

CONTEMPORARY DIALOGUES  
Today's ten key sites of national remembrance

CONTEMPORARY ART EXHIBITION

**NICOLAS DAUBANES**

**& THE 3 FRACs**

**IN THE GRAND EST**

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European Centre of Deported Resistance Members

Site of the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp

## **EXHIBITION CURATOR**

Margot MARIE-CATHERINE

Responsible for promoting remembrance sites at the Office national des combattants et des victimes de guerre

## **GENERAL COORDINATION AND ORGANISATION**

### **FRAC Alsace**

Anne-Virginie DIEZ, in charge of regional projects and dissemination

### **FRAC Champagne**

Sébastien BOURSE, Audience and Dissemination Manager

### **FRAC Lorraine**

Pauline ESMEZ, in charge of outdoor projects

## **European Centre of Deported Resistance Members**

Michaël LANDOLT, Director of the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members

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Gwendolyne TIKONOFF, in charge of communication and public relations

Why hold a contemporary art exhibition at remembrance sites? Can art change our perception of contemporary conflicts?

These are broad topics on which this exhibition, *Dialogues contemporains - Aujourd'hui, les dix hauts lieux de la mémoire nationale*, in partnership with Nicolas Daubanes and the three FRACs in the Grand Est region, can hopefully shed some light.

The French national art project, *Aujourd'hui, les dix hauts lieux de la mémoire nationale*, is led by the Office national des combattants et des victimes de guerre (National Office for Veterans and Victims of War). Artist Nicolas Daubanes will create a work of art for each of the ten sites to reflect the memories enshrined in the individual locations. This project, which is innovative in terms of type and scope, seeks to enrich and facilitate the practices of handing down historical events and commemoration to future generations.

*Dialogues contemporains*, an exhibition organised at the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members in collaboration with the three FRACs in the Grand Est region, allows us to continue our reflections by focusing more specifically on the history of the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp from numerous artistic perspectives. Resilience, dehumanisation, strength, weakness and suffering, etc. are just some of the topics revisited in the works on display.

This artistic programme is the first of its kind, creating a genuine bridge between the world of art and remembrance. Indeed, one of the Office's key missions is to adopt a new approach to the way in which our remembrance sites are passed on and opened up to new audiences. This is an important mission nowadays as key witnesses of the past are no longer with us and younger generations have a role to play in ensuring that remembrance lives on.

To conclude, I would say that art can express or portray some stories which cannot be put into words. Visit this exhibition and discover a new way of paying homage and, above all, understanding the past.

Margot MARIE-CATHERINE  
Exhibition curator

# Nicolas Daubanes

*"I address key questions, namely life, death, the human condition and the social forms that shape these issues. In my latest work, the speed, fragility, porosity and ghostly appearance of the images and materials convey the pressures of the past at the crossroads of the future. My work is part of an ongoing project, tracing a path, a trajectory geared towards the search for freedom and release from constraints. I endeavour to investigate intensity and rigour and experiment with mental, visual and physical danger."*

Nicolas Daubanes has focused his work on the prison world (drawings, sculptures and videos) for over ten years through total immersion in prison settings. From drawings with iron filings to awe-inspiring, sugar-sabotaged concrete sculptures, Nicolas Daubanes is interested in the culminating moment of suspension and fall. This means witnessing the driving impetus before the fall, before destruction. Iron filings, a fine, hazardous and volatile material, are used in the drawings and wall *drawings* to conjure up images of prison bars and, by extension, escape. Sugar-laden concrete is inspired by the fruitless attempts of resistance fighters to sabotage construction of the Atlantic Wall during the Second World War. Temporary and fleeting.

Nicolas Daubanes has exhibited his work in a number of establishments including Villa Arson, Les Abattoirs (FRAC Occitanie Toulouse), FRAC Occitanie Montpellier and MRAC Sérignan to name but a few. His works are part of major private and public collections including FRAC Occitanie Montpellier and FRAC Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur, etc. Nicolas was awarded the Yia Prize in 2016, the Grand Prix Occitanie d'Art Contemporain in 2017 and the Prix Mezzanine Sud les Abattoirs in 2017. He was also the recipient of the Prix des Amis du Palais de Tokyo in 2018. In 2019 and 2020 he held solo exhibitions at the FRAC Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur, Château d'Oiron and Palais de Tokyo. In 2021, he was awarded the Drawing Now Prize. In 2022, he presented a solo show at the Drawing Lab, a major venue at the Centre Pompidou Metz, and took part in the Lyon Biennale, 'Manifeste de la fragilité' (Manifesto of Fragility).

*À la faveur de la nuit - Ancien camp de concentration de Natzweiler, 2024*



# Presentation of works by Nicolas Daubanes

In his latest research, Nicolas Daubanes questions the link between vegetation and memorial landscapes, i.e. landscapes that bear testimony to significant events in our history. At the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, for instance, he was not only interested in the camp per se, but also in the surrounding forests. These forests, which concealed the camp's activities, inevitably featured in the internees' escape fantasies as they imagined blending in with the dense vegetation to disappear from ever-watchful eyes.

