



**PRESS
FICHE**

Mathieu Harel Vivier

Prendre coutume

EXPO 14.11.2019 > 12.01.2020

WED > SUN 10:30 > 18:00
Free entrance

CENTRALE
FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

box

Place Sainte-Catherine 44
1000 Brussels
www.centrale.brussels



CRP CENTRE
RÉGIONAL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE
HAUTS-DE-FRANCE



LEFRESNOY
STUDIO DES ARTS
NATIONAL CONTEMPORAINS

eAD ÉCOLE SUPÉRIEURE
D'ART ET DE DESIGN
DE VALENCIENNES

Mathieu Harel Vivier

Prendre coutume

EXPO 14.11.2019 > 12.01.2020
VERNISSAGE 13.11.2019
CONVERSATION WITH MATHIEU
HAREL VIVIER & STÉPHANIE MAHIEU
15.12.19, 15:00

Laureate Watch this Space,
Contemporary art Biennale of the 50°
Nord network

Mathieu Harel Vivier is interested by New Caledonia as a territory crossed by flows. Due to its situation in the Coral Sea and in the South Pacific Ocean, its mining operations, cultural crossbreeding and its customs, each portion of the Caledonian landscape is organised around flows that regulate numerous activities and build a singular landscape. Whether sea movements, the arrival of ore carriers or transportation of the latter, the entire stake of the artist's researches resides in the displacement of the uses of the Kanak custom towards a reflection on the deployment of images in space. Mixing photographs, sculpture, sound recordings, videos and archives, two facets of this reflection are presented at CENTRALE.box and the Espace 36 in France.

With the support of Fresnoy - National Studio of Contemporary Arts, Tourcoing (FR)



Textura, 2019 © Mathieu Harel Vivier



Au loin l'embouchure de Yaté, 2019 © Mathieu Harel Vivier



Les danseurs, 2019 (Nouvelle-Calédonie) © Mathieu Harel Vivier



La Pierre aux échanges, 2019 © Mathieu Harel Vivier.



Les danseurs, 2019 (Nouvelle-Calédonie) © Mathieu Harel Vivier



Sans titre, 2019 © Mathieu Harel Vivier



Sur la photo Jacques Vivier, Tromel des mines Bornet à Thio, 2019 © Mathieu Harel Vivier

Interview

Mathieu Harel Vivier

By Laura Pleuger and Estelle Vandeweeghe
CENTRALE for contemporary art
August 2019

How did you get to CENTRALE.box?

I heard about CENTRALE, particularly the *Private choices* exhibition, when I arrived in Valenciennes to teach at the École supérieure d'Art et de Design. Moreover, through my application to the 10th edition of the *Watch this space biennial* organised by cross-border contemporary art network 50° nord, I was selected by the CRP / Centre régional de la photographie Hauts-de-France at Douchy-les-Mines, by Brussels' CENTRALE for contemporary arts and by Saint-Omer's Espace 36 to be supported to the realisation of two exhibition projects: one at CENTRALE.box and the other at espace 36 (France).

Tell us about your path.

As a lecturer in graphic arts at the photography department of the University of Vincennes in Saint-Denis (Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis or Université de Vincennes à Saint-Denis), I develop an artistic practice that merges photographs, texts, videos and objects presented as installations. Artistically speaking, I was born at Rennes' Université 2 Art & Essai gallery. My interest surfaced through the confrontation with the works of such artists as John M. Armleder, Richard Fauguet, Martha Rosler, Olivier Mosset, Victor Burgin, Christian Marclay and with other artists through my activities as an assistant and exhibitions' photographer. In the same way as Deleuze understands it in his dialogues with Claire Parent, I have encounters with people that can durably mark an existing dialogue, but more particularly with an object, an image, an event, a text that gives me an idea. My artistic work systematically focuses on

the organic qualities of images. My work concerns the life of images in the sense of Gombrich in the preface of his book *L'Écologie des images*, where he suggests an analogy between the ecology of living beings and the social context of images.

