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Erhard, Annegret. "This art is radioactive contaminated." *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.
June 8, 2019.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung



Julian Charrière: "Aomen II (Oamen II) - Terminal Beach", 2016, Photography (Courtesy Galerie Tschudi, Zuos / © Pro Litteris)

This art is radioactive contaminated

The Swiss Julian Charrière is an environmental activist who works with the subtle means of art. He tours photography, filming, diving and experimenting Asia, Pole, Russia. He is thus successfully joining the avant-garde of research artists today.

As a start, a South Seas idyll in large format, in addition to the sleek in island and underwater landscapes roaming camera. Landscapes, however, in which shipwrecks and decaying bunkers eclipse the paradise. Then an irritating scenario with a huge steel diving bell, with cannonballs stacked in a pyramid, as we know it from World War I images. Behind it, finally, the singular video shot of an old, sunk to the sea bottom propeller. The concise and complex installation in the Berlinische Galerie was Julian Charrière's first institutional solo exhibition in

SEANKELLY

the city, When he's not out and about. And that's usually the case. To places that serve as vivid interfaces for the interrelationship between culture, technology and the environment, demonstrating the cruel impact of human activities and the associated geological, sociological and philosophical ignorance. He tours Asia, Pole, Russia. With the headlights of a specially prepared for the enormous cold drone, he glides over the huge glaciers of Greenland and generates unreal, but true imagery.



"The title of a work or exhibition offers me a good opportunity to make sense or confusion," says Julian Charrière. (Image: Serena Acksel)

For the Architecture Biennale in Venice, he and his colleague Julius von Bismarck spray doves with beautiful, naturally soluble colors and dismiss them freshly disguised into freedom, intervene in the usual human lust and with a nice result, into nature and refer to lashed judgments to perception , Truth and equality.

More recently, the Swiss artist has accompanied free divers into the depths of the ocean off Mexico, in water-filled caves. The mysterious cosmos, once described by Jacques Cousteau as the "Silent World," are gradually unfolding into an unimaginable logic. The sun, photographed from the deepest underwater view by the floating divers, becomes a glittering ray, a phenomenal feedback. Brazen relationships, rigid knowledge? Above and below? Given. All just a question of perspective.

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Ambiguity of the titles

Incidentally, the plentifully irritating and convoluted array of installations in the Berlinische Galerie is the result of Charrière's trip to the Bikini Atoll, where the American military fired 23 nuclear weapons between 1946 and 1958 for experimental purposes. The islanders were evacuated and deprived of their homeland forever, their past, the island is contaminated to this day.

"I work in one place, the place affects me. At the meeting, the work is created », describes Julian Charrière his approach. Basically, it is a performative work process when he makes fantastic, photographing, filming, diving and experimenting locations, fictitious places in the collective memory, but also places that are endangered by exploitation, transforming them from the sober product of intensive field research into an inspiring work of art ,

White patches on his photographs of the Pacific archipelago were created by irradiated sand, which was applied to the already exposed footage before the development. These are the visible traces of a radioactive double exposure. Already on his trip to Kazakhstan, where Russian nuclear tests took place, Charrière fixed this phenomenon on his black-and-white photographs of the experimental bunkers there. The cannonballs in his multi-media room installation in the Berlinische Galerie, meanwhile, are lead-coated, radioactively contaminated coconuts, piled up to a monument of ruthless appropriation.

SEANKELLY



Julian Charrière: "Pacific Fiction - Study for Monument", 2016. (Courtesy Galerie Tschudi, Zuoz / © Pro Litteris)

The ship's propeller ground to a depth of sixty meters is useless, useless and motionless as it lies there, only as a memento mori. "As we used to float" is the seemingly melancholic title of this work, but it can also lead in other directions. Does he refer to the wrecked warship device, to the unimpeded flowing visions of power and destruction, to the abrupt end of a growing island community?

"The title of a work or exhibition offers me a good opportunity to create meaning or confusion," says the artist. "The titles may sometimes seem cryptic, but for me, absurdly enough, they have a concrete, abstract connection to the works. A title encourages - after considering the work - to further interpretations. Based on the individual mood and orientation of the viewer, he can raise questions to which one has no answer, and thus destabilizing, as well as pretend possible new readings.

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Subjective narrative

Charrière seeks to transpose the artistically transcribed arc of time between people's fantasies of almighty humanity, the radical implementation of feasible attacks and the inevitably associated globally effective injuries and losses. He does not understand himself as an instructive environmental activist in all research work, in all knowledge and utilization of contexts. Rather, he wants to find out how this imbalance can be reproduced stringently and originally as a result of the hair-raising misconduct and the fatal misunderstanding of having to subdue the earth; he wants to contribute a new cultural, subjective way of narration.

This can be done with humor, for example, when he makes the gigantic, unusable diving bell hanging just above the ground in the Berlin exhibition depend on the equilibrium of some not very stable bags of water. The same applies to the image and music language of the club culture, when he passes through an ultralong ride through an Indonesian palm grove with smoky swirls and stroboscopic flashes and accompanies with the vibrating rhythms of the techno beat. Rave in the Oil Palm Plantation - beauty and intoxication united in the sublime setting of exotic exploitation hotspots?

Or a punch in the stomach? These include the narrow planks of blackened tropical wood with a seemingly weathered ornamental relief pattern of depictions of Indonesian flora and fauna. They are up to four and a half feet long and are reminiscent of Egyptian mummy boards, also on alpine death boards. The artwork was based on drawings by the English naturalist and evolutionary theorist, Alfred Russel Wallace, a contemporary of Darwin's, who traveled to Indonesia to explore the ecosystem and human impact on nature. His findings, written and illustrated in a popular report at the time, relativized previously valid laws of nature. He could not anticipate the extent of the catastrophic consequences for the sensitive ecosystems due to careless human impacts.

Charrière's reflections also result in abundant cryptic objects. Like in a shrine, last year at the Biennale in Riga, he presented the beautifully illuminated beauty of a being (?), Object (?), Magic thing (?) In a glass case in the middle of a night-black room. His work titled "Tropisme" was a crowd pleaser in an instant. Who does not love the lyrically presented riddle? The silvery-white ice-covered twigs and leaflets of an ancient plant variety that has existed for millennia are enclosed in a permafrost snow white coffin for the sake of perpetual persistence. Is it possible to preserve what has been stupidly and willfully destroyed over time?

In general, the question arises as to whether the encounter with art influences our global ecological awareness and behavior more efficiently than sober, less entertaining facts of scientific knowledge. If it is original in formulating and using time-typical means and materials, it has the best chance of captivating recipients. Julian Charrière has understood this very well and joins, often in

SEANKELLY

cooperation with a creative pool of thinkers, particularly successful in today's avant-garde of the research artists. There is still no danger of a general wear and tear, a banalization of existential questions. But the interface of image-finding, beauty and meaningfulness can quickly become the focal point of platitudes.