Using photographs taken during his visits, Nicolas Daubanes has created a series of drawings to portray these forests. These drawings were made using incandescent iron filings, which adhere to glass surfaces on contact. From Nicolas's perspective, iron filings

are synonymous with the idea of escape (filed prison bars). Using glass allows his creations to be superimposed, thus creating a narrative between the various landscapes. Its fragility evokes an internal tension, a potential event.

The series of works is called 'In la faveur de la nuit' taken from a German expression 'Nacht und Nebel', Night and Fog. The term was used to refer to Resistance fighters deported to the Natzweiler-Struthof camp. It allowed them to remain nameless. According to some, the term 'Nacht und Nebel' was used in reference to a passage in Wagner's opera, *L'Or du Rhin* – The Rhinegold, in which Alberich, King of the Nibelungs, wearing the magic helmet, turns into a column of smoke and disappears singing 'Nacht und



Nebel, niemand gleich' ('Night and fog, no one left'). In fact, 'bei Nacht und Nebel' was a common German expression for 'under cover of night' before the opera premiered in 1869.

*Under cover of darkness,  
escape is possible.*

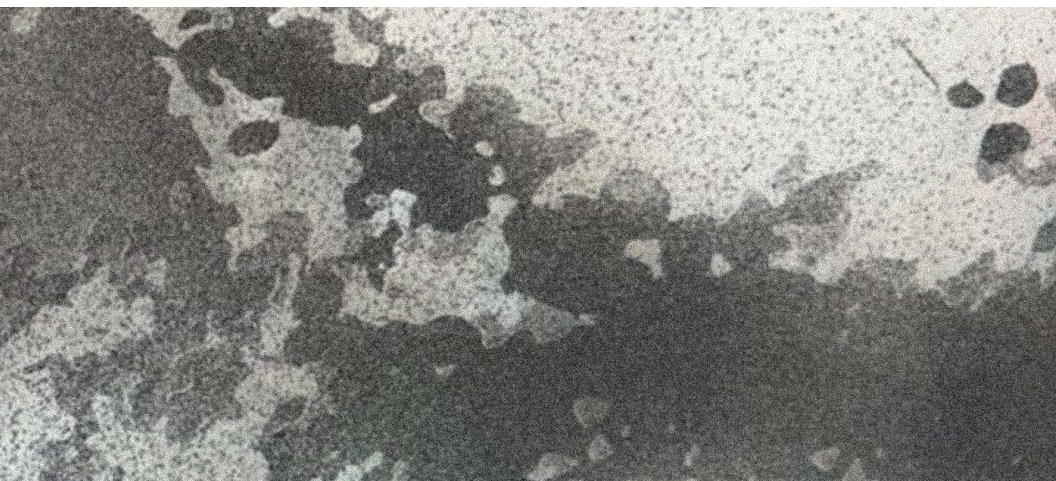
*Under cover of darkness,  
everything becomes possible.*

To coincide with his solo exhibition at the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp as part of the 'Aujourd'hui, les dix hauts lieux de la mémoire nationale' project, Nicolas Daubanes is upscaling to include the 'In la faveur de la nuit' series of drawings. This format will appeal to the audience and immerse them in the landscape depicted before them. Only this

time, the trees part to reveal a clear sighting of the camp through the forest. This could well be the last image seen by a prisoner who has managed to break through the barriers and flee. The view of the camp gradually fades into the background but is indelibly etched in the memory after that final backward glance.

Throughout the exhibition, this drawing will be presented outdoors on the site where the camp once stood. The steel pellets on the surface of the artwork will become slightly oxidised here and there over time, as the work evolves and absorbs its surroundings, capturing the wind, sun and rain as well as curious glances from onlookers.

Photos : Nicolas Daubanes / © Nicolas Daubanes



# The 3 FRACs in the Grand Est

FRAC (Fonds régionaux d'art contemporain) holds public collections of contemporary art created to bring the latter to every corner of France. The primary aims are to create an art collection, exhibit it to various audiences and devise ways of raising awareness of contemporary art. With an essentially nomadic heritage and equipped with original tools to disseminate and educate, FRAC collections travel across France and abroad. The fact that FRAC is a mobile entity makes it a vital stakeholder in France's policy of cultural development seeking to reduce geographical, social and cultural disparities and introducing contemporary art to the most diverse of audiences.

