

SEBASTIEN BONIN

Group Exhibitions

«The Wild West From Buffalo Bill to Bobbejaan» / 2017, groupshow, De Warande and Venetiaanse gaanderijen / Turnhout and Oostend, Belgium.

«Stephan BALLEUX, Sébastien Bonin, Léa Belousovitch, Hannu Prinz» / 2016, groupshow, D+T Project / Brussels, Belgium.

«Point of view» / 2016, groupshow, Kunsthal Charlottenborg / Copenhagen, Denmark.

«Friendly Faces» / 2015, groupshow, Johannes Vogt / New York, USA.

«186 Louise / 2015, groupshow, 186 Louise / Brussels, Belgium.

«Un-scene III» / 2015, groupshow show, WIELS Contemporary Art Center / Brussels, Belgium.

«Cirque Mafate» / 2015, duo show, Super Dakota / Brussels, Belgium.

«Lens na Spinoza» / 2015, group show, Croxhapox / Gent, Belgium.

«20.000 Leghe Sotto I Mari» / 2014, book launch, Le Bal / Paris, France.

«The Belgian Six» / 2014, group show, Palais-des-Beaux Arts / Brussels, Belgium.

«Light / Object / Color» / 2014, group show, Super Dakota / Brussels, Belgium.

«Cosmos» / 2014, book launch, Théophile's Papers / Arles, France.

«Nabla» / 2014, group show, Abilene Gallery, Poppositions / Brussels, Belgium.

«Violins without violins» / 2013, group show, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

«Martine à la plage» / 2013, group show, MNAC / Bucharest, Romania.

«A Romantic measure» / 2012, group show, Charlie James Gallery/ Los Angeles, USA.

«Oh My Book» / 2011, group show, Les rencontres d'Arles/ Arles, France.

«Cube» / 2011, group show, cube/ Beijing, China.

Solo Exhibitions

Kledze Hatal» / 2016, soloshow, D+T Project / Brussels, Belgium.

«Salon indien» / 2014, solo show, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

«Vue d'un aigle par un hibou» / 2014, solo show, Le Cabanon / Astene, Belgium.

«Suzy cream cheese» / 2013, solo show, c-l-e-a-r-i-n-g / Brussels, Belgium.

«El Mirage Lake» / 2012, solo show, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

Curation

«Violins without violins» / 2013, group show, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

«Des chevaux» / 2014, groupshow, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

«Houston» / 2014, groupshow, Island / Brussels, Belgium.

Artist Book

«Dialog/Dialogue» / Vue d'un aigle par un hibou / 2016, Editor: Tim Onderberke.

«Le Morning» / Novembre / 2015, Editor: Herman Byrd.

«Cirque Mafate» / 2015, Editor: Théophil's papers.

«20.000 Leghe Sotto I Mari» / 2014, Editor: Théophil's papers.

«Unphotographable» / 2011, Editor: La Manière Noire.

The light of photography never arrives alone. It is always attended by darkness'.

– Eduardo Cadava

Photography is often identified with its referent, and in general we interpret a photo as a description, a detail or a representation of a larger and past reality. According to Roland Barthes, however, a photo, much more than a simple keepsake of a past moment, is a true 'emanation' of the referent. Thanks to a chemical process, it is literally possible to capture the luminous rays of physical bodies, and these can continue to reach us regardless of the breadth of time and distance separating them from us. The referent, Barthes argues, sticks to a photo to such a degree that the photo itself becomes transparent: 'Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible; photos themselves are always invisible: it is not it that we see'. Much as photos may allow us to see through them, they nevertheless invoke, also, their own existence. As Lyle Rexer points out in his historic study about the emergence of abstraction in photography, photos invariably have intrinsic qualities that cannot be entirely reduced to external situations or objects. For Rexer, it is not so much about seeing through the photo as much as with it.

What Rexer's historical overview shows is that, ever since the appearance of the medium 170 years ago, artists have never ceased exploring the unique status of photography, which perfectly resembles, and yet is different from, its referent. However, Rexer observes that, as advances in technology reinforce the feeling that the medium can capture the real, a growing number of artists are producing photos that have fewer and fewer links with external reality. Just as everyone is capable of producing high-definition photos with the click of an iPhone, artists, it seems, are turning to other types of photographs. Artists known for their documentary work, such as Wolfgang Tillmans or Thomas Ruff for example, have for several years now been exploring the basic technology and materials of in photography in order to explore abstract images.

Sébastien Bonin's recent work belongs to this movement. Although in the past he has turned his camera to the great landscapes of the American West or to the trivial details of his urban environment, since 2013 the artist has been experimenting since with the photogram technique – considered to be the forerunner of photography – to produce non-figurative photos. Playing with colour filters generally used in the cinema or theatre to modify the lighting, he has created bright colour compositions that are modulated by sharp or elusive contours. The variations, infinite yet unique, bring the work of the photographer close to that of the painter. It is like an artist painting with light.

The pictorial reference is important for Bonin, who does not hesitate to draw inspiration from Colour Field Painting. He follows in the footsteps of painters who belonged to this school, but he liberates colour from its figurative function, allowing it become the subject of the photo itself. Certain photograms, for instance, remind us of the coloured and vibrant fields of Mark Rothko. Also noticeable is a similarity with the work of another major representative of abstract expressionism, Barnett Newman, who used scotch tape to create narrow bands of contrasting colour that he called 'zips', and that became a central motif in his paintings. In a number of Newman's works, the tape remains visible under the colour, a surprising detail that is a testimony to the manual character of the painting. Likewise, certain photograms preserve the lines of the scotch tape used to attach them to the wall of the dark room. This detail clearly indicates that the photos are produced manually, and not with a digital programme on a computer, as some photos might suggest.

This detail distinguishes the Bonin's photograms from the Degrade series, themselves a meditation on colour, that the American photographer James Welling produced between 1986 and 2008. Welling was a member of the Pictures Generation of the 1980s, and he was obviously involved in a critique of the representation: the Degrade series is part of a photographic practice that regards the photo, not as a transparent window, but as sowing a seed of uncertainty onto the represented. As the art historian Rosalyn Deutsche explains, the premise for Welling's work stipulates that there is no stable image or subject. The title of the series is significant in this sense. The adjective 'dégradé' picks out the variation in the colour observed in the photograms, but it also refers to the action of 'degrading' or deteriorating the colour, possibly until its disappearance. This feeling of vulnerability can also be applied to Bonin's photograms: despite their sparkling colours, the photos appear fragile and accidental. A little too much light could destroy them.