Stirred by the concept of placement that lies at the heart of my researches for my thesis – because it allows reflecting on the right functioning of relations to establish between images – what preoccupies me most today is the experience of movement, which is essential in my artistic, theoretical and educational researches. The issue of movement of a subject or event observed or on which one has investigated in the field of art, the issue of fieldwork and its inscription in history are some of the many matters that specifically preoccupy me when I think about an exhibition project.

Could you tell us a little bit about the title of your show: *Prendre coutume*?

One the one hand – without any precision – a custom is a habit, a means for most people to confront one another in a social group. On the other hand, chronologically in my personal history, the choice of this title for the exhibitions at CENTRALE.box and at Espace 36 ensues the former, *Prendre position* – which is the name of a research and creative workshop aimed at art school students that I coordinated.

Prendre coutume is a proposition made to spectators, to whom I give the opportunity to take a habit in the exhibition, in other words to take their time, to come back, to make a habit out of it in order to access its various reading levels.

Choosing the title *Prendre coutume* means immediately posing the paradox of the term "coutume" (custom). For the Kanak – and contrary to its use in the French language – this term designates the indispensable passport to understand their culture. The *coutume* (custom) is

a set of rules and rituals applied by the clans regrouped around the hierarchical authority of the chiefdom. We then speak of “making the custom”, which consists of completing a range of actions to enter the Kanak world. It is engaging in a specific relationship with one or more individuals at a given moment and place. The customary gesture (*geste coutumier*) is a mark of attention and respect to conclude an agreement, to make a request. It is knowing oneself and recognising one another.

The great moments in life – birth, bereavement, marriage – result in get-togethers that can regroup several hundred individuals. On this occasion, the *coutumier* officials make long speeches, recite their genealogy and tell their history. In addition to ancient rituals, the practices of *coutume* progressively broadened and today, encompass the Melanesian art of life as a whole, i.e., a system of social relations where respect, humility, the power of speech and exchange gesture are fundamental values.

Traditionally, the *coutumier* gesture is not revealed and is reserved to the Kanak. It is carried out in the absence of women, but, with the evolution of society, is today practised more commonly, particularly when visiting another Kanak tribe or one’s family. In this case, it is known as the “*coutume d’accueil*” (welcoming custom), which can be followed with the “*coutume du retour*” (return custom) on departure. It consists of a symbolic gesture during which one must take at least one piece of printed cloth known as “*manou*” along with a 500 or 1000 CPP franc note. Then, in front of the man or custom authority of the tribe, one must place the gift on the table or on the ground outside, utter a few words explaining the reasons of the visit while lowering one’s head in a sign of respect and humility. The *coutume* official then utters a few words of greeting without being interrupted, places his hand on your gift as an acceptance of the

“*geste coutumier*”. You are welcomed!

Why this interest for New Caledonia? And how did it evolve into an artistic approach?

As far as I can remember, I have always wanted to travel to New Caledonia. My mother and two of my uncles were born there and when they returned to mainland France, they corresponded with the children of a family of Caledonia friends of my grandparents. My mother went back there in the nineties. My uncle lived there for several years with his family after the death of my grandfather. And while my brother and cousin decided to move there two years ago, I focused my interest on the territory even more, albeit from afar.

In a first while, I examined the personal event – a grandfather who lived there from 1949 to 1962, worked on several mining sites and lived very close to the Kanak universe – as a political fact to weave ties between the tales of a few people living in the country’s cities or in their tribes, and a corpus of images capable of enlightening the stories and photographs found in the family archives, which all contributed to sharpen my interest for the “rock” (le Caillou).

Besides, for me, New Caledonia has always been linked to art. I always went to Caledonia through the means of objects that made up the art pieces that I studied. Maps, drawings, photographs, sculptures and paintings hanging on a wall or unpacked by my grandfather were the vehicles through which my imagination was built. Finally, it is also with the recollection of Aby Warburg’s approach as she visited the Hopi Indians that I went on my first journey to New Caledonia in July-August 2018. “In the eyes of Warburg, writes Philippe-Alain Michaud, the journey to New Mexico is not a simple movement in the order of knowledges, it is also a parabola of the tearing away from melancholia. By trying to substitute ‘a more physical activity’ to the study of art works and texts, Warburg alters the

very exercise of her discipline, giving her research a practical meaning that is unusual in the history of art¹”.

