

Cyprien Gaillard

Beton Belvedere

exhibition notes

A *Real Remnants of Fictive Wars (Part V), 2005*

35mm, 7 minutes looped

Courtesy of the artist and Laura Bartlett Gallery, London

This work is one of five films in which the Cyprien Gaillard and his collaborators set off fire extinguishers while hidden in the landscape. Slowed to enhance its unreal quality – shot at 32 frames per second on 35mm film – the films reveal an almost painterly sensibility. In each work, the smoke from the fire extinguishers conceals and then reveals an aspect of the landscape. In this film, the grey smoke hides the tree and – as the smoke settles – renders it in a grisaille effect, in stark contrast to the green of the surrounding forest. The idea for the film first came from Gaillard's own photographs of cypress trees, whose form resembles that of an explosion. His choice of 35mm film is not simply for the image quality that it provides, but because the medium embodies the notion of entropy that is so central to his work – the more the work is shown, the faster it fades away.

B *Field of Rest series, 2008-2009*

All Polaroids, 9 x 7 cm (framed: 40 x 52cm)

Courtesy of the artist and Laura Bartlett Gallery, London

[from left to right]

Field of Rest (Kent), 2009

Field of Rest (Giza), 2009

Field of Rest (Flaine), 2009

Field of Rest (Baltimore 2), 2008

Field of Rest (Brandsbutt), 2008

Field of Rest (Umpqua), 2008

Field of Rest (Sanjhi), 2009

Field of Rest (Esna), 2008

Field of Rest (Corviale), 2008

Field of Rest (Sighthill Standing Stones), 2008

Field of Rest (Baltimore 1), 2008

This sequence of photographs – four of which are presented here for the first time – are the product of Gaillard's increasingly itinerant practice. Keen to escape the restraints of the studio, he works predominantly outside and collects his images and inspiration while travelling the globe. His subjects are the abandoned graveyards of shrinking cities; the juxtaposition of massive engineering projects with crumbling, vernacular constructions; the meeting of the extraordinary with the mundane; the scenes we see when we look just to one side of the usual tourist attraction. He chooses the medium of Polaroid photography for its economy of means, for its immediacy and the independence it allows him. He also likes the fact that Polaroid film fades quickly and is hard to conserve. To distance the work from the documentary function of photography, he shoots at a 45-degree angle and frames the image in a multi-layered mount, presenting it with museum-like precision, as if it was the result of an excavation.

C *La grande allée du Château de Oiron, 2008*

C-print mounted to diasec, 170 x 211 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Cosmic Galerie, Paris

Covering the original path, a mixture of crushed concrete, wood, plastic and glass leads to the Renaissance Château of Oiron, France. This carpet of materials was previously a tower block in the Parisian suburb Issy-les-Moulineaux. Gaillard had it shipped from the demolition site to this Château, where it infiltrated one of the traditional elements of a formal French garden, the gravel or chalk path (which are also used in French cemeteries). This work – at once spectacular and discreet – evokes commemorative monuments and the actions of Land Art. It becomes an act of mourning for a particular type of modernist architecture – the tower block – and the social utopia it embodied. The scale of the image, the decision to print and frame it in this way are also conscious decisions to evoke the work of contemporary German photographers such as Thomas Ruff or Andreas Gursky.

D *View over Sighthill Cemetery, 2008*

C-print mounted to diasec, 211 x 170 cm

Courtesy of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

This photograph – taken moments before the demolition of this building – transforms an unwanted piece of architecture into an iconic image. Until recently, this tower-block stood in a suburb of Glasgow, a city which is currently undergoing rapid redevelopment in advance of its hosting of the Commonwealth Games in 2014. Gaillard questions how in the future we will be able to understand the modernist era, when most of its architecture is being destroyed, an action that he describes as “state vandalism”. Yet Gaillard's instinct for preservation is juxtaposed with a desire to let nature take its course, to let buildings fall apart. “Once buildings are half-ruined, they gain a picturesque quality”, he says. “They no longer belong to their former inhabitants or to the architects who created them, but instead become an almost organic part of the landscape”.