Among the artist's coloured abstractions, there are some with geometric patterns that, rather than drawing their inspiration, not from American painting, but from a very different source and type of painting: that of the car bodies Bonin spotted in Los Angeles, where he lived for several months in 2013. The car is a recurrent theme in art, particularly in the United States, where the road is a cultural obsession, whether in the cinema, literature, music or the visual arts, photography included. Bonin's photos reduce the car to an abstract symbol. The coloured shapes remind us for example of the patterns painted on the Muscle Cars of the 1960s, the Chevron logo or the shape of air vents on the hoods of certain car models. And yet, Bonin produces his photograms in a dark room, so these cannot possibly be the details of real cars. The photo is an illusion, it is, to use Baudrillard's terminology, a simulacrum.

Equally artificial are the photos of luxuriant vegetation that seem to have been shot at different times of the day. Their wild appearance notwithstanding, these plant beds and trees are in reality artificially built 'sets' the artist spotted in zoos and botanical gardens in New York, Los Angeles, San Diego, Palm Springs and other places. Once developed on photographic paper, the photos are exhibited behind coloured Plexiglas that alters the colours of the photo and creates an effect similar to day for night, the technique used to simulate night time in scenes shot in daylight. While the photograms inspired by the surface of American cars may be interpreted as illusions, what we have in the nature photos is a doubling or a mise-en-abyme of the simulacrum: artificial nature itself appears under artificial lighting.

What the recent work of Sébastien Bonin shows us, therefore, is not reality, but rather, to use a term that was dear to Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality: a world dominated by simulated experiences and sensations. In *The Edge of Vision*, Rexer proposes to define what we usually call 'abstract photography' with the photographic term 'undisclosed'. While they may sometimes appear to be abstract, the photos of Sébastien Bonin are, on the contrary, what we would call hyperreal.

Devrim Bayar



«Salon Indien», 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. Each 127 cm x variable.



«Salon Indien», 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. Each 127 cm x variable.



« Untitled» (Wally Vernoun), 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. 127 x 121 cm.



«Untitled» (Hoot Gibson), 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. 127 x 115 cm.



« Untitled» (Smiley Burnett), 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. 127 x 120 cm.



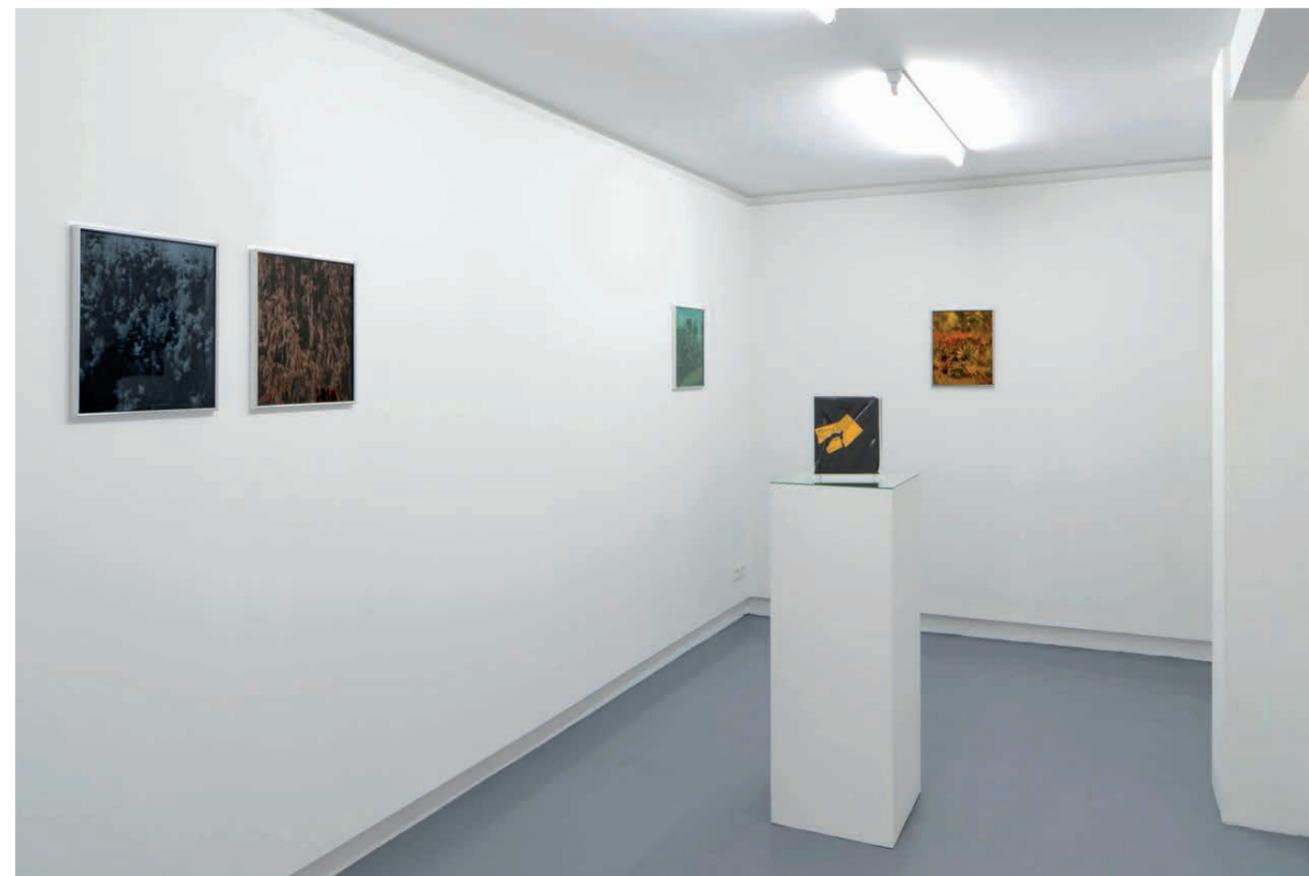
«Salon Indien», 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. Each 127 cm x variable.



«Salon Indien», 2014
chromogenic-print, framed. Each 127 cm x variable.



«Sweating like a whore in church», 2015
chromogenic print / unique edition. 127 x 380 cm.



«Light,object,color», 2014
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. Each 32 x 40 cm.



« Untitled», 2014
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. 32 x 40 cm.



« Untitled», 2014
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. 32 x 40 cm.



