

L'avant-dernière version de la réalité

The Penultimate Version of Reality

Exhibition by Brognon Rollin

Curated by Julien Blanpied and Frank Lamy,
assisted by Ninon Duhamel

Lighting designer: Serge Damon

English

From 7 March 2020 to 31 January 2021

Text by Julien Blanpied and Frank Lamy, curators of the exhibition

MAC VAL is putting on the first monographic museum show by the artistic duo Brognon Rollin (born, respectively, in 1978 and 1980, in Belgium and in Luxembourg), a mixture of new and older works.

Behind the exhibition title, taken from Borges, there is a simple, yet dizzying question: "Is reality soluble in its representation?" Does reality exist outside its representations? What role do time and perception play? And relativity? And its spatial dimension? How do we give form to the experience of duration? Or waiting? Of suspension? Of balance?

Brognon Rollin's projects are densely intertwined narratives inscribed in the history of minimal and conceptual art. Combining symbols, events, objects and anecdotes that are in principle unconnected and sometimes fantastical, the works are powerfully polysemous supports for unfolding lines of flight imbued with melancholy and poetry. What we see is only the tip of the iceberg. A clock freezes when the viewer approaches it in the constrained space of a cell (*8m² Loneliness*); a *line sitter* occupies the space of a museum until the voluntary departure of a person reaching the end of their life (*Until Then*); the duo makes an actual-size tracing of the island of Gorée and then store it, fragment by fragment, on a shelf (*Cosmographia*); in Jerusalem, on a football pitch whose geometry is deformed, children calculate the position of the centre circle (*The Agreement*).

Waiting, confinement, the status quo and fragility are at the heart of their obsessions, leading them to explore intermediary spaces: addictions, the sacred, prisons, islands, etc.

By shifting these pointers, by bringing into play a change of perspective, the artists postulate that a fall can resemble soaring, and vice versa. A theatre spotlight positioned over the exhibition reveals no show. Is resilience child's play? Do statues have a life? Is there something new under the sun? What happens when my eyes are looking elsewhere?

Between Philip K. Dick, Stefan Zweig and Jorge Luis Borges, David Brognon and Stéphanie Rollin explore the interstices of time. The works in the exhibition can be experienced like so many spatio-temporal fault lines and, in the end, encourage meditation on the programmed disappearance of all things.

Exhibition organised in partnership with BPS22 Musée d'Art de la Province de Hainaut, Belgium, the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles, Paris and the Mission Culturelle du Luxembourg en France. With the cooperation of the Fonds Culturel National Luxembourg. With the support of L'atelier de l'imaginaire.

Attempt of Redemption, 2012-13

The men in the image are inmates at the Écrouves detention centre, with which Brognon Rollin began to collaborate during a creative residency at FRAC Lorraine.

Their choreography follows the lines marked out on the floor of the prison gym and redraws a singular process of marking time: *Doors closed. Promenade. Legal visit, Family visit. Infirmary. Atelier. School. Sport. Doors locked. Disciplinary committee. Registrar. Doors closed.* In the video, all the movements are made backwards, anticlockwise, as if in an attempt at symbolic redemption, by going back in time.

Classified Sunset, 2017

All through the year 2017, Brognon Rollin published photographs of a sunset in the classified ads of the international press. The twelve images, all taken on the same evening and in the same place, retrace *a posteriori* the movement of a setting sun. The artists then made newspaper cuttings and framed each one individually.

Every fortnight, through to the end of the exhibition, one of the twelve photographs of this sunset will be presented on the signboard in the MAC VAL garden.

Cosmographia (Île de Tatihou), 2015 Cosmographia (Île de Gorée), 2015

In 2015, Brognon Rollin undertook the impossible project of tracing on paper the outline of an island chosen for its history on a scale of

1:1, centimetre by centimetre. Every day, working on site, the artists posted the contours they had managed to trace to the person who commissioned the work. Located off the coast in Normandy, the island of Tatihou was used mainly as a military base. It has fortifications but also served as a jail for prisoners of war and as a lazaretto for quarantining crews and merchandise from ports where the plague, or some other disease, was rife. Gorée, in the Bay of Dakar, Senegal, was a central hub of the slave trade. Millions of captive Africans were held here to be sold as slaves. Since 1978 the island has been a memorial and listed UNESCO World Heritage site.