Working on projects steeped in history, such as this, poses an exciting and eagerly awaited challenge for FRAC. Indeed, as far as we are concerned, it is essential to create dialogue between the works of art in our collections and the past and present realities of a given site. For this project, we had to meet, listen to and have discussions with the teams at Struthof and the Office national des combattants et des victimes de guerre, as well as with the artist, Nicolas Daubanes, in

order to fully appreciate the extent of remembrance associated with the site and to fine-tune our thought processes and selection of works. With the utmost respect and humility for the prisoners and victims of the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp, we have collectively chosen to work on concepts that reflect both the site and its history. To echo the works created by Nicolas Daubanes as part of his project with the Office National des Combattants et des Victimes de Guerre, the three FRACs in the Grand Est region are proud to present Contemporary Dialogues - an exhibition that provides a meeting place as well as an artistic and contemporary counter-perspective to the history of Struthof, highlighting issues of unspeakable suffering, dehumanisation and conjuring up both individual and collective memories.

FRAC Alsace, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne and 49 Nord 6 Est - FRAC Lorraine make up the three-FRAC network in the Grand Est region supported by the Région Grand Est and the Ministère de la Culture - Drac Grand Est (Department for Culture).

*The first half of the texts relating to the works of art are extracts from notices written by: Brigitta Arnoux, Sébastien Bourse, Anne-Virginie Diez, Pauline Esmez, Jean-Paul Felley, Gilbert Lascault, Sophie Kaplan, Olivier Kaeser, Vincent Romagny and Nathalie Savey. None of the notices relating to the works of art were written specifically for the exhibition but provide a general introduction to the said works and the wishes of the artists. The second half of the texts were written by the ONaCVG to highlight and explain the links between the information provided on the works of art and the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp.*



**Peggy BUTH** (born in 1971 in Berlin, Germany)

*Monument*, 2005

Sculpture

Polystyrene, bitumen, 2 aluminium tubes, 1 novopan base

215 x 220 x 245 cm

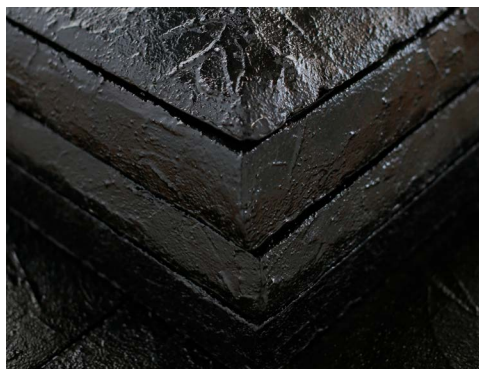
FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

*Monument*, the title of this work, evokes a number of references and conjures up a plethora of images. An architectural/sculpted work of art intended to perpetuate the memory of an individual or event, Monument is used by Peggy Buth as a model, a symbol of power, recognition, presentation and remembrance. Both enigmatic and timeless, this sculpture has the deconstructed appearance of a monument. Strength is combined with fragility, and power with levity. The various superimposed layers reveal cracks and there is no axial symmetry. The polystyrene structure is covered in bitumen, which plays on the ambivalence of its use. [...] This 'Monument' highlights the ambiguities and paradoxes that arise between its original meaning and its formal treatment. AVD

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

A central element of this exhibition, *Monument* revisits the importance of remembrance and handing down the past to future generations. Directly linked to the assignments undertaken by the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members, this work questions us about the need to talk about past events, whatever they may be, so that every memory has its place. This geometrically imperfect structure proves to us that a heterogeneous whole can achieve a certain stability and elevate the overall composition. War memorials first appeared at the end of the First World War and soon took on a leading role in terms of homage and commemoration. Today, these monuments are still vital, even if they are sometimes questioned. This is why the Memorial to the Heroes and Martyrs of the Deportation, which was officially inaugurated on 23 July 1960 by General de Gaulle, has such a striking impact on visitors to the site, both for its symbolism (40 metres high and visible from the valley, it represents a flame and portrays the emaciated silhouette of a deportee) and the memories enshrined within it. MMC



**Francesco ARENA** (born in 1978 in Brindisi, Italy)

*Monochromes*, 2013

Slate, wooden wedges

2 x (122.5 x 122.5 x 2 cm)

FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Recent history is Francesco Arena's primary medium. Through his sculptures and creations, he measures it and measures himself against it alongside the legacy of artistic currents such as Minimalism and *Arte Povera*. Taking political, social, cultural and religious events as a starting point, he develops a body of work combining aspects as contradictory as objectivity and subjectivity or featuring the collective and individual historical dimension. His works can therefore be perceived as representations of key moments in history, or as portraits of the artist as a product of history.

In 2013, on the forecourt of Reims Cathedral, Francesco Arena discovered two plaques commemorating the Franco-German reconciliation celebrated on 8 June 1962 with the meeting between Adenauer and General de Gaulle. Up to this point, only one plaque in French had been laid, but a second identical plaque, written in German, was laid following Angela Merkel's visit in 2012. Hence it took fifty years for the language of the vanquished to take its place alongside the language of the victors. Francesco Arena reproduces both plaques in *Monochromes* (2013), retaining only the accents of each language. In this particular work,

he symbolically marks and questions the viewpoints that shape history and lasting memories.