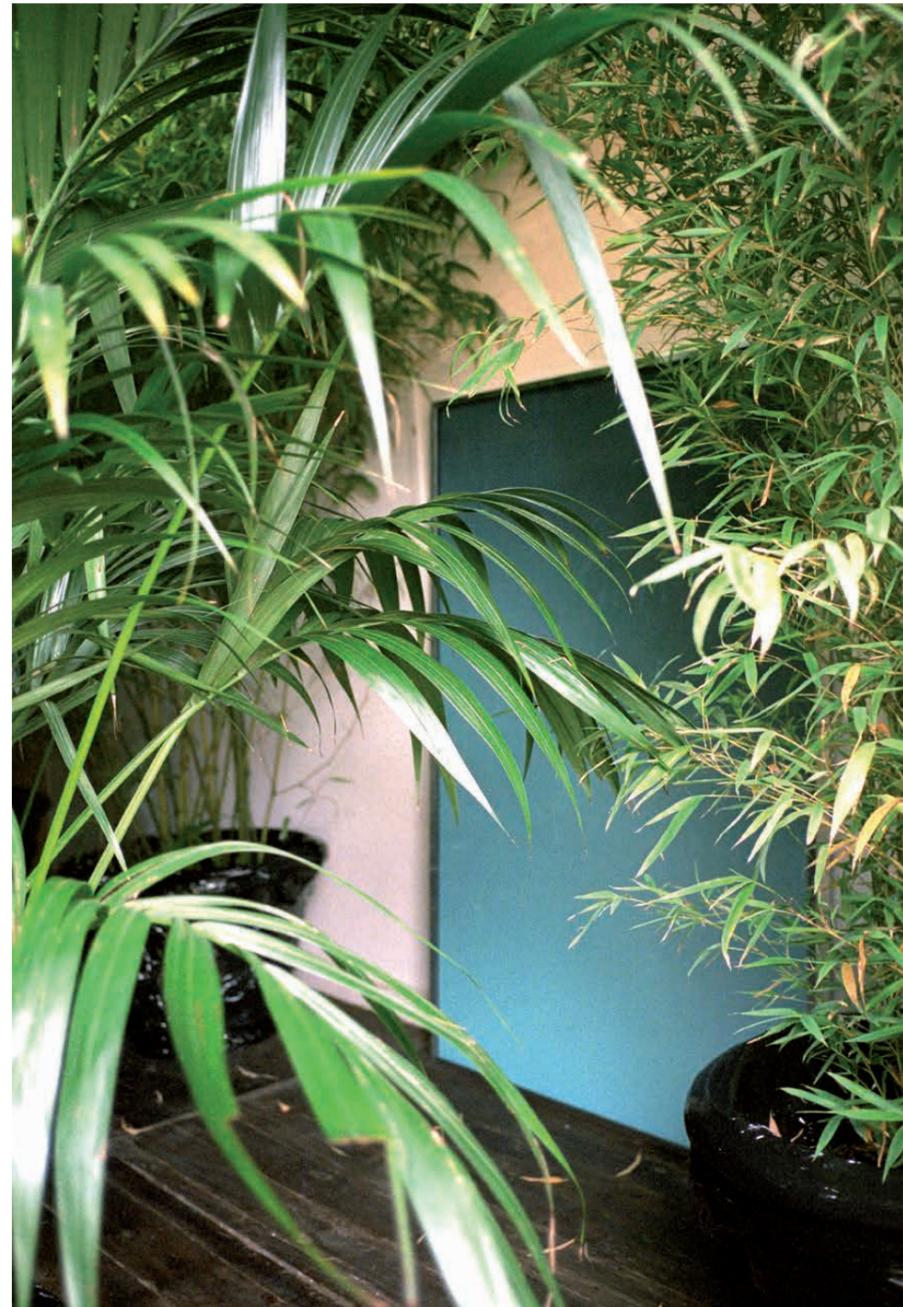
«Vue d'un aigle par un hibou», 2014
plants, black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. Each 135 x 90 cm.



«Vue d'un aigle par un hibou», 2014
plants, black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. Each 135 x 90 cm.



«Sky XI», 2014
plants, black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. 135 x 90 cm.



«Sky VII», 2014
plants, black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. 135 x 90 cm.



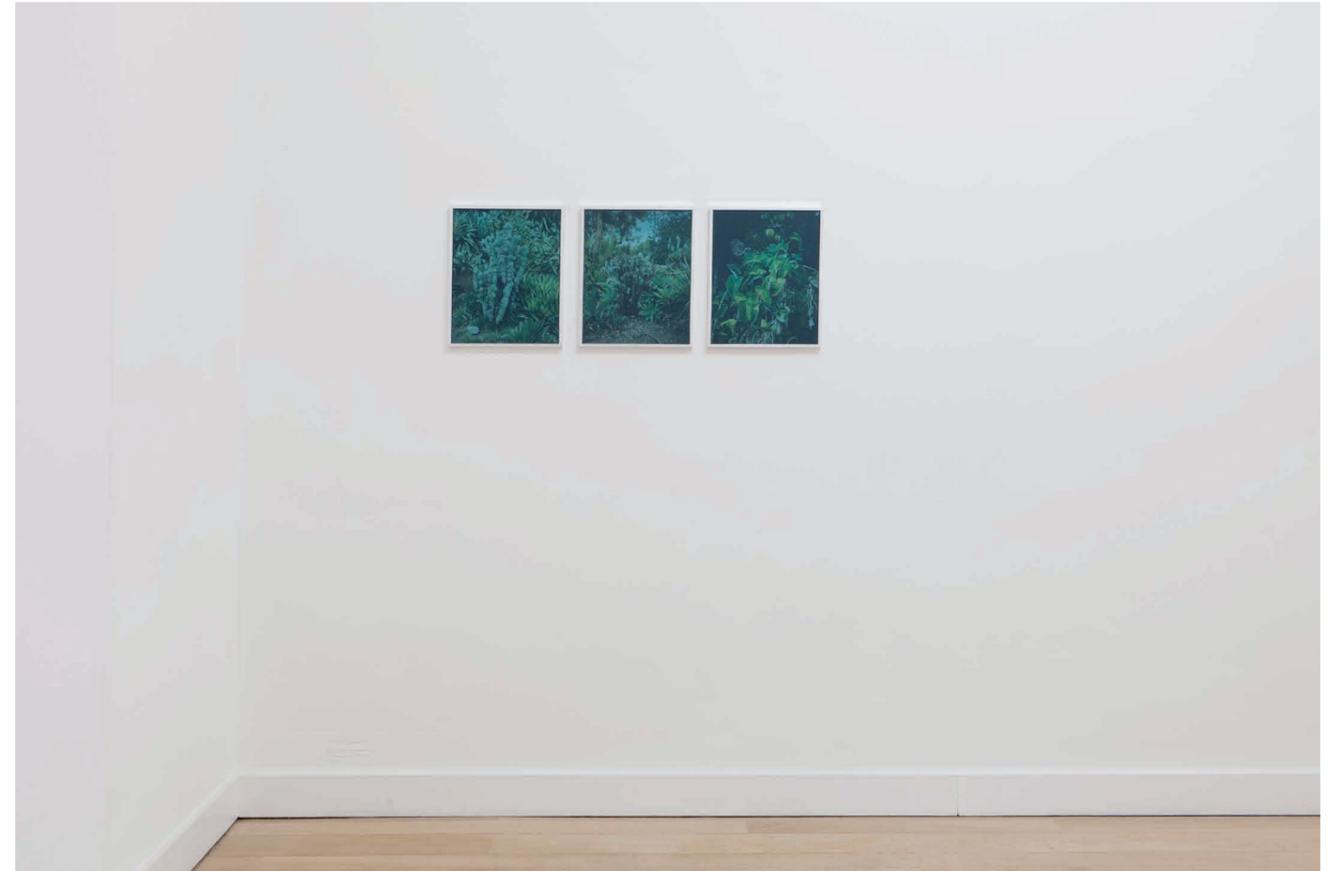
«Suzy creamcheese», 2013
enlarger Durst pictochrom, c-print, brass framed. 60 x 40 cm.