***Famous People Have No Stories, since 2013* Coproductio n MAC VAL**

Chiromancy, or palmistry, a divinatory technique which uses the lines of the hand to predict a person's future, has been practised in Europe since the 12th century. Brognon Rollin photographed the hands on statues of famous people (from Joan of Arc to Bruce Lee and including Victor Hugo, Théodore Géricault, George Washington and Magic Johnson), as if looking for retrospective confirmation of their glorious destinies.

Fate Will Tear Us Apart (Stefano), 2011

Resorting once again to the principles of palmistry, *Fate Will Tear Us Apart* is a series that questions the idea of destiny: the lines on

the palms of the drug addicts met by the artists are enlarged and reproduced in the form of a neon. The work's title references "Love Will Tear Us Apart," a famous song written and performed by the group Joy Division in 1980.

I Lost My Page Again, since 2018

In collaboration with craftsperson Lucie Richard, Brognon Rollin had a series of photographs of waiting rooms reproduced in straw marquetry. This ancestral technique was widely used in Europe from the 17th to the 19th century for interior decoration, furniture and small objects. Wisps of straw are died and coloured then assembled and glued onto a wooden ground to form an abstract pattern or figurative image. Made using a humble and easily obtainable material, this craft was taken up by convicts, gallery slaves and nuns – all categories of people living in confined spaces. The large amounts of time required for this meticulous technique echoes the subject represented by the image: waiting rooms, station and airport concourses, medical surgeries, administrations and customs controls.

I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness, 2011

Le Grand Voyage, 2012

L'Haleine des Statues, 2014

Fool's Gold, 2016

Jet Black, 2016

Le Miroir de Claude (Claude's Mirror), 2019 – Production MAC VAL

Made from scratch or recuperated from "low-risk consumption

rooms" (SCMR), these shoot-up tables in stainless steel were originally items of furniture designed for rehabbing drug addicts.

The tables presented here are "augmented" by a metal-chain spider's web, an ox bezoar, a pyrite stone, two jade stones, a polish mark and a black mirror.

Le Bracelet de Sophia (Sophia's Tag), 2020

Coproduction MAC VAL – Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles, Paris

Produced specially for the exhibition at MAC VAL, *Le Bracelet de Sophia* is a light installation which transcribes at a distance and with a time lag the movements of a person placed under electronic surveillance.

L'Haleine des Statues (The Breath of Statues), 2018

Brognon Rollin filmed the faces of stone statues in close up, cutting out all context. Spiders webs moving in the wind give the impression that air is escaping from their mouths: the statues seem to be breathing. By exploring the frontier between alive and inert, movement and fixity, the artists question the notions of life, death and vanity.

Résilients, 2017

David Brognon, Sergio Bruno, Emmanuel Di Mattia, Alain Durieux, Jean-Pierre Henin, Pascal Martens, Stéphanie Rollin

Caterpillar is an American industrial group which specialises in

construction vehicles and machinery. In September 2016 the company announced that it was closing its production site at Gosselies in Belgium. 2500 people stood to lose their job. During the months that followed, the employees decided to set about creating a work of art in collaboration with Brognon Rollin. Taking the form of a monumental steel portico closed at the rear, this object is a scanner used to check bodies and objects passing in and out of factories, farms, airports, stations, metro stations, companies and other points of transit. In each new exhibition, the work must be assembled and dismantled by the six former workers who helped conceived and create it. The resilience referred to by the work's title designates both a metal's capacity to resist stress and an individual's psychological ability to come through traumatic events.

Statu quo nunc, 2016

Standing in the heart of Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre houses the "tomb" of Christ. Built in the 4th century, it was fought over by different Christian communities who all claimed the right to own, occupy, use and maintain it. In 1852 the Ottoman authorities proclaimed the *Statu quo nunc*, giving a definitive, final form to the rights and properties of all the parties. The unmoveable ladder placed on the church façade since the signing of this decree has become a symbol of the unchangeable nature of the status quo.

This work consists of eight copies each of a contract and a

glass plaque, the number referring to the communities that share responsibility for the building. Signed by the artists and five collectors, the contract is intrinsically linked to the stability of the ladder: if the object disappears, Brognon Rollin undertake to reimburse the sums paid by the co-signatories. In exchange for which, the latter undertake to restore the work to the artists to be destroyed.