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

*Monochromes* is part and parcel of this exhibition's overall reflection on memories and their significance. Indeed, through its link with the commemorative plaques successively installed in Reims to coincide with the visits of German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (French version) and Angela Merkel (German version), this work is closely akin to that of Peggy Buth, reminding us of the importance of homage and commemoration in our societies. However, it goes even further by asking visitors about the linguistic differences between German and French, with only the accents represented on the slate slabs. In this work of art, Francesco Arena creates tension by calling for fraternity between nations, as also evidenced in Edith Dekyndt's work, but highlighting a distinction between languages at the same time. This tension is nevertheless resolved, reminding us that languages may be different but the desire to share memories is common to us all. MMC



Photo : Martin Argyroglo / © droits réservés

**Tom DRAHOS** (born in 1947 in Jablonec nad Nisou en Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic)

*Papiers froissés (Crumpled Paper)*, 1983

Black and white photography

4 x (66 x 62.5 cm)

FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims collection

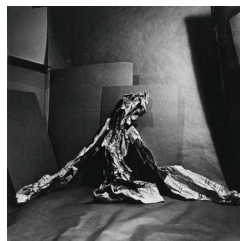
### *FRAC's perspective*

Tom Drahos's artistic and photographic career has been nothing short of amazing - from reportage photography in the 1960s to experimenting purposefully with art forms from the 1980s onwards, incorporating digital images and multimedia creations in particular along the way. Indeed, he was a pioneer of these techniques. His work is constantly evolving, drawing on the numerous options provided by the photographic medium, ranging from traditional photography to digital media. He therefore belongs to a generation of artists who confront the materiality of an image and query its status in contemporary art.

Symbolic of this free and open photography practice, *Papiers froissés* (1983) are small-scale productions, like pocket theatres in which crumpled newspaper pages are transformed into fragile, precarious anthropomorphic figures. Highlighting the power of illusion in any representation, particularly photographic, these images frugally create a disturbing, even oppressive atmosphere seemingly embodied in these paper silhouettes.

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

What do we see in this image – an individual slumped in the corner of a room? A crumpled newspaper knowingly arranged in a specific way? There are no obvious answers to this highly enigmatic piece of work, which explores the ambivalence of human beings, contrasting weakness with strength, and traces of the past with building the future. If we choose to envision a character linked in some way to the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in these pieces of crumpled paper, then we can also see lives adversely impacted by deportation. Ribs and suffering, penmanship and stories in equal measure. But if we decide to switch focus and take a step back, we can see that this precarious balance allows an empowered individual to stand up and fight back, as portrayed in this unidentified character created in the image of fleeing deportees whose lives were forever impacted by what went on here. MMC



**Marc BAUER** (born in 1975 in Geneva, Switzerland)

*Dread*, 2006

10 interlinked drawings

Grey and black pencil on 200g smooth paper, wooden frame painted white

32 x 45 cm

Framed format: 34 x 46.7 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

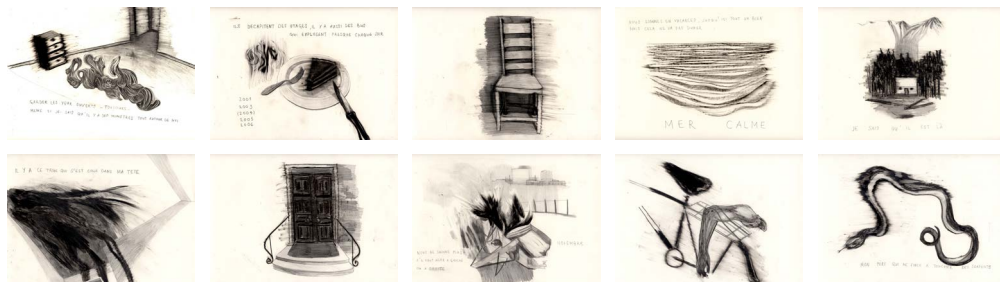
Drawing is Marc Bauer's main medium but he also creates murals, videos and sometimes sculptures. His work reflects his own life, the lives of his nearest and dearest and episodes throughout history. He draws on personal childhood memories as well as tales and documents passed on to him by family members. He also refers to historical events. [...] He uses black pencil and graphite, which he sometimes blends in with his fingers, creating scenes synonymous with the memories they evoke, partly precise and partly blurred. He also adds a liberal dash of interpretation.