«Magenta», 2013
enlarger Durst pictochrom, c-print, brass framed. 60 x 40 cm.



«Suzy creamcheese», 2013
right: c-print, framed. 45 x 30 cm.
left: c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. 32 x 40 cm



«Suzy creamcheese», 2013
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. three-elements. Each 32 x 40 cm



«Untitled», 2013
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. three-elements. 32 x 40 cm



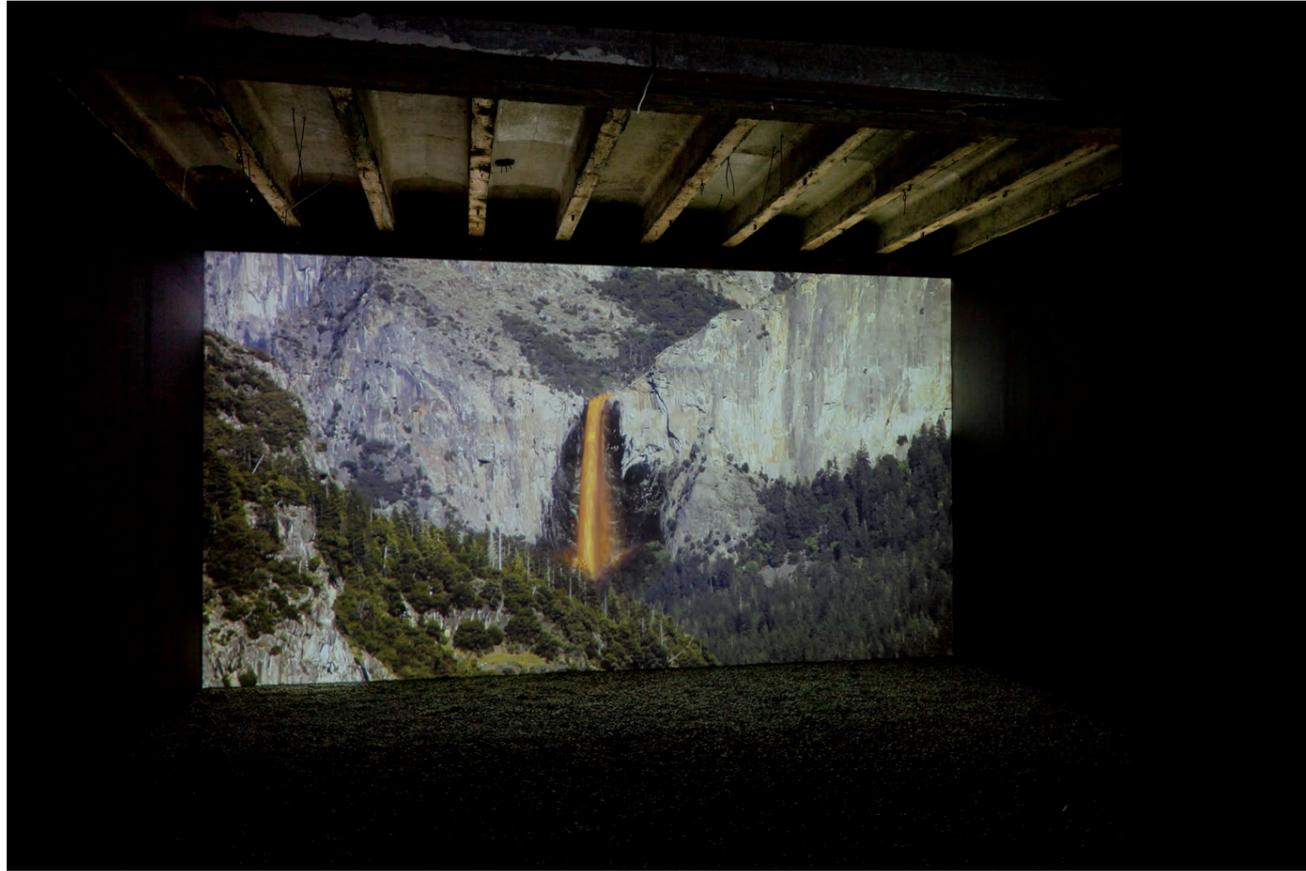
«Untitled», 2013
c-print, acrylic plastic sheet, framed. three-elements, 32 x 40 cm



«El mirage lake», 2012
black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. 135 x 90 cm.



«El mirage lake», 2012
black and white print, acrylic plastic sheet, plating framed. Each 135 x 90 cm.



Installation «Gaël's dream», 2015
video loop, gravel floor. 200 x 450 cm.



