

Lionel Sabatté

Prix des Amis 2017

exhibition : February, 23 - May, 20 2018

Once a year, an artist is elected by the «friends of la maison rouge» to produce a work that will go on show in the foundation's patio. In 2017, these «amis de la maison rouge» chose Lionel Sabatté, a French plastic artist.

«Are they immortal, the dwellings we construct, the places we inhabit with our existences? Let us imagine instead a realm of possibility, a stance against ingrained habits and the sentiment that what is will always be. Everything must be transformed; how else might it maintain its potential for action and create its legend, all the while suggesting the desire for renewal. By his every gesture, Lionel Sabatté gives form to this philosophy centred on life and vitality. Is it not contained in everything he has ever produced? And at the time of writing, his Demeure [dwelling] has yet to come into existence. It will take shape only after he has erected it, there in the Patio of la Maison Rouge, from cement and iron bars several metres high, drawing out the detail of its botanical, geological, archaeological, anthropomorphic anatomy. We will circle this muscular, flaming ochre architecture, made of solids and voids like the crumbling palaces of our childhood dreams. It will emerge from a battle waged with matter. Such is the essence of any large sculpture; one that is made from flesh, energy, life snatched with a sense of urgency, quivering outlines and frozen flight. When the artist showed me his working model, I thought of Rodin and his *Gates of Hell*. My eyes stayed riveted on that part of the dwelling where heads held my gaze with sunken eyes. I imagined the absent bodies of these

dead and doomed souls. And remembered that cement sets in a matter of minutes, and that it is sculpted by hand now that the marble- and stone-cutter's tools are no more. The almost precipitated forms, seized unaware, the blunt facets appear in the caressing brutality of their origin. In a performative gesture, the operation hinges on a sort of vital release, a freeing of the possibilities at work. In that instant where transformation takes place, power is given to blood and breath; to that which, in order to exist, must consume itself. This shelter is so frail as to be open to the Paris skies, a reminder that the stalactites and stalagmites of a new cavern communicate with the primeval forest, just as borders are dissipated by the mesh of time and place. When the exhibition closes, this dwelling will be destroyed and scattered, piece by piece. Proof of the multiple meanings of the word itself. When we dwell we linger, are reluctant to leave, until finally we settle there. You thought this was your home for ever but that would be to misconstrue the innermost intention: our final resting place can only be death. Something the artist refuses to accept. We must join him in this healthy reflection.»

Léa Bismuth

Léa Bismuth is an art critic, author and independent curator, most recently for -, an exhibition in three parts at Labanque in Béthune, between 2016 and 2019.