*Dread* conjures up personal memories and dreamlike imagery. A threat hovers over each drawing, accompanied by text - sometimes explicit, such as 'MON PÈRE QUI ME FORCE A TOUCHER DES SERPENTS' ('MY FATHER FORCED ME TO TOUCH SNAKES'), or sometimes hinting at drama just around the corner, such as 'NOUS SOMMES EN VACANCES, JUSQU'ICI TOUT VA BIEN / MAIS CELA NE VA PAS DURER / MER CALME' ('WE'RE ON HOLIDAY, SO FAR SO GOOD / BUT IT WON'T LAST / CALM WATERS'). OK

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

This collection of ten drawings paints a nightmarish vision of life with often mediocre subjects taking on an entirely different guise under the pencil strokes of Marc Bauer. Are these the thoughts or nightmares of deportees? Or are they the product of our own imagination when we come face to face with the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp? The site per se was constructed in a bid to instil fear and horror. So how can visitors disregard these feelings? Or is it better if they do? Everyone deals with this historical reality in their own way, through their own emotions, making a conscious decision to visit a specific location or to see/not see a certain item, as so aptly suggested by Joséphine Kaepelin's work. When faced with this emotional turmoil, it is

important to remember that this type of site can only be understood in the light of historical facts and analysis. Not all fantasies are reality but, conversely, some atrocities that were sometimes played down did well and truly exist. MMC



**Max SCHMITZ** (born in 1936 in Essen, Germany)

*Figur*, 1984

Sculpture

Varnished iron

120 x 25 x 25 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### ***FRAC's perspective***

At first glance, *Figur* is seen as the human body in art form, depicting a 'human figure part way between realism and abstraction'. [...]

This forms part of a new group of sculptures referred to by Max Schmitz as 'Conformation Mensch' (Conforming People), which he seeks to portray as completely elongated, vertical, with no protrusions/growths, upright, slender and collected, entirely separate from any 'situation'. Although smaller than real-life figures and devoid of arms, gender or facial features, they appear bizarrely whole and complete. And although placed at ground level, they exude an aura of divinity.

*Figur* presents a schematised body. [...] The importance of the back of the head - the seat of thought

– accentuates the metaphysical presence of this portrayal of a human being in all its philosophical complexity. This evenly balanced, pure, proud and distant figure clearly conveys the lofty position of human beings in the world. BA

### ***ONaCVG's perspective***

We can imagine several links between this piece of work and the exhibition site, namely the former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. Indeed, the faceless silhouette with no identity is a stark reminder of the dehumanisation suffered by deportation victims, echoing the work of Anne and Patrick Poirier. The *Figur[e]* we see before us appears to be waiting for someone or something in passive mood. This posture could be reminiscent of that adopted during the dreadful 'Appell' or 'roll call' endured by deportees on a daily basis, sometimes for hours on end, whilst being head-counted by the SS. On the flip side, however, the strength of the figure comes to the fore, not least because the materials used in its creation - varnished iron – give the lasting impression of solidity. The afore-mentioned passive mood could therefore be interpreted as a silent protest against the oblivion and oppression suffered by the victims. MMC



**Anne** (born in 1941 in Marseille, France) **et Patrick POIRIER** (born in 1942 in Nantes, France)

*Sans titre (No name)*, 1975

Wall sculpture comprising 7 casts

Japanese paper

Papier Japon

Framed work: 58 x 155 x 6 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Anne and Patrick Poirier, remembrance archaeologists and architects, have a passion for ruins or, to be precise, for the 'catastrophic' aspects of ruins which often bear testimony to the violence of nature or history. All catastrophes drive home the fragility of civilisations, of human beings and ultimately of their creations. Indeed, all of the work produced by these artists tells the same story – cultures, civilisations and, in other words, remembrance, are extremely fragile. [...]

'Sometimes they patiently construct miniature cities in intricate detail using tiny pink terracotta bricks or black charcoal. Sometimes they use marble and bronze to portray the cosmic battle between the gods of Mount Olympus and the Giants. Sometimes, they use Japanese paper to fashion enigmatic headstones or parts of faces reminiscent of fragmented sculptures. But all the while they are experimenting with both large- and small-scale creations, heavy and light, durable and fragile, using noble as well as less noble or overlooked materials [...]' GL

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

These casts portray the dehumanisation experienced by victims of the Nazi regime and question the notion of identity in contemporary conflicts. The serial number concept would inevitably spring to mind if visitors were asked to comment on deportation during the Second World War. This image of a person's identity being taken away and replaced by simple numbers is indelibly etched in the minds of all victims and those who remember. It is an individual's identity that makes them unique. Depriving a human being of their identity is tantamount to depriving them of their very being. Continuing in the image of these casts, one of the challenges facing post-conflict generations has been, and still is, to identify the victims. And this is precisely where this piece of work resonates with our ability to be resilient. Indeed, although these amputated faces may appear similar to us, upon closer inspection we rediscover the unique features of the person behind the 'mask' as every smile, every chin and every jaw line is different, reminding us of our own unique, indelible character. MMC



**Patrice ALEXANDRE** (born in 1951 in Paris, France)  
*Personnages aux yeux bandés* (*Blindfolded Figures*), 1979

Terracotta  
22 x 52.5 x 27.5 cm

FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Living between Champagne-Ardenne and Paris, where he teaches at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Patrice Alexandre has been reflecting on war and its violence for many years. He has created sculptures in homage to the 'gueules cassées' (facially disfigured servicemen and women) and questions the concepts of remembrance and commemoration by revisiting war memorials in the Marne region and in Belgium in particular. Just like an interpreter, he explores the link between the sculptor and the war, the monument and the location, and between the language of art and remembrance.