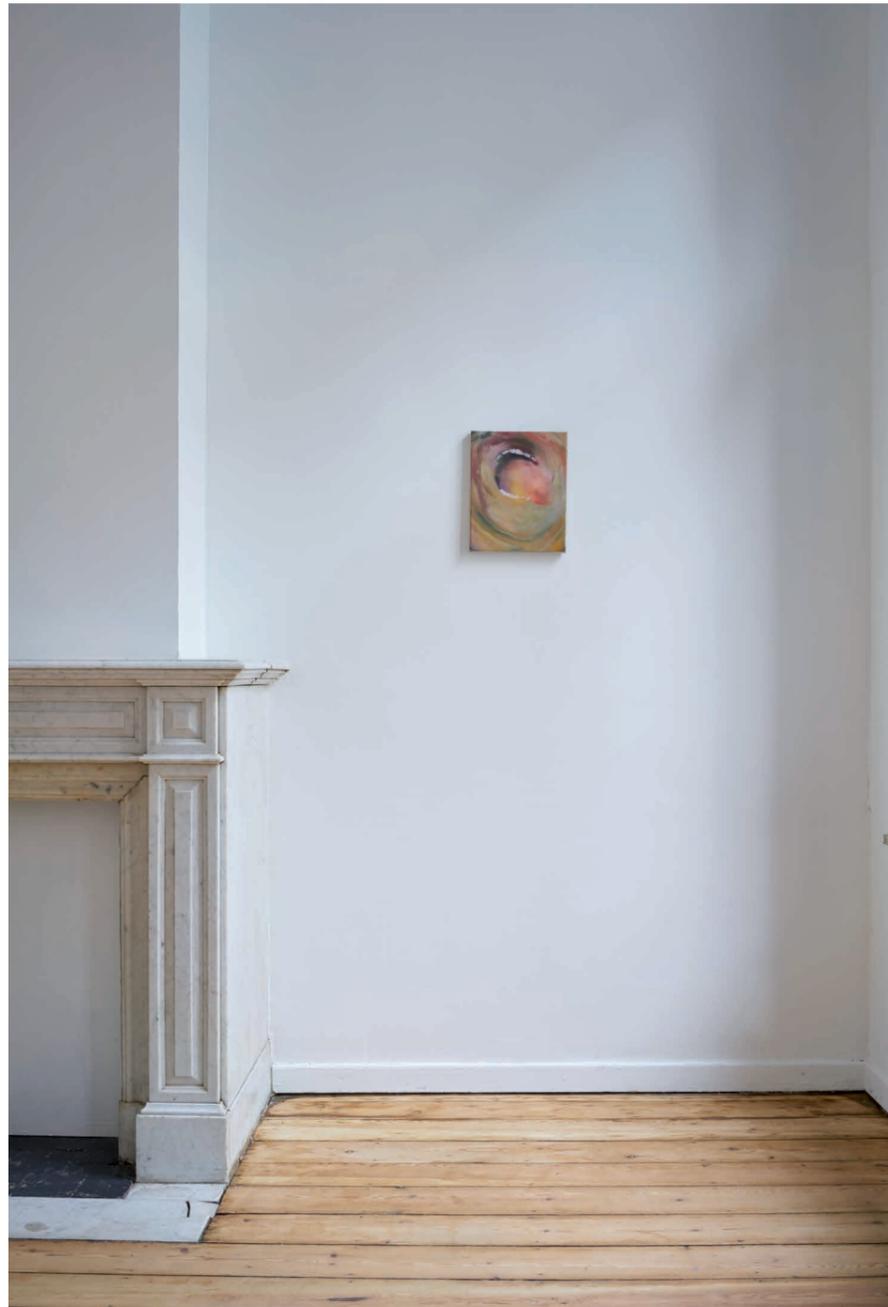
Installation «Gaël's dream», 2015
photo on transparent acrylic sheet, fluorescent painting, lighting system. 50 x 30 cm.



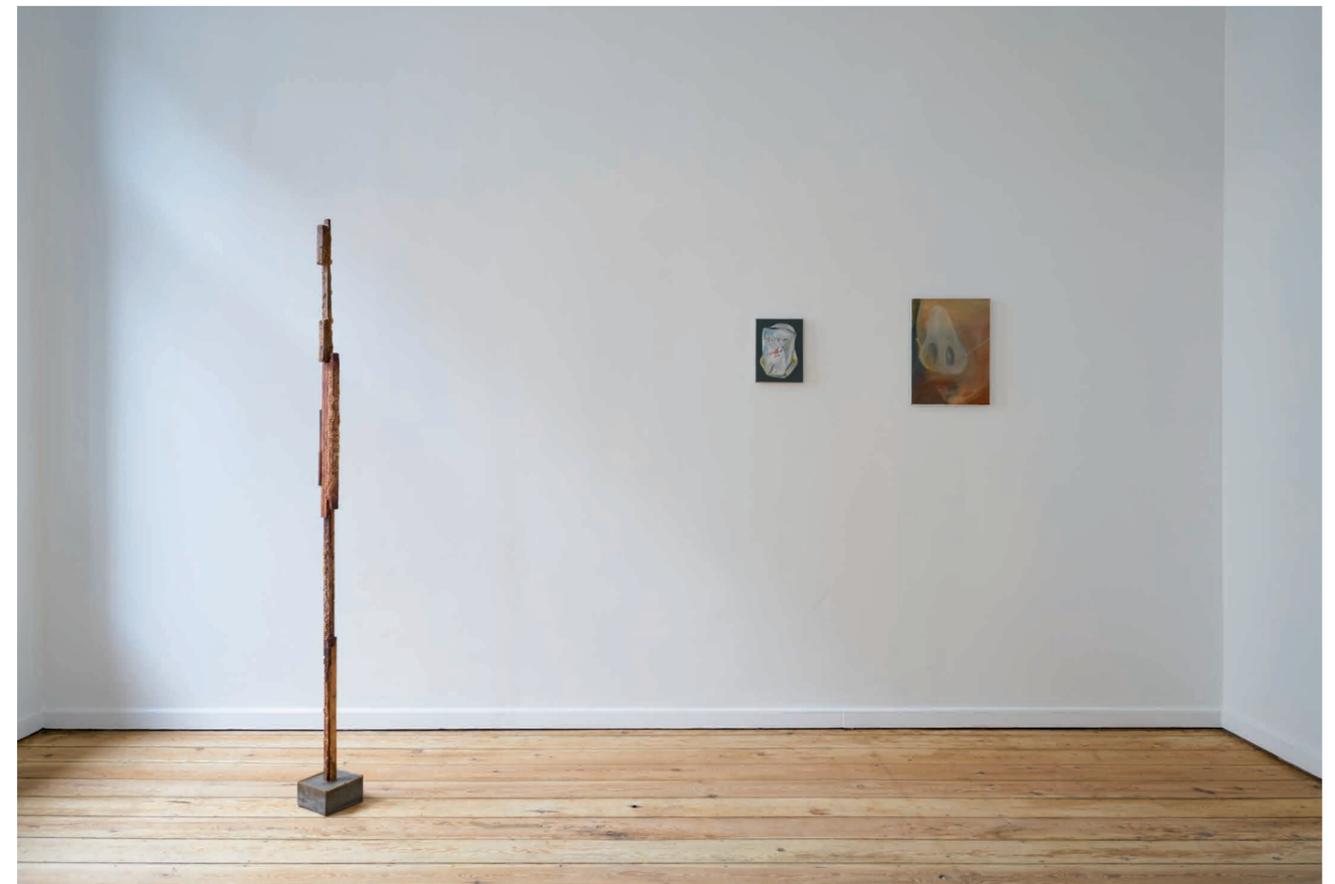
Installation «Gaël's dream», 2015
photo on transparent acrylic sheet. 32 x 40 cm.



