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Issaurat, Laurent. "2021 Marcel Duchamp Prize: Meet the Nominees (1/3): Julian Charrière." *Société Générale*, October 2021.



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How would you describe your current practice in terms of preferred media and themes?

I don't have a preferred medium per se. I never use the medium as the means to take on a new subject. It's always the opposite, in fact. The starting point is the concept, the idea, that I try to interpret, dictated by the means. That's why my work encapsulates a broad range of media, including video, performance art, and installation — one of the particularities of my work is that I sometimes develop my projects beyond the four walls of my studio. Very early, I was interested in our relationship with space, in the world that passes through us and through which we pass. Thus, moving beyond the studio was an obvious next step. Working in the field, in the landscape, and directly with the subject is what drives my approach. Sometimes my work can be seen as provocative by inviting critical reflection on the cultural traditions of our perception, representation, and engagement with the natural world. It's an invitation to challenge our preconceived ideas and inherited conceptions of the notion of Nature as an idea or an ideal, as well as its transformation over the deep geological course of time, including the history of humanity.

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Image credits: Julian Charrière, Towards No Earthly Pole, 2019 / Installation view, Towards No Earthly Pole, MASI Lugano, Lugano, Switzerland, 2019 / Copyright the artist; VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany / Photo by Jens Ziehe

What pieces (or series of pieces) best epitomise your work, or are particularly meaningful to you?

My latest video project *Towards No Earthly Pole* is one of the hardest phases of work I have ever experienced in the production process. The project emerged as a kind of outcome of the themes running through my head for a few years now. My team and I took three years to develop the final version after several grueling months of filming in the Antarctic, the Arctic, and the Alps. What fascinates me is not only the film but the regions where we filmed. Some of my latest work finds its origin in parts of the cryosphere in which memory is encrypted and contained. This interest in the hidden knowledge contained in certain raw materials is not new to my work. For example, the *Future Fossil Spaces* project that began in 2014, and for which I was invited to the Venice Biennale a few years later, addresses similar themes. For this piece, I focused on the digital age and its materials, which have led to the emergence of a period of increasing dematerialisation. I used lithium-rich salt and brine from the Salar de Uyuni salt flat in the Bolivian Andes — the largely untouched home to a third of the Earth's lithium reserves. This fact will probably make it the biggest extraction and production site of this highly-prized metal, given our growing reliance on mobile technologies. Salt bricks piled on top of one another to resemble geological strata as a reminder of the long processes that led to the formation of these resources, juxtaposed with the potentially rapid destruction of this environment. Examining the salt and its chemical reactions was one of my first attempts at working the different stories compressed in the strata of a given material — an examination better served through the prism of geology than through the humanities or the news.

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Image credits: Julian Charrière, Future Fossil Spaces, 2017, Installation View, La Biennale die Venezia, Arsenal, 57th International Art Exhibition; Copyright the Artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany; Photo by Jens Ziehe

Tell us about an important source of inspiration in your journey (an encounter, a lecture, an event, etc.).

One of my main sources of inspiration is travel: allowing spaces to move through you while moving through spaces; learning through encounters with a given place, its stories, and its substance; getting lost in the different time scales and levels of ecological coexistence. I'm fascinated by places where different meanings superimpose, and where different narratives emerge through different cultures and periods. Places of radical history also have an element of fiction that is hard to escape, especially when real history is no longer visible nor tangible. A major shift occurs between the aspect, the original essence of a place, and its appearance, its representation. Sometimes the emotional tie connecting a tangible space to its history ceases to exist. It is replaced by images floating within the collective visual imaginary. I'm basically interested in places that can be read in many different ways. Certain materials also contain particular stories revealing inherent time scales. Our society relies on specific ancient resources, shedding light on history in a broader context, showing the evolution of our environment, i.e. nature and our role within nature. Working with these materials is another type of journey to distant places with exact geophysical identities.

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Ultimately, the interaction of substance and deposits open up new possibilities for me.



Image credits: Julian Charrière, Weight of Shadows, 2021, Installation View, Prix Marcel Duchamp 2021, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, 2021 / Copyright the Artist, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, Germany / Photo by Jens Ziehe

Can you give us a few words on your project for the 2021 Marcel Duchamp Prize?

The project deals with the celestial memory and past states of the atmosphere, as well as with humanity's place within these complexes, the sheer scale of which is beyond our comprehension. The state of the skies and the former states of the atmosphere crystallise as air bubbles trapped in the ice's strata. These bubbles containing the history of the atmosphere are one of the keys to understanding the systemic functioning of the Earth's climate. This explains the work's connection with the cryosphere, its rapid liquefaction, and the loss of this

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information. Glaciers and polar caps are in my mind the oracles of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Visiting an oracle should give you answers to a possible future, an omen. These oracles communicate loud and clear and are echoed by the scientific world. Yet society has turned a deaf ear to their dark omens of the deregulated climate of the world that awaits us. The project takes the form of an immersive installation that addresses different states of matter, namely the avatars of carbon and its chemical cycle. The centerpiece is a “pure waste” video that documents an action taking place in the north of Greenland. A hand casts a few diamonds into a glacier mill a few diamonds in a gesture, both provocative and reconciliatory. The diamonds in question are quite special. I created them using the CO₂ collected during a reverse extractive operation — i.e. not mining minerals from rock, but sucking out the dioxide in the ambient air, which I mixed with the CO₂ collected from the breath of a thousand people around the world, before transforming the carbon in its purest and hardest form: the diamond.

Where will you be exhibiting after the Marcel Duchamp Prize?

I have a joint exhibition with Katie Paterson — a kind of a follow-on of the project presented for the Marcel Duchamp Prize — at the Tschudi gallery in Zuoz this December, then a project for Parasol Unit in Venice in the inner courts of the music conservatory.