The sculpture *Personnages aux yeux bandés* (1979) (*Blindfolded Characters*) is typical of the artist's work in the 1980s using crudely modelled clay, fragile figures, often facing oversized structures. However, contrastingly, in this case, the sheer bareness and lack of any decorative element exude dramatic effect and poetic licence in all their glory. The figures appear to be holding hands – the first sign of a community spirit and social bond, although the fact that they are blindfolded symbolises desperate isolation. Or could they be awaiting execution?

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

In direct response to Joséphine Kaepelin's *Je ne veux pas voir ça* (I don't want to see that), these *blindfolded characters* represent those who refuse to see and accept certain truths. These characters have no way of knowing what lies in store for them. They cannot even decide on which direction to take. This work therefore reminds us of the importance of knowing our past in order to map out our future. The link between remembrance and citizenship is of paramount importance if we are to respond to the challenges facing contemporary society. This work has been chosen because of its extraordinary resemblance to the treatment of prisoners at Fort de Metz-Queuleu, a former special Gestapo camp and holding site for the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp in operation between 1943 and 1944. Prisoners detained here were blindfolded and had their hands and feet tied by the SS (a Natzweiler-Struthof sub-camp was also located there). This remains largely unknown to this day and must be passed on to future generations.  
MMC



**Miriam CAHN** (born in 1949 in Basel, Switzerland)

*Einzelköpfe* (*Individual Heads*), 2014

Digital colour slideshow with no sound

Delivery medium: tablet

Duration: 1 min 44 s

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Miriam Cahn is an artist who makes no concessions, either in her work or in her dealings with the establishments that exhibit it [...]. Her career took off in the early 1980s. Her drawings attracted the attention of Jean-Christophe Ammann and were exhibited for the first time at the Kunsthalle in Basel followed by the pavillon Suisse at the Biennale de Venise (Venice). [...]

She is best known for her graphic and pictorial work imbued with life-giving energy, clinically removing any reference to everyday violence portrayed by the media. She also enjoys working with materials (wood or clay), making her mark through often ephemeral sculptures. Photographed on a step-by-step basis, they form slideshows - such as *Einzelköpfe* (individual heads) - which portray the major themes of her work, namely love, sex and war or, in her words, life. JPF

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

In this work, Miriam Cahn destroys and then reconstructs an individual's head (*Einzelköpfe*). In this way the artist models the features of a fictitious character in clay, offering us yet another representation of resilience, a concept also evident in the work of Anne and Patrick Poirier. Resilience is demonstrated because this character, which was almost horrific at one stage, gradually regains human form before the visitor's very eyes. In light of the memories rekindled by the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp site, this work of art helps us to forge links with all forms of resistance which, despite not reaching fruition during the Second World War, nevertheless played a major part in promoting the rebirth of our society. This link can also be forged with the history of the site per se - once a place of suffering and destruction but now a place of peace and remembrance. MMC





**Didier RITTENER** (born in 1969 in Lausanne, Switzerland)

*Petite fille (Young Girl)*, 2005

Drawing

Transfer onto paper

210 x 150 cm

Framed format: 217 x 157 x 6 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### ***FRAC's perspective***

Didier Rittener's medium is mainly drawing and sculpture. In his drawings, he copies and slightly modifies designs from a wide range of sources including architectural ornaments, botanical drawings, works of art, texts, rock iconography and tattoos, etc. This allows him to create an ever-evolving bank of images from which he creates works on a single theme or compositions combining several elements. By drawing repository and cultural comparisons, he is constantly remixing the formal glossaries that make up our collective visual memory. He draws on tracing paper and directly on walls. More often than not, he uses a

chemical process to transfer ink from one medium (printed page or photocopy) to another (larger-format paper, strips of paper for 'tapestries'), using trichloroethylene. [...] *Petite fille* is a portrait of a young girl, copied from a magazine and transferred to large-format paper using trichloroethylene. OK

### ***ONaCVG's perspective***

Didier Rittener's work is both the gentlest and most impactful of this entire exhibition. In fact, we are 'only' looking at the portrait of a young girl with a sulky pout. This drawing would not take on such an emotional dimension in a more conventional setting. But seeing this image against the backdrop of the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp inevitably brings to mind the subject of child deportation during the Second World War - a historical reality that is difficult to grasp. Some people might see in this image a portrait of Anne Franck, who died in the Bergen-Belsen camp at the tender age of 15. On a broader note, others might see it as an invitation from a young girl not to forget her story. The youngest child to be incarcerated at the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp was a young German, Ernst Böhmer, who was 11 years old when he arrived there in November 1943. Some sub-camps such as Thil, were also used to house large numbers of children including a hundred or so Hungarian deportees aged between 14 and 18.