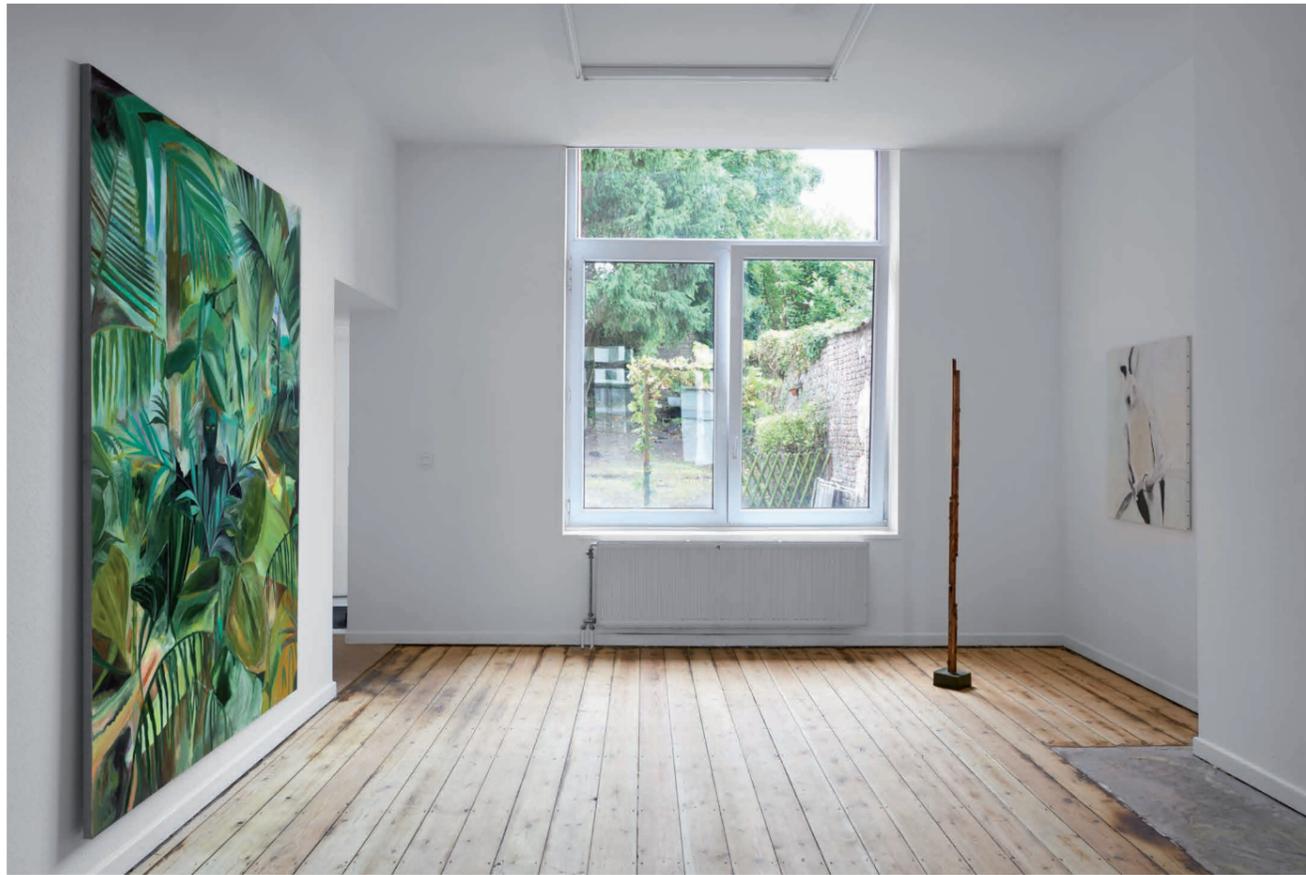
Installation «Gaël's dream», 2015
photo on transparent acrylic sheet. 32 x 40 cm.



«Le pendu», 2017
oil on canvas 30 x 24 cm.



Installation «Le désespoir des singes», 2017
Oil on canvas, wax, wood, honey



Installation «Le désespoir des singes», 2017
Oil on canvas, wax, wood, honey, straw and silver wire.

