

Marie Voignier
selection of works (2009-2017)

Tinselwood, 2017

2K film 82 min.

Production Les Films du Bilboquet & Bonjour Cinéma



The tropical forest extends over the whole southeastern part of Cameroon and isolates it from the rest of the country. Both impressive and oppressive, this forest is part and parcel of every existence as well as the beating heart of the economy of the region. Not only is it the main resource for its inhabitants (cocoa plantations, farming, hunting), but it also constitutes a much-coveted reserve of wealth (wood, gold, mercury, diamond). The forest has also a history of its own: it provided a shelter to those who sought to flee from the various forms of oppression, slavery in the 19th Century, forced labor and colonial repression in the 20th Century; it was also a battlefield where German and French troops fought during World War I.

Tinselwood is a film on the inhabitants of the region today. Keeping away from any kind of “exotic” representation, Tinselwood tries to catch the human presence in its territorial and historical embeddedness. As such, the jungle appears as an intricate junction where promises of prosperity fuse with the scars that history inscribed in the minds and in the landscape – colonial scars, invisible scars marked by an absence: what was not done, what was not said, what was expropriated. Hence the narrative element in Tinselwood gives way to a dialogue between heterogeneous temporalities and dimensions, resulting in an intricate canvas where memory and imagination, actions and beliefs intertwine.



La Piste rouge

Colonisation, travail forcé et sorcellerie dans le sud-est camerounais

2017, book, introduced by Catherine Coquery-Vodrovitch, Editions B42 and Marcelle Alix



Exhibition view, *Vert monument*, 2017, Marcelle Alix. Photo Aurélien Mole.



The shooting of her film *The Mokélé-Mbembé Hypothesis*, led Marie Voignier to Cameroon for the first time in 2010. She was then accompanying cryptozoologist Michel Ballot in a forest on the edge of a large river, on the footsteps of a fantastic animal. Encounters she made then made her conceive a new project taking an interest in landscape as monument. This is how she returned to eastern Cameroon in 2015, to meet the men and women whose path she'd crossed on her previous shoot. With the idea to better understand, this time, the region's past, which had seen conflicts opposing the German and French colonial powers before the national army fought rebels, but had also been an emblematic location for organized forced labor, first in German concessions, then by the French companies, lasting until after World War II. For her research, she conducted a series of interviews which have been gathered in the book *La Piste rouge* (ed. B42), on display in the reading room set up for the exhibition.

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Le Sud-Est du Cameroun, région enclavée et principalement composée de forêts tropicales, a été le théâtre d'une exploitation forcée de la main-d'oeuvre locale organisée par les grandes compagnies et l'État colonial français. Alors que les populations sont envoyées de force à la récolte du caoutchouc, au portage ou encore à la construction de pistes indispensables à l'exploitation des ressources naturelles de la région, les

députés et sénateurs discutent longuement en France d'un Code du travail des populations d'outre-mer.

En rassemblant des entretiens menés avec des habitants de la région et des extraits des débats parlementaires de l'époque, Marie Voignier prend le pouls de cette histoire aujourd'hui oubliée. Les entretiens, fidèlement retranscrits, rendent compte des événements tels qu'ils sont transmis au niveau local ; de récits traversés par la mémoire de l'arrivée des Allemands puis des Français, du travail forcé, de la sorcellerie et de l'évangélisation, des maquisards indépendantistes de l'UPC dans les années 1960. En créant les conditions d'existence d'un dialogue impossible entre deux paroles, Marie Voignier rend sa dimension politique à la forme de l'écriture face à l'histoire officielle.

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International Tourism, 2014

Tourisme International

HD film 48 min.

Production Bonjour Cinéma & CAC Bretigny Contemporary art center



How does a dictatorship exhibit itself to the tourists visiting it? What kind of narration, actors, and staging does it summon? *International Tourism* has been shot as a recording of a show on the scale of a whole country, North Korea. Museums, painters' studios, cinema production houses, or a chemical factory are presented to us by North Korean guides whose voices we never hear - for the film has been completely dubbed in at the editing stage in order to create anew a sonorous universe completely disconnected from the official discourses: all sounds have been rerecorded in order to restore the density of spaces, the murmur of tourists, the gestures of the guides, with the exception of the voices. The guides do speak, but we never hear them, and paradoxically, this muteness reveals in a better, enfolded way the coercion of the regime on the spaces and the bodies.