Subbar, Sabra, 2015

On a trip to Israel, Brognon Rollin learned about the history and multifaceted symbolism of the prickly pear, an invasive species of cactus that was imported from Mexico in the 16th century and used by local inhabitants to delimit plots of land. It is called *subbar* in Arab, deriving from *sabr* for "patience" or "tenacity," while in Hebrew it is called *sabra*, which is also a name for Jews born in Israel. From plant root to etymological root, the prickly pear is a political symbol that crystallises the identities of these two peoples. The duo sampled the thorns on a pear growing among the ruins of an old Palestinian village and then set out to graft them one by one onto the "racket" of a fig tree with no needles growing in the heart of Jerusalem. This double projection shows a graft. The voice-over reads the Wikipedia definitions (October 2015) of the prickly pear, alternating between the Arab and Hebrew versions.

The Agreement, 2015

The video *The Agreement* was shot in Terra Sancta College in Jerusalem, a Neoclassical architectural complex built in 1926 by the Franciscan order and backing onto the surrounding walls of the Old City. In the inner courtyard, a group of young boys are about to play football. Using their bodies to measure with, they mark out on the ground a new centre spot in chalk, while adapting to the reality of this ground on which the goals can never face each other.

The Foundling Fate, 2017

Pawn shops are very popular in the United States, where they offer a way of obtaining large sums of cash in exchange for personal possessions (jewellery, hi fit equipment, etc.). These are held for a few months until their owner returns to redeem them. In December 2017 the artists deposited a French calendar dating from 1910, a quarter of which had been carefully cut out, at Brothers Collateral Loans on Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles, in exchange for one dollar. This calendar was an “abandonment card,” an original document left with a child when he or she was given up to the Assistance Publique.

The Most Beautiful Attempt, 2012

In a dark room, a young boy moves the piles of salt on the floor in order to keep them in line with the ray of sunlight coming in, and out of the shadow. His patient,

silent action evokes the workings of a sundial, one of the first instruments for measuring time. Salt has many functions and meanings. Once used as a currency for the payment of taxes, it is both precious and corrosive. The action performed in this video is simply an *attempt*, which is a central notion in Brognon Rollin’s work.

There’s Somebody Carrying a Cross Down, 2019

Mazen Kenan, the patriarch of a Palestinian Muslim family that has been living in Jerusalem for decades, offers wooden crosses for hire (50 dollars) to pilgrims who want walk in Christ’s footsteps along the Via Dolorosa, the path of his Passion, all the way to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He also offers to photograph them for an extra three dollars. At the end of the walk, pilgrims leave their cross in the little courtyard facing the church. Several times a day, therefore, Mazen Kenan takes the crosses back down along the path, to the starting point, where other tourists can hire them again.

Until Then (MAC VAL), 2020 Production MAC VAL

In 2012, Robert Samuel invented the profession of *line sitter*, offering to stand in for his clients in the queues at shops, social services, shows, etc. In 2018 Brognon Rollin hired him to wait in the exhibition space for the deliberate and programmed death of a person. This performance is being reactivated for the exhibition at

MAC VAL. In Belgium, where the law recognises and regulates euthanasia, a person has decided to stop living in order to cut short his suffering and notified his doctors of this fact. On the same day and at the very second when this person dies, Elvin Williams (employed by Robert Samuel's company S.O.L.D) will vacate the premises, leaving his chair empty.

8m² Loneliness, 2012-13

A clock fitted with a motion sensor is installed in an alcove measuring eight square metres. When you enter this space, the clock automatically stops. Time is suspended then starts again when you leave, catching up with the time it has missed.

This aluminium grandfather clock is marked with the mention "B135", which is the cell number of a prisoner the artists met. The alcove, which has the same dimensions as that cell, is the replica of a space of confinement, where someone somewhere is living the daily experience of boredom, waiting and *loneliness*.

57 Seconds, 2017

Three photographs constitute this work: the first shows a misted up pane of glass on which is written "57 seconds" along with the actual format of the image (8×12 cm) and the support on which it was made; the other two show the gradual erasure of this inscription, until it becomes totally invisible. The work is tauto-

logical (it refers only to itself): 57 seconds is the exact time it takes for the writing on the misted surface to disappear.

24H Silence (157 / 1,440 min), 2020

Production MAC VAL

This work is a collection of minutes of silence compiled by Brognon Rollin. A secular ritual, the minute of silence pays homage both to the dead and to survivors, when words are powerless. The minute almost never lasts a full minute and the silence is rarely absolute. Aural accidents and interference picked up by the recordings make it possible to hear and feel the unsuspected qualities of the silence.

Texts: Stéphanie Airaud and Ninon Duhamel

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