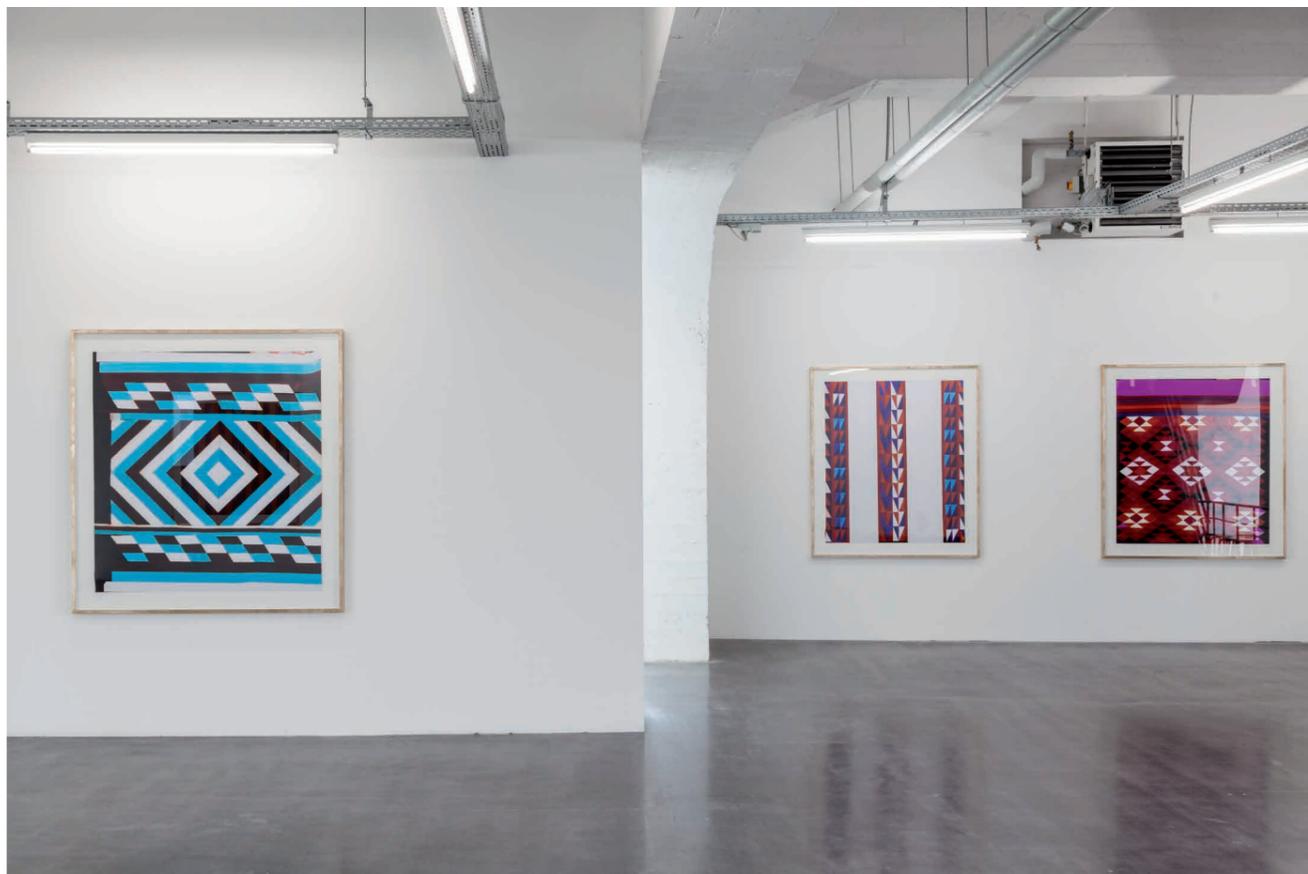


«6 rue Gabriel Pérouse», 2017.
Straw and silver wire, 10 x 16 x 9 cm.