As tragic as this image may be, *Petite fille* reminds us of the role of art and, above all, its ability to transcend particularly sensitive topics – an essential step in passing on memories to future generations. MMC



Photo : Mathieu Bertola/Service photographique interne des musées de la Ville de Strasbourg / © Didier Rittener

**Joséphine KAEPELIN** (born in 1985 in Lyon, France)

*Je ne veux pas voir ça (I don't want to see that)*, 2014

Mechanical engraving and hand sanding on black 'Deep nocturne' Corian®.

64 x 98 x 1.2 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### ***FRAC's perspective***

Solid black sections are a recurring theme in Joséphine Kaepelin's work. Yet these monochrome areas routinely refer to the world of digital machines from which she formulates the inaugural hypothesis of her approach as an artist, namely, to assume that machines have subjectivity. [...]

*Je ne veux pas voir ça* is produced from sheets of Corian®, a material comprising mineral fillers and acrylic resin, in a format similar and proportional to television screens. The diagrams and phrasing, 'Je ne veux pas voir ça', are mechanically engraved on the screen like subtitles, and the artist has sanded down the edges of the screen by hand. She likens them to icons, and the instruction to hang them at height is commensurate with the esteem in which they are held. VR

### ***ONaCVG's perspective***

*Je ne veux pas voir ça*. This phrase takes on many different meanings when applied to a former concentration camp. Indeed, thoughts of denial and paralysis spring to mind when faced with the horrors of conflict or the difficulty in accepting someone else's reality, etc. There are as many interpretations as there are messengers. But when Joséphine Kaepelin's work is exhibited at one of the major deportation sites, it actually raises questions for visitors. Why would we want/not want to see this? Why do we need to look at a former concentration camp? The answer to these questions may seem obvious – to pass on this era in our history and these memories to future generations to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again. But behind this obvious answer, there is a great deal more. We are confronted with the very nature of mankind and the ambiguity between good and evil. An engraving of this kind gives us another view of this camp, which, despite rekindling traumatic memories marked by torture, death and suffering, poses the ultimate question - how could humanity have created a place that we now wish we had never seen? MMC



Photo : Joséphine Kaepelin / © Joséphine Kaepelin

**Peter FISCHLI** (born in 1952 in Zurich, Switzerland) and **David WEISS** (born in 1946 in Zurich, Switzerland)  
*Schublade (Drawer)*, 1987

Rubber sculpture

13.5 x 43 x 50 cm

49 Nord 6 Est - FRAC Lorraine, Metz collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Peter Fischli and David Weiss defunctionalize everyday objects without stripping them of their evocative power. They follow in the tradition of *ready-made objects* inherited from Marcel Duchamp whilst paying particular attention to materials. The incongruous use of rubber in the manufacture of furniture is reminiscent of materials associated with travel and connections - vehicle tyres and seals are made of rubber.

The drawer has lost its front panel and its contents are no longer hidden from view. Placed on a pedestal, it becomes a sculpture and an item to look at. The idea is to invite onlookers to imagine its contents based on their own perceptions. PE

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

Why display a rubber drawer in a place of remembrance? In order to answer this question, we have to analyse the role of the object *per se*. In this case, we will mention the desire to file and classify documents. This inevitably brings to mind the Nazi administrative system whereby each deportee was identified by an information sheet. We can visualise tens, hundreds and thousands of sheets filed in drawers and cupboards. But these control instruments introduced by the Nazi regime later became essential archives for understanding sites such as the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp. This drawer invites us to analyse period documents in terms of their historical development and to draw scientific conclusions from them in order to avoid manipulating the past, as we are doing in a different way with the work of Marc Bauer. MMC



Photo : Rémi Villaggi / © P.Fischli & D.Weiss

**Lida ABDUL** (born in 1973 in Kabul, Afghanistan)

*What we saw upon awakening*, 2006

Video, colour, sound

6'52"

Production et 49 Nord 6 Est - FRAC Lorraine, Metz collection

### ***FRAC's perspective***

Afghanistan, Kabul – a war context. A group of men are trying to knock down the remaining walls of a house. Or are they in fact trying to create buttresses to preserve these structural threads? The taut ropes are conducive to either interpretation.

Lida Abdul uses the image of the ruin primarily to denounce the political situation in her native country, which has been shaken to its very core by wars, and then symbolically to invoke the identity and memory of a culture that has been abused here. The burial of a stone adds a commemorative dimension and makes reference to Islam according to which the bodies of the deceased are buried directly in the ground. The artist views humans as both builders and destroyers with the latter triggering memories to be erased or preserved.

