Dockx. The book navigates through Gautier's oeuvre, archives and research with a visual essay by Nico Dockx, an essay by Brian Dillon, an artistic intervention by Laure Prouvost and contributions by Eva Wittocx, Louise Osieka and Alicja Melzacka.

The book is for sale in the M-shop for 25 EUR.



## THERE IS MORE

Finissage 20.03.2022

Reservations via [www.mleuven.be](http://www.mleuven.be) from 2022.

Playground 11.11 – 14.11.2021

As an extension of the exhibition, Gautier will be hired as a taxi driver for four days during the Playground festival. Inviting the audience for narrative loops along the ring road of the city, he attempts to define a multiplicity of centres from a multiplicity of peripheries. The car acts as the lens of a camera, with landscape and cinema coalescing into one and the same.

Reservations via [www.playgroundfestival.be](http://www.playgroundfestival.be).

## THE WORKS

'L'Heure de la Soupe' is seen by the artist as a light-sensitive roll of film on which various scenes, gestures or interventions can leave a trace. Throughout the space and duration of the exhibition, a dynamic story is created that enters into dialogue with practice, the customs or mechanisms of the museum. Based on his interest in processes and models of collaboration, Gautier brings together several new works of art in an installation tailored to the room in M.

A selection from the exhibition:

### Floor work

- Welcome; with Richard Tuttle; rubber paint, terracotta, various objects; work in-situ; 2021

### Series of ceramic works

- (MacGuffin Series) Huacai / U88; with Shi Chunping, Shi Jian & Fang Yaqi; porcelain; 85 x 200 x 0,7; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Shi Jian Workshop / Tobacco ash; porcelain; 102 x 201 x 0,9; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Jinsheng / 655; porcelain; 67 x 196 x 0,8; 2021
- (MacGuffin Series) Peiyintang / Celadon #5468; porcelain; 88 x 198 x 0,8; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Shi Jian Workshop / GE554; porcelain; 86 x 201 x 0,8; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Peiyintang / # 3121; porcelain; 83 x 200 x 0,8; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Jinsheng / 544; porcelain; 102 x 202 x 0,8; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Peiyintang / #3432; porcelain; 100 x 200 x 0,7; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Huacai / U96; porcelain; 100 x 200 x 0,7; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Shi Jian Workshop / GE303; porcelain; 85 x 200 x 0,7; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Peiyintang / #5495; porcelain; 102 x 201 x 0,9; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Peiyintang / #5109; porcelain; 67 x 196 x 0,8; 2021
- (Mac Guffin Series) Jinsheng / 960; porcelain, wooden crate; 88 x 198 x 0,8; 2021

### Series of textile works

- Fabulations, (work in progress); with Sanju Devi & the Sujanimahila Jeevan Foundation; hand-embroidered silk; dimensions variable; (2021-)

### Rooftop installation

- Ventilation System; aluminium modules, Inox frame aluminium; 407,5 x 354,5 x 150 cm; 2021

### Wall intervention

- Second Museum; work in-situ; 2021

### Sound piece

- Air Conditioning; sound installation; 60 min loop; 2021

### Drawings

- Storyboards, coal on paper; 13,5 x 20,8 cm; 2020 2021

## **Billboard print and wooden support**

- Namesake on a Motorbike; with Alexis Gautier; Inkjet Print on blue-back paper, Ericka Beckman projection screen; 457 x 300 cm; 2021

## **Tennis print**

- Namesake on a Court; with Alexis Gautier; Inkjet Print; various sizes; 2021

## **Tennis balls**

- Tennis ball; with Shen Runzhong & Shen Weixing; silk, tennis ball; 6,5 cm ø; 2021

## **Aluminium kites in the space**

- Kite; aluminium; 39 x 48 x 17 cm; 2021

## **Circular Table**

- The Monkey King; table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2016
- Sand Boat; table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2016
- Can you Count the Guavas?; table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2017
- Pulau Jengkerik; table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2017
- Nicholas' Dices; table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2020
- Untitled (2021); table, silk, monitors; video installation; 2021

## **Light boxes**

- Pick-up Point; silkscreen on cotton, wood; 150 x 120 x 14 cm; 2021

## **Tennis chair**

- Umpires Chair; purchased tennis; 2021

## **Series of pocket works**

- Pocket Work Series, (With Gunnar, Monique, Petra, Alex, Anny, Dirk, Elly, Elma, Flora, Greet, Hedwige, Huguette, Lieve, Louisa, Nicole, Rie, Yvan, Anaïs, Femke, Hanne, Judith, Katoo, Manon & Mariem); various media and sizes; 2021

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

M LEUVEN

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[info@mleuven.be](mailto:info@mleuven.be)

[www.mleuven.be](http://www.mleuven.be)

Plan your route to the museum

### **By bike**

Cyclists are very welcome. It is easy and safe to leave your bike in the bike park under Rector de Somerplein. From there, it is a two-minute walk to the museum.

### **By public transport**

The museum is ten minutes' walk from Leuven Station. If you come by bus, the nearest stop is Rector de Somerplein. Plot your route with Google Maps.

### **By car**

The new circulation plan leads you in different loops to Leuven and the car parks. Prefer to avoid city traffic? Then park your car in one of the peripheral car parks and take a free bus to the centre. Do you prefer to park nearby? Then there is parking Ladeuze, a two-minute walk from the museum. You will also find 18 places for disabled persons (height-limit: 1.90m). Click [here](#) for more information on the circulation plan and all parking options.

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<https://www.mleuven.be/en/alexis-gautier>

High resolution images can be downloaded at the bottom of this press page:

<https://mleuven.prezly.com/media>