The journey is interspersed with title cards, in which we learn that the President himself is concerned with every detail, that painting seems to replace photography, that all movies are overdubbed for fear of any excess. The film questions the way the nation fabricates its images, between politics, mythology and imagination. Amidst this confrontation between the images of power and the gaze of tourists, we perceive the silent choreography of the touristic guides - those rigid but gracious actors of a country in perpetual self-representation.



Ένα ένα (one by one)

Vassilis Salpistis & Marie Voignier

Video HD, 15 min.

Production Bonjour Cinéma & Art Professionals-In-Athens Residency, 2014-2015



“One by one” is a fifteen minutes experimental film-collage, which is composed by a number of testimonies and texts relating to historical events and crisis in Greece. The assemblage converges the exploration of contemporary applications of the function of myth. To a great extent consisting of filmed photographs, even when in motion the images of the film suggest the stillness of a stable shot. Via juxtaposition in the form of an atlas of representations, diverge and at the same time literal, the images shift the narrative to the direction of visual essay.



Standing Still, 2013

Les Immobiles

HD film and 3 ink-jet prints with pasted colour paper
film: 14 min 37 / prints: 3 x (76 x 46,6 cm)





“In your film *Standing Still*, the myth of the white colonist finds its most destructive embodiment: the hunting guide. Hesitating in between a spontaneous violence and its religious imitations, he utters the most economical remarks about death images that assess the game of violence and culture. A (sacralized) game that is lost to a sacrificing vestige to unite women’s and men’s hearts in an arbitrary and violent resolution.”

Cecilia Becanovic. Press release *Les Chasseurs*.



Exhibition view, *Les Chasseurs*, Marcelle Alix Paris, 2013.



Les Immobiles, 2013 HD film and 3 ink-jet prints with pasted colour paper
 film: 14 min 37 / prints: 3 x (76 x 46,6 cm)



The Land was already occupied (the future), 2012

Le terrain était déjà occupé (le futur)

HD video 17 min

Production Biennale de Rennes (cur. Anne Bonnin)

For the Ateliers de Rennes 2012, and in keeping with the spirit of Les Prairies, Marie Voignier has put herself in a real-life situation, that of looking at a building plot and investigating the different ways of approaching construction on it. A surveyor, a town-planner and a landscape architect take it in turns to express their vision and to explain their activity, and in doing so give the lie to the perception of the plot as a mere expanse of terrain. For this video Marie Voignier drew inspiration from the television documentaries about architecture that Eric Rohmer made with Jean-Paul Pigeat in the 1970s. These films, incidentally, were an essential source for this curator in creating the artistic project of Les Prairies. Forty years on, there has been a noticeable change in attitudes towards unbuilt-on land, whether it is meadow, field or wasteland. One is unlikely now to see someone stand in front of a huge field and say, as one of the architects in the Rohmer film does, “Look, there, there is nothing”. The beholder can reappraise his or her perception of built reality.

Anne Bonnin



Exhibition view, Les Chasseurs, Marcelle Alix Paris, 2013.



Exhibition view, *Les Chasseurs*, Marcelle Alix Paris, 2013.

The Mokele-Mbembe Hypothesis, 2011

HD film 78 min.

Production capricci & Centre d'art contemporain Espace Croisé, Roubaix.

The Hypothesis of the Mokélé-Mbembé carries us far from Europe towards other territories, to south-eastern Cameroon, and towards other areas of History. There, for several years, the explorer Michel Ballot has meticulously mapped out the jungle and the muddy riverbanks in search of a mysterious animal hitherto unknown to zoologists: the “Mokélé-Mbembé”, a prehistoric hybrid of rhinoceros, crocodile, snake and dinosaur. Is it a real animal or a mythological beast? Ballot investigates continuously, questioning the Pygmies, contriving to install a camera to film the river and its eddies during his absence, seeking traces, trying to find clues, pondering out loud. But what credence can be given to the numerous testimonies gathered and what might be indicated by simple sketches that myriads of hands are willing to draw for him? From this obsessive quest the contours of a ghostly Africa are drawn in negative, more imaginary than real, an object of fantasy, a mental space made of silence, stamped with a colonial vision, discrete but insistent. Suddenly, prehistory is no longer so ancient but is recent history that a solitary passion attempts to track, and that the Pygmies play at holding a mirror up to each other in which their reflection is merely the vacillating figure of the desire of the Other.