PE

### ***ONaCVG's perspective***

This work by Lida ABDUL questions our own relationship with heritage and material remnants impacted by contemporary conflicts. The former Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp houses remnants of buildings from the concentration camp era, such as the kitchen barracks, clearly portraying the historical reality of the site. *What we saw upon awakening* puts forward the fantasy of destroying these heritage footprints. Why destroy such traces, which are so important from a remembrance standpoint? To avoid taking responsibility in the history of conflict? To impose a single vision in terms of remembrance? Or quite simply to forget the atrocities of war? There is obviously no single answer to this question, but rather a proposal for reflecting on the link between heritage sites, justice post-conflict and historical confrontation.

MMC



Photo : Lida Abdul / © L. Abdul

**Edith DEKYNDT** (born in 1960 in Ypres, Belgium)

*One second of silence (Rotterdam)*, 2009

Colour video with no sound, Projection

Running time: 20 min 28 s (loop)

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

Through the power of observation and experimenting with elementary forms and basic manifestations, Edith Dekyndt unveils primordial forces and phenomena (gravitation, magnetism, etc.). [...] The ability of every onlooker to observe the 'fascinating existence of things' is multiplied as they discover her work. A unique physical and mental experience is there for the taking, encompassing both the work per se and the exhibition venue.

In the video *One second of silence (Rotterdam)*, a transparent flag flies against the backdrop of a grey sky, impressing the onlooker. The core concept of movement is depicted here. There is the movement of the flag in the foreground accompanied by the vast, fleeting movement of the sky at the front, rear and all around. The landscape concept is also evident and, on a more symbolic note, the concept of country, which is "unlimited" rather than 'demarcated' given the transparency of the flag. The artist filmed several versions of this video in different parts of the world. [...] SK

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

This enigmatic work, *One second of silence (Rotterdam)*, takes on particular significance in this exhibition venue - the European Centre of Deported Resistance Members. Indeed, the colour of the flag - or rather, the lack of colour given the transparent canvas used - emphasises the equality of nations in the face of contemporary conflicts. Indeed, the very definition of this venue as a European centre shows that the site you are visiting represents victims of deportation right across Europe with no distinction in terms of country of origin. Another important symbol is the flag *per se*. This fundamental element of the remembrance ceremony reminds us of the importance of commemorating the events of the past. In this respect, we can make the link between Edith Dekyndt's suggestion and that put forward by Peggy Buth, both of which come back to the link between society and its relationship with history. MMC



Photo : Edith Dekyndt / © Edith Dekyndt

**Nathalie SAVEY** (born in 1964 in Bourg-en-Bresse, France)

*Les Envolées (Flights)*, 1998

Black and white silver print on Bergger Prestige Variable CB baryta paper

37 x 56.5 cm

Framed format: 52 x 71.5 cm

FRAC Alsace, Sélestat collection

### *FRAC's perspective*

‘ Dans la série *Les Envolées*, je photographie des mouettes d’au-dessus. C’est un point de vue que l’on n’a jamais quand on regarde les oiseaux car c’est plutôt en levant les yeux qu’on les voit. [...] J’ai imaginé un paysage en créant ce faux horizon. C’est un point de vue d’au-dessus d’un pont en plein centre-ville de Strasbourg, la terrasse panoramique du barrage Vauban, où des mouettes rieuses aiment venir. Quand j’ai vu ce lieu, j’ai ressenti qu’il pouvait être l’espace pouvant symboliser le rapport du ciel et de la terre et un lieu qui peut générer une intemporalité. [...] Les oiseaux sont les acteurs qui définissent la profondeur de l’espace. Les mouettes, par leur taille, leurs mouvements, et leurs positions par rapport aux autres, donnent la sensation du proche et du lointain. Je voulais qu’in chaque photographie, chaque envolée, elles racontent un autre espace, qu’elles rendent palpable ce vide entre terre et ciel. Je me sens comme un metteur en scène, en choisissant très précisément, quand, comment, je crée une fiction en partant du réel. [...] ’. NS

### *ONaCVG's perspective*

L’œuvre de l’apaisement. C’est ainsi que l’on pourrait nommer les photographies de Nathalie Savey. La poésie de cette œuvre contrebalance les terribles mémoires de ce lieu et nous donne l’impression de respirer après avoir plongé dans les ténèbres. On peut bien sûr penser au retour in la réalité des déportés ayant survécu au camp de concentration de Natzweiler-Struthof ou in la volonté de tous les peuples de construire un avenir plus clément. Néanmoins, Nathalie Savey nous rappelle que nous ne pourrons jamais nous défaire du passé en représentant in la fois la terre, symbole de notre ascendance, et le ciel, symbole de la postérité. Les directions des personnages que sont ces oiseaux divergent et nous indiquent que se tourner vers l’avenir se conjugue forcément avec un regard en arrière sur notre histoire. C’est d’ailleurs la principale mission du Centre européen du résistant déporté que de transmettre et commémorer les mémoires des conflits contemporains. MMC



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