E **Belief in The Age of Disbelief series, 2005**

Etchings, various dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Laura Bartlett Gallery, London

[from left to right]

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (Les Quatre Arbres/Etape VIII), 18 x 20 cm

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (Paysage Aux Trois Tours), 17 x 23 cm

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (L'Arbre Incline), 18 x 20 cm

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (Banja Luca), 18 x 20 cm

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (Les Deux Chemins au Ruisseau/Etape VIII), 17 x 25 cm

Belief in The Age of Disbelief (Haarlem), 9 x 15 cm

When asked about the recurrence of modernist tower blocks in his work, Gaillard stated: "What interests me is not so much the architecture as the landscapes they generate". These post-war structures, once a symbol of utopian promise, have now become synonymous with social conflict and urban decay. Gaillard sees tower blocks as modern-day fortresses, violent impositions on the landscape that are seemingly impervious to the individual. In this series *Belief in the Age of Disbelief*, he introduced 20th century tower blocks into 17th century Dutch landscape etchings. Autonomous works in themselves, they also sketch out one of Gaillard's dream projects: to create a "parc aux ruines", a sculpture park on truly massive scale, where unwanted tower blocks can be preserved for posterity.

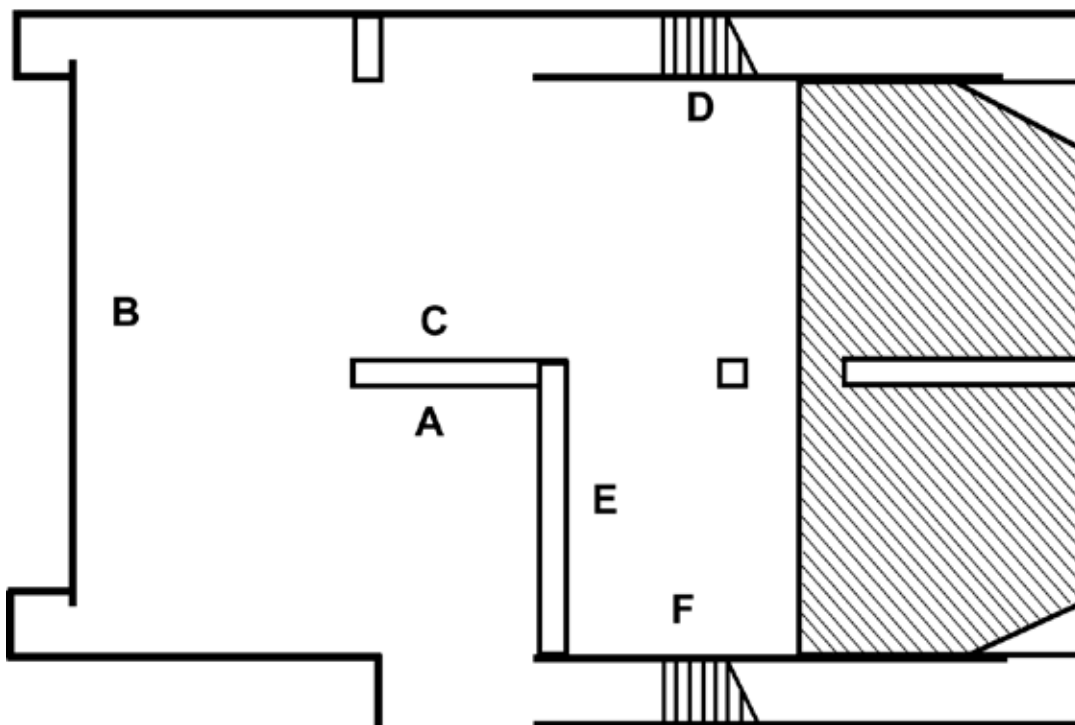
F **The New Picturesque, 2007-2009**

Various dimensions, found postcards and paper

Courtesy of the artist and Cosmic Galerie, Paris

Picturesque meaning literally "fit to be made into a picture" was used as early as 1703 and derived from the Italian term *pittresco*, meaning, "in the manner of a painter." It developed in the 1770s-1790s as an aesthetic ideal, in both painting and landscape gardening, leading to the 'picturesque theory' that designed landscapes should be composed like landscape paintings, and feature pleasing architectural elements, often ruined or in a state of poetic disrepair. In *The New Picturesque*, an ongoing series of postcards that Gaillard adapts by hiding much of the subject with torn paper, he 'ruins' the images in order to make them interesting, to render them truly picturesque. A link can be seen between this work and his film *Real Remnants of Fictive Wars V*, in which an element of the landscape is temporarily obliterated from view by a white form, and also with the *Field of Rest* series, in which our attention is drawn away from the 'main attraction' to look at what is happening elsewhere.