Nicolas Féodoroff







Hearing the shape of a drum, 2010

HD video 17 min

Production 6. Berlin Biennial (cur. Kathrin Rhomberg) & Contemporary art center Bretigny (Pierre Bal-Blanc)

The reason why everyone is here is seen briefly once: Josef Fritzl, “the monster of Amstetten,” in the dock. Reporters from all over the world have gathered outside the district court in Sankt Pölten for his trial in March 2009. But the proceedings take place in camera. The only glimpse of the object of so much interest comes from archive material the artist films from a news team’s monitor in a double fracture of reality: the accused hiding his face behind a folder.

Maria Voignier’s film *Hearing the Shape of a Drum* explores the construction of a global media event that also participates in inventing its object. The entire arsenal of the image industry has been drawn up outside the law courts: cameras, tripods, microphones, spotlights, production trucks. The battle can begin anytime. But the enemy is in hiding. So the reporters have no alternative but to interview each other and film each other filming. The hysterical curiosity is thrown back on itself and the projections that fuel it. The journalists’ ever-renewed efforts at summoning up the profound banality of evil for the cameras have all the senselessness of Beckett’s theater of the absurd. The only person producing really significant images is the artist. She depicts a news industry treading water. (...) In *Hearing the Shape of a Drum* Voignier, who shares the journalists’ venue as well as their tools, also reflects the conditions of her own artistic practice: “Does not media critique equally apply to artists, especially when they make use of journalistic practices?” As artist she is a model example of the freelancer as created by the news economy. Under pressure of having to provide employers with material, the reporters evince a truly artistic inventiveness. It becomes clear they have the same everyday cares as their audience in front of their screens and that they are sometimes as much in the dark. But they must produce authoritative images. Even when nothing happens they must at least feign events, devising realities with the tools of fiction. Marie Voignier shows the absurd media theater that takes place backstage.

in catalogue 6th. Berlin biennial.



Exhibition view, Berlin biennial, 2010.



Exhibition view, Berlin biennial, 2010.

Hinterland, 2010

HD video 49 min.

Production capricci & CAC Bretigny, Contemporary art center (Pierre Bal-Blanc)

A few buildings in the middle of nowhere, then the camera delves deep into exotic, luxuriant vegetation. Here we are in Tropical Islands, a leisure complex near Krausnick, a village 70 kilometres south of Berlin on the site of a former Soviet airbase. In this spot, and moving from one affectation to another, the upheavals of the last century pile up like so much sediment. – Europe's scars and contradictions, its mental space, its dreams and illusions. In this Hinterland, indicated in the title (which geographers would define as an area of economic development linked with the activity of a port), Marie Voignier unravels the currents of history – the location director : the village elders, as well as the newcomers to the village, like the young man who has come to try his luck and the sets of this cosseted universe with its makeshift huts and painted skies. Hovering over all of this and drawn on a white balloon which floats discretely overhead throughout the film, is a drawing based on a watercolour by Paul Klee painted in 1920 called *Angelus Novus*, with reference to a text by Benjamin, edited rapidly in 1940, which describes it as the angel of History with its face turned toward the past : « He wanted to linger on, awaken the dead and make whole what had been smashed. But there was a storm brewing in Paradise which had got caught in his wings, a wind so strong that the angel could no longer close them. This storm propelled him unstoppably into the future to which his back was turned, while the pile of debris before him grew skyward. This storm is what we call progress. » Making the angel the main focus of the set is a deliberate gesture on Marie Voignier's part which reflects the extent of her ambition – discreet and incisive, intuitive and articulate.

Nicolas Féodoroff in Catalogue of the International Film Festival, Marseille, France, 2009.