“Custom cannot be owned, it is done, it presents itself, stating or lodging itself in such a way that every gesture, every word constitutes a custom, a ceremonial action of exchange²”. This quote often appears in the texts accompanying your works. Would you like to achieve this ceremonial exchange through your artistic work? Transmit a heritage? What message do you want to convey to visitors?

This quote describing every action of the Kanak culture boasts a value of conceptual protocol that I find fascinating in terms of the transmission and placement of the works in the exhibition space.

The space of the table inside or the space delineated on the ground by the cloth on which the custom gifts are placed alludes to these “receptive surfaces on which one can spread out objects, enter data, receive, print, carry forward an information, in coherence and confusion³” described by historian Leo Steinberg⁴.

In the series entitled *Textura*, which is currently made up of 5 pigmentary prints on Canvas paper mounted on the roller of a stand used for photographic backdrops, an artwork representing a floor is reproduced to accommodate other, smaller images kept in place with small magnets. Images pile up like the gifts on the *manou* during mourning or marriage ceremonies. Aesthetically speaking, these large coiled-up images suggesting the mobility of images are characterized by a very dense effect of weft and the regularity or texture produced by vertical, horizontal barrels, whence the title of this series, which directly refers to a manuscript or Gothic style of writing adapted by Gutenberg to compose the text of the first European typographic book. For Steinberg, “the moving from vertical to horizontal expresses the most radical

change in the ‘subject’ of art. It is the moving from nature to culture⁵. ”

It is, therefore, not the ceremonial character of the process that interests me, but rather, the succession of operations put at work to *make custom*.

Moreover, by giving room to the testimony of Raymond Bonnenfant, a sculptor and copyist of Kanak objects, the short film presented in the exhibition delivers an implicit message that is particularly close to my heart. Kanak money has nothing to do with money as it is perceived in the western world; its value is symbolic, not monetary. Many suggest that money appeared in Kanak culture with colonisation, supplementing or even replacing the Kanak currency.

Finally, the testimonies that appear in the film nuance the experience of a life spent on Caledonia territory. I was curious to find out how it was possible to get as far away from the sea when you live on an island. I wanted to restore the quality of a tale where the events recalled are whispered to preserve their part of mystery. Although the first testimony challenges the decisions of acquisition and preservation of Kanak objects in museums, the second comes back to the events surrounding an important event in today’s New Caledonia: the tragic and unresolved disappearance of Eymard Bouanaoué, Mayor of Belep, whose body was carried by boat to reach his final resting place.

Your work blends photographs, sculptures, 3D modeling, sound recordings, videos and archives. What is your relationship with these various media?

The photographic experience is foreseen as the starting point of the artistic process. Very often, I access other medium to build my installations through photography. For example, the sculpture presented at CENTRALE.box is a creation of volume of the rock that appears in a

photograph of the family archives. The combined presentation of two elements – photography and sculpture – composes the installation *La Pierre aux échanges*.

How do you think you will integrate your universe to that of CENTRALE.box?

The space at CENTRALE.box is a white cube, a neutral space capable of hosting an artistic proposition. It is not necessary to establish a dialogue with a location freed from all contextual assignation. Based on this observation and the architectural specificities of the exhibition space, the artistic proposition is deployed according to the progression of visitors who enjoy a viewpoint from the entrance before seeing the exhibition space open up before them on the left. This is why the most talkative element – the film – is presented at the back of the space, at a distance from the entrance for a better experience and to allow spectators to make a first reading of the works presented upstream without immediately associating the film commentary.

Tell us about a piece that you particularly like in the exhibition?

The installation called *La Pierre aux échanges* consists of the reproduction of a black and white archive photograph hanging on the wall near a 1/1 sculpture of the stone installed in front of the sheet metal cabin where my grandfather lived during the first years that followed his move to New Caledonia. When he was younger, my grandfather told me that this stone witnessed his first exchanges with the Kanak from the nearby tribes. My grandfather was an apnoea fisherman, and he used to place the fishes or shells he had caught on the stone. On several occasions, these were exchanged for meat, fruit and vegetables. Without exchanging a single word in a first while, the custom was probably already at work!