Floorplan groundfloor



Giambattista Piranesi (b. 1720, Venice – d. 1778, Rome)

As a counterpart to Gaillard's work, a sequence of etchings by the Italian master Piranesi is shown – on loan from the collection of the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. These works locate Gaillard's very contemporary practice within the art historical tradition of landscape, whilst also revealing the ongoing artistic fascination with archaeology and shifting notions of the picturesque.

In her essay 'Displeasure of ruins: Piranesi and the monuments of ancient Rome'¹, Lola Kantor-Kazovsky writes: "The 'pleasure of ruins' [...] entered French aesthetic discourse in the middle of the 18th century. 'Ruine' was defined thus in the Encyclopedie in 1765: 'decadence; chute, destruction ... les ruines sont belles a peindre,' and Diderot's famous ruin discourse in the Salon of 1767 contains the edict: 'To make a palace an object of interest one must destroy it.'

Kantor-Kazovsky argues that Piranesi did not take pleasure in contemplating ruins. She argues that 18th-century art and literature poeticised ruins in a way entirely alien to Piranesi: "A play of imagination that takes decay as its starting point is diametrically opposed to what he intended. Although Piranesi was a prolific writer, he never discusses this concept. It seems that he had no notion of the aesthetic potential of the ruined state of monuments, and [...] he used the word 'ruin' only in a professional – and rather negative – sense, when referring to defects in construction and the mistakes of bad architects. [...] When discussing ancient monuments, he preferred the word *avanzi* ('remains'), emphasising their endurance and not their slow effacement." She explains this "aesthetic indifference to the ruined state of the monuments" by Piranesi's fascination with the question of construction: "he liked to determine precisely how stability was achieved, which is in complete opposition to the 'poetique des ruines'."

As she points out, the Roman suburbs in Piranesi's engravings are never idyllic. Instead, the classical structures are fractured, splintered, defaced, and at times wholly unpleasant. Whereas his successors – such as Hubert Robert – preferred to depict their ruined temples and palaces in a bucolic landscape, Piranesi's ruins are shown in the disturbing context of modern life. He repeatedly stressed that his beloved monuments could never have fallen merely because of the ravages of time. They were built to last. 'It is clear', he wrote, 'that they perished more from the injuries of people or fortune, than because of the ignorance of their builders or lack of strength of their structure.' Just as the ruins of Rome aroused Piranesi's indignation – rather than inspire an aesthetic admiration or melancholic reverie – so does the destruction of modernist architecture anger Cyprien Gaillard.

¹ In *Apollo*, Sept, 2007, by Lola Kantor-Kazovsky, available on: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PAL/is_546_166/ai_n1952017

Vedute di Roma

Etchings included in the exhibition, courtesy of the Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten:

1. Veduta degli avanzi superiori delle Terme di Diocleziano, 1774, 460 x 695 mm

[View of the remains of the baths of Diocletian]

2. Rovine delle Terme Antoniniane, c.1760, 420 x 690 mm

[Ruins of the Antonine baths]

3. Avanzi del Tempio del Dio Canopo nella Villa Adriana in Tivoli, 1768, 445 x 580 mm

[Remains of the temple of Canopus at Hadrian's villa in Tivoli]

4. Veduta del Tempio ottangolare di Minerva Medica, 1764, 460 x 700 mm

[View of the octagonal temple of Minerva Medica]

5. Frontespizio: Capriccio di rovine con statua di Minerva, 1748, 495 x 630 mm

[Frontispiece: Fantasy of ruins with a statue of Minerva]

6. Piramide di Caio Cestio, c.1760, 550 X 760 mm

[Pyramid of Cestius]

7. Tempio antico volgarmente detto della Salute, su la Via d'Albano, cinque miglia lontan da Roma, c.1760, 550 X 760 mm

[Antique temple commonly known as called Della Salute, on the Via d'Albano, five miles from Rome]

8. Tempio di Giove Tonante, c.1760, 550 x 760 mm

[Temple of Giove Tonante]

Floorplan basement