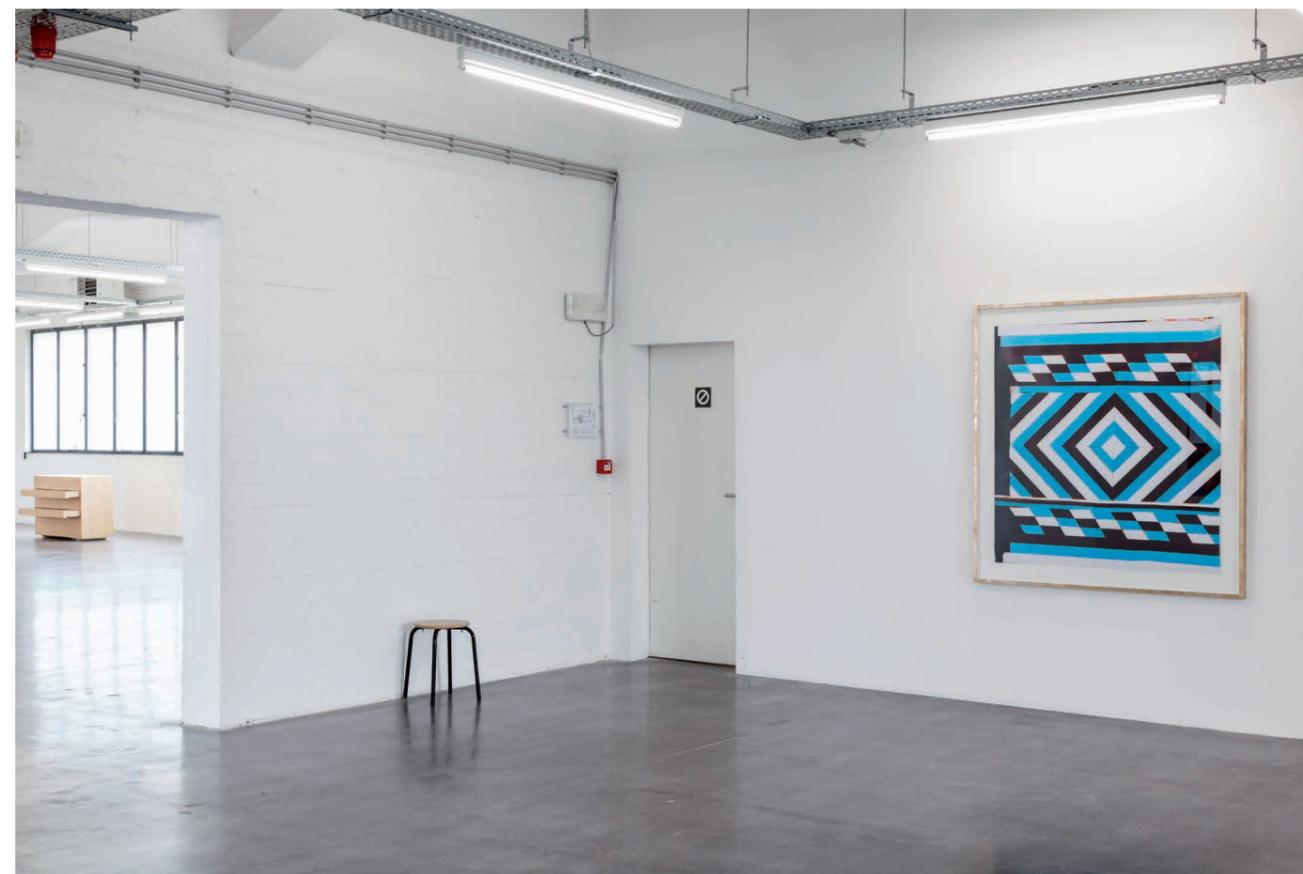
«Unseen III», 2015 installation view



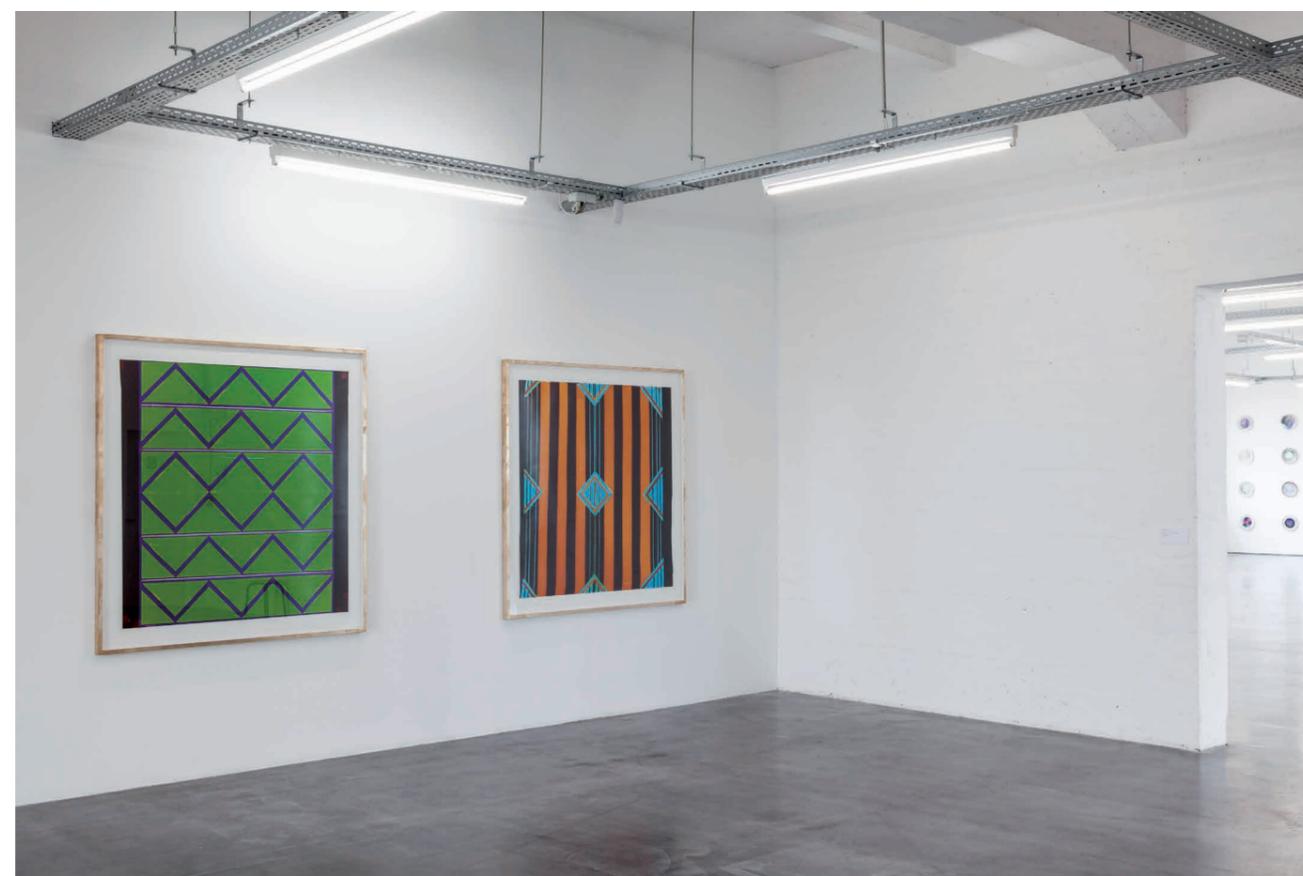
«Navajo composition NO.6», 2015
chromogenic print / unique piece. 119,5 x 127 cm.



«Navajo composition NO.2», 2015
chromogenic print / unique piece. 114 x127 cm.



«Unseen III», 2015 // chromogenic print / unique piece. 119,5 x 127 cm.



«Unseen III», 2015 installation view



«Sunset red N°1», 2015 // chromogenic print / unique piece. 127 x 300 cm.



«Sunset red N°II», 2015 // chromogenic print / unique piece. 127 x 300 cm.



«Cirque de Mafate», 2015 installation view

Kledze Hatal.

Following his intervention at Wiels, Contemporary Art Centre, on the occasion of the exhibition called Un-Scene III, Bonin continues to explore the limitless possibilities of interpretation of stories linked with the Navajo society, the Native Americans from the Southwestern United States. The artist skilfully reinterprets the designs of their clothing borrowed from old American comics and Western Movies. Taking them out of their original context, he is only interested in their physical aspect and brings through a complex photographic process the essence of these patterns: the colours and the structure thus creating a totally new fiction. Bonin turns them into complex compositions produced with help of gelatine filters used in the theatre and the movie industry leaving certain details that remind the very manual aspect of the process that involves collages. Hence, just like painting is applied onto a canvas, Bonin uses the technique of photogram to project luminous rays onto paper, thus giving birth to new realities where light itself becomes subject. The newly created images resemble to its referent but gain new existence by definition. With its obvious aesthetical strength the work of Sebastien Bonin focuses on the process of simulacra intrinsic to photographic process and further questions the sense of reality of an image itself. Also, like many other artists, Bonin explores the possibilities of photographic technology and material it employs in order to explore the limits of abstraction.



«Blue», 2013
enlarger Durst pictochrom, c-print, brass framed. 40 x 60 cm.



«Kledze Hatal», 2015 installation view
right: collage. 25 x 15 cm.
left: chromogenic print, brass frame. 135 x 130 cm.



«Doublage N°01», 2016
collage on paper, comics. 25 x 15 cm.



«Kledze Hatal», 2015 installation view
right: collage, chromogenic print, brass frame, 135 x 130 cm.
left: chromogenic print, brass frame, 135 x 128 cm.



«Kledze Hatal», 2015 installation view
right: chromogenic print, brass frame, 135 x 130 cm.
left: collage, 25 x 15 cm.



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Born in 1977, Brussels, Belgium.
Live and work in Brussels.
2004: Ensav La Cambre - Master in Silkscreen and
digital imaging.

«Bang,bang,bang...», 2016
collage on paper, comics. 8 x 8 cm.