

PRESS RELEASE

**MATHIEU MERCIER**

*Désillusions d'optique*

**26.05 - 19.08.2012**

**Press meeting:  
Friday 25 May at 4 pm**

**Opening:  
Friday 25 May at 6 pm**



Sans titre (vase / disque chromatique), 2011-2012. Vase, Plexiglas, water, sublimation on Corian, 120 x 60 x 60 cm. Photograph André Morin.

**The Fribourg Art Centre/Kunsthalle Freiburg, Fri Art, is pleased to announce its upcoming exhibition, “Désillusions d’optique”, Mathieu Mercier’s solo show.**

Mathieu Mercier’s works have a special quality which seems to have to do with their conspicuously static character: their stable presence within the exhibition seems to invite us, with a subtle emphasis, to consider their aesthetic value, their status, the probability of their function, and the cultural worlds which they refer to... In the evident relationship of otherness which they introduce, they naturally invite us to become aware of the exercise being enacted, or one which visitors are invited to become involved in, in a promised absence of interactivity.

So, in addition to being the title of this exhibition, the “optical disillusion” in question is a special *modus operandi* for reconsidering the objects, works and sign systems which they convey. This seemingly involves thwarting the habits of understanding and perception which govern the mode of relationship to the world and to works of art.

The exhibition is a manner of encounter which implicitly proposes sharing knowledge. The systems and arrangements are varied: among the figures experienced, we find the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*, dedicated to the world’s history and marvels; the diorama of natural history museums, the convention of the picture affixed to the wall, and the object on its stand. By extension, the life of objects in the real world, be it public place, private space, or commercial space, implies a type of existence which might be likened to this exhibition mode, if, that is, we do indeed want to show an availability for reconsidering these objects.

The exhibition's circuit plays ostensibly with manners of presentation. A first room proposes a hanging of the artist's old works, whose density conjures up a cabinet of curiosities. It is amusing to bear in mind that the term "curiosity" describes both a state of the subject and the nature of the object. Curiosity covers three attitudes: "Curiosus, cupidus, studiosus" (attention, desire, a passion for knowledge), and in it we will perhaps see a summary of what a relation to the works covers.

In a second room, a repetition of objects on stands is a sort of stereotypical, repetitive presentation of the display of objects. The "Sublimations" series combines immediately identifiable objects with a stand made of Corian and a diagram or a plan. The literal merger between the diagram and the stand, permitted by the technique of hot sublimation, the absence of manufacturing marks and brands, and the choice of the generic object for its "super-ordinary" quality which leaves no doubt about its identification, clearly pinpoint the artist's desire to reconsider the existence of objects but also that of signs and allegories.

Commenting on the recent series of "Scanners", Mathieu Mercier emphasizes that what holds his attention is, in contrast with photography, the absence of viewpoint offered by the scanner. Like the "Sublimations", the objects (here, commonplaces of art history like flowers and the monochrome) are juxtaposed with measuring systems and devices, and the image produced by the scanner is a mixture of objectivity and romanticism.

If Mathieu Mercier's work might be characterized by an aesthetic imbued with minimalism, the presence of the living occupies a special place in it. The figure of the Homunculus, which deforms and reinstates the proportions of the human body in accordance with the sensitive capacity of the different zones, like the use of animals in aquaria (*Holothurie*, 2000), seems to open up an unusual path in the reading of Mathieu Mercier's oeuvre.

Here the terrarium-cum-display case, which houses a pair of axolotls, presents--using a hybrid arrangement somewhere between zoo and museum--these extraordinary creatures, whose translucent pink colour betrays their permanent larval state. The empathy with the living gives rise to many possible ways of interpreting this piece, by bolstering its metaphorical scope; what is more, the singular capacity of these animals to regenerate their organs and numerous forms of tissue seems to point to the very notion of evolution and environmental adaptation. The different movements of art towards life—and more or less glorious returns—have often been commented upon in relation to Mathieu Mercier's work. The presence of this "larval infinity", and the enigmas which it gives rise to in relation to its evolution, are thus anything but insignificant.

The circuit is wound up by a gesture, involving a simple white cylinder set on a small black table, like a mental image, wavering between the blackboard/chalk pair of the scientific and academic demonstration, and the magic wand placed in the half-light. An image with many meanings which seems to remind us that the fact of designating might, in the exhibition venue, have to do with the fact of re-enchanting.



CENTRE D'ART DE FRIBOURG  
KUNSTHALLE FREIBURG

**Mathieu Mercier** was born in 1970 in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, in France. A graduate of the *École nationale supérieure d'art* in Bourges (1994) and of the *Institut des hautes études en arts plastiques* in Paris (1997), he lives and works in Paris.

His work has been shown in many institutions, recently, in particular, in the solo shows *Sublimations*, Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine (2011), *A Quarter to Three*, Skulpturi, Copenhagen (2011), and *Sans titres*, 1993-2007, Kunsthalle Nürnberg, Nuremberg (2008) and at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2007), and in the group shows *Carte blanche à John M. Armleder*, *All of the above*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2011), *French Window: Looking at Contemporary Art through the Marcel Duchamp Prize*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2011), *Seconde Main*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2010), *Ganz konkret*, Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2010), *just what it is... 100 Jahre Kunst der Moderne aus privaten Sammlungen in Baden-Württemberg*, ZKM Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe (2009), *Portrait de l'artiste en motocycliste*, Le Magasin – CNAC, Grenoble (2009), *Less is Less, More is More, That's All*, CAPC – Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2008), and *Airs de Paris*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2007).

## DIARY

### GUIDED TOURS

Thursday 21 June at 6 pm

Thursday 16 August at 6 pm

Admission free, by appointment for groups and school parties

### VISITS DESIGNED FOR TEACHERS

Tuesday 29 May at 5 pm

By registration at [publics@fri-art.ch](mailto:publics@fri-art.ch)

## CONTACT PRESSE

**Marc Zandrini**

[marc.zandrini@fri-art.ch](mailto:marc.zandrini@fri-art.ch)

and +41(0) 26 323 23 51

Press kit and visuals on request

## INFORMATION

### OPENING TIMES

From Wednesday to Friday 12-6 pm

Saturday and Sunday 2-5 pm

Late opening and admission free on Thursdays 6-8 pm

Guided tours by appointment

### ADMISSION FEES

Full fee: 6 CHF

Reduced fee: 3 CHF, those under 18, students, seniors and unemployed persons

Admission free for Friends of the Art Centre, children under 12, Passeport Musées Suisses, Carte Culture, artists.

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