¹ Philippe-Alain MICHAUD, *Aby Warburg et l'image en mouvement*, Paris, Macula, 1998, p. 176.

² Remarks by Sylvie Béaud-Kobayashi, an associate researcher at the French Institute of Research on Japan at Tokyo's French-Japanese house and moderator of the encounter entitled "New Caledonia at the heart of its own history", between Alban Bensa, anthropologist at Paris' EHESS à Paris and photographer Sébastien Lebègue, Maison franco-japonaise, Tokyo, 7 June 2016.

³ Leo STEINBERG, "Other Criteria", in Claude GINTZ (dir. And translated), *Regards sur l'art américain des années soixante*, anthologie critique, Paris, Territoires, 1979, p. 46.

⁴ Leo Steinberg's remarks are uttered for the very first time in 1968 during a conference at New-York's MOMA

⁵ Leo STEINBERG, « Other Criteria », *op. cit.*, p. 46.

ARTISTIC CAREER

WEBSITE

<http://www.mathieuhv.fr/>

2019

Help with post-production (calibration), film *Prendre coutume* with Juliette Barrat, Director of Photography and Maxime Cointement, editor, help for external projects, **Le Fresnoy, Studio national des arts contemporains**, Tourcoing (FR)

Laureate of the North Euregion biennial *Watch This Space*, organized by 50 ° Nord, a cross-border network of contemporary art, with the help of the **Centre Régional de la photographie Hauts-de-France** in Douchy-les-Mines around the exhibition projects presented at **CENTRALE for contemporary art**, Brussels and at **Espace 36, association d'art contemporain** in Saint-Omer in November and December 2019.

2018

Laureate of the Nickels de l'initiative, Société Le Nickel, SLN, Noumea, New Caledonia

Selection

Personal, duo and group exhibitions

2018

(group exhibition) *Les Ambassadeurs, Portrait et identité*, Rennes. Curator: D. Spiteri invited by Phakt, Colombier Cultural Center for Frac Bretagne and General Direction Culture, Rennes

2016

(group exhibition) *Enquiry in my own room, Hôtel Pasteur*, Rennes. Curators: V. de la Cruz Lichet and M. Tkindt-Naumann

2013

(duo exhibition) *Rise & Fall, Ateliers portes ouvertes*, Rennes

(group exhibition) *System of down*,

Espace cinko - cutlog club, Paris, on a proposal of the label Hypothesis at the invitation of Mains d'Œuvres

(group exhibition) *Collection*, Orangerie

du Thabor, Rennes. Curator: P. Ferreira, General Director of the Culture department, City of Rennes

2012

(duo exhibition) *LZ 129, Schaufenster*, Séléstat. Curators: A. Stouvenel and Schaufenster

2011

(group exhibition) *Ville dessinée, ville rêvée, Biennale*, Romainville. Curator: B. Le Pimpec

(duo exhibition) *Subduction, WE-project*, Brussels. Curators: F. Rans and Santitre 2006 : N. de Ribou, C. Migraine, M. Guyon

2010

À la lumière, galerie Sintitulo, Mougins. Curator: C. Migraine

Publications

2013

C'est dans la boîte, Frac Bretagne, 300 ex. ISBN : 978-2-906127-43-2, leporello.

2011

ISBN : 978-2-906890-07-7, edition *La Criée, centre d'art contemporain*, texts of J. Dupeyrat and A. Pennachio, graphic design B. Böhnké, 400 copies, 80 p.

2019

Lecturer in visual arts, photography department, photography and contemporary art course, UFR Arts, Philosophy and Esthetics, member of the research laboratory (EA4010) Arts des images et art contemporain (AIAC) and the EPHA team, Aesthetics, practice and history of the arts University Paris VIII - Vincennes Saint-Denis



CENTRALE

FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

box

Many artists and creators present their latest pieces at CENTRALE in parallel to large exhibitions. They are usually laureates of various prizes (Médiatine/ ArtContest/Watch this space) or were invited by a confirmed artist.

CENTRALE CONTACTS

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NOTES

