

Cyprien Gaillard: Cosmic Galerie

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Perhaps you remember those T-shirts printed to look like the kind sold at rock concerts but peddled by street vendors at the exits of the Armory Show or the Venice Biennale? They were printed with the names DAMIEN HIRST, VANESSA BEECROFT, and MAURIZIO CATTELAN--the new pop stars of art. If so, then you already know something about Cyprien Gaillard, the artist who (with Payam Sharifi) made the shirts and documented them in the book *World Tour 2002-2003 Archive*.

You may have also seen Gaillard's beautiful videos of romantic landscapes suddenly inundated by a thick, white smoke. Gaillard and accomplices, hiding in the forest or behind fir trees, created the fog by emptying as many as fifty fire extinguishers all at once. Shown in 2005 in Paris just as the riots in the city's suburbs were taking place, the series "Real Remnants of Fictive Wars 2003-2004" seemed to present a "poetics of uprising," as I wrote at the time in the magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, an artistic counterpoint to the unfolding events.

For his first show at Cosmic Galerie, Gaillard presented a photograph related to this series. *Real Remnants of Fictive Wars VI, 2007*, depicts Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty, 1970*, covered in smoke. In the same room were five works from the series "Belief in the Age of Disbelief," 2005, in which Gaillard has "inserted" postwar building blocks into seventeenth-century etchings of Dutch landscapes, juxtaposing modernist symbols with rural idylls. The centerpiece of the exhibition, however, was the film *Desniansky Raion, 2007*, a three-part meditation on the collapse of utopia and the end of Soviet Communism. It begins with a brawl between two gangs of hooligans--blues versus reds--in an unidentified Eastern European city, surrounded by Soviet architecture. The second part consists of archival footage from the late '80s of fireworks and a sound and light show. After the city of Meaux, a suburb on the outskirts of Paris, decided to tear down a housing complex, the mayor offered inhabitants this spectacle as some meager recompense. The film shows the building, upon the conclusion of the show, suddenly sagging and collapsing in a cloud of debris and smoke; today, it is impossible to watch this and not be reminded of the fall of the World Trade Center. The final section reveals a magnificent aerial view of a suburb of Kiev; its austere buildings--architectural monoliths--are arranged in a circle.

As one watches this visual opera, which features an electro sound track by the artist and

musician Koudlam, one doesn't immediately grasp the sources of its images. Only the last part was filmed by Gaillard himself--the first was found on the Web and the second acquired from the municipality of Meaux. This mix of sources reflects an easygoing way of circulating through the world of images that is very contemporary and symptomatic of a new generation of artists. Gaillard's work is a continuous reflection on the old and the new, on the entropic melancholia of modernism. Or, to use Smith-son's phrase, "ruins in reverse."

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

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