After Eden. The Walther Collection

Curator: Simon Njami

Every autumn since its creation, La maison rouge has presented a private collection, giving visitors the chance to enter into the world of the passionate art lovers who put them together. For the thirteenth exhibition in this cycle, it has chosen The Walther Collection, which is one of the biggest private photography collections in the world, exceptional both in its international scope and for the quality and unity of its series by individual artists.

From its starting point of early twentieth-century German photography, the collection gradually broadened to embrace contemporary Chinese and African photography, fields in which its boasts several unique ensembles. Since 2010, The Walther Collection has been on display in two locations: a group of three galleries in Neu-Ulm and a Project Space in New York, where a series of major multiannual exhibitions have seen curators have explore African photography and video from a variety of thematic angles (the portrait and social identity in *Events of the Self* by Okwui Enwezor in 2010, landscape in *Appropriated Landscapes* by Corinne Diserens in 2011, African archive documents in *Distance and Desire* by Tamar Garb in 2013).

Après Eden takes another approach to the collection, based on sets of serial and typological images that bring together different geographical zones and periods, from the nineteenth century to modern and contemporary photography. It was entrusted to curator Simon Njami, who offers us an exhibition-cum-fable on aspects of humanity, following themes that he found running through the collection (landscape, the portrait, the city, identity, alterity, etc.). Its title, *Après Éden*, was chosen to evoke a lost paradise, a fallen world in which humans struggle to leave a lasting trace.

Origins

The ensembles by the German photographers Karl Blossfeldt, August Sander (shown in another section) and Bernd and Hilla Becher (Artur Walther's first acquisitions) constitute the collection's "DNA." These works immediately established his interest in serial photography, in which a subject is explored through a set of images with the same formal characteristics

and in the same format. This initial choice shaped the way the collection has grown over the years: rather than concentrate on an exemplary work by each artist, Walther acquires series, often with the intention of showing them together. This, in turn, implies a particular way of hanging the works: in blocks, rhythmically laid out in lines or grids.

A teacher at the Kunstgewerbemuseum school of the arts in Berlin, **Karl Blossfeldt** started photographing plants, seeds and other forms of vegetal life to serve as models for his students. While the neutral backgrounds and the unvarying framing of these images recall the systems of classification used in botany since the seventeenth century, in the context of the 1920s their strict composition and documentary style also echo the aesthetic of the New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit), an artistic style whose chief photographic proponents were August Sander and Albert Renger-Patzsch. Published in 1928, Blossfeldt's *Urformern der Kunst* was an immediate and, soon, international success. All 120 plates from this portfolio are exhibited here. Thirty years later, the German photographers **Bernd and Hilla Becher** invoked New Objectivity, and Sander in particular. But rather than take nature or humankind as their subject, this couple were interested in the disused and often derelict industrial infrastructure of postwar Germany. They spent nearly forty years assembling a visual inventory of these vernacular architectural forms (here: gravel plants and blast furnaces), their method strict and unchanging, almost scientific: black-and-white, centred and frontal framing, uniform lighting, always the same distance. In the 1970s they began presenting their work in the form of grids, which they called "typologies." These pioneers of conceptual photography had a profound influence on the following generations, and particularly on the "Düsseldorf School." They are also key figures in the history of this collection, since they were Walther's mentors when he began to take an interest in the medium. With Blossfeldt and the Bechers, the distancing of the world constitutes the first stage in a journey on which, gradually, the human dimension would gradually come to the fore.

Fiction 1

The garden

Man was banished from the Garden of Eden. What dominates here is not so much the harmony of nature as landscape, that is to say, environments framed by photographers who imbue them with a particular resonance and significance. Southern and Central Africa are represented through the lenses of five photographers who tell us very clearly that there is no neutral or Edenic landscape. They emphasise human action. Wars, migration, colonialism and industrialisation have marked the landscapes of South Africa, Namibia, Angola and Mozambique, reflecting the political history of the region.

The section opens with two images by **David Goldblatt**, a critical observer of events in South Africa ever since the 1960s. Like the black-and-white ones made under apartheid (shown in another section), these recent works in colour document the effects of ideology on the landscape of his homeland. As for **Jo Ractliffe**, she offers a vision of something rough and raw which,

for all its apparent emptiness, is replete with the memory of wounds still not fully healed. Since 2007 she has been concentrating on the landscapes of Angola, ravaged by years of war. In *Terreno Ocupado* she explores the capital Luanda, just after the end of the civil war. To make *As Terras do Fim do Mundo*, she worked as a documentarian and topographer, probing with her lens the battlefields of the Border War in which South Africa and its allies fought Angola for nearly thirty years. What half-masked clues, what traces remain of this conflict, which took more than a million and a half lives?

In the "photographic essays" he began making nearly three decades ago now, Santu Mofokeng explores the symbolic dimension of landscape and the relations between the environment and development in his country. His subjects can be rural (the life of tenant farmers in *Bloemhof*) or urban (the representation of everyday life in the black townships before and after apartheid: *Townships* and *Billboards*). In 1996, Mofokeng began working on *Chasing Shadows* (shown in a later section), an essay in which he looks both at religious rituals and the places where they are practised, querying the link between landscape, memory and spirituality. With both Mofokeng and Goldblatt, photography bears witness to the thousand ways in which ideology shapes the landscape. Goldblatt is particularly interested in the "structures" set up in rural or urban spaces, and uses these to create a social, cultural, economic and moral portrait of South Africa, opposing order and chaos, memory and forgetting.

Like Jo Ractliffe, Guy Tillim left his country to explore an Africa that, at the time, his compatriots hardly knew. His images give us the noises of the city. Tillim studies the place of the big modernist buildings from the colonial period in contemporary African reality. Taken back by citizens after independence, and now crumbling, theses buildings/traces project us into "avenues of dreams," a phantasmagorical space where past and present, colonialism and the struggle for emancipation all merge. Closing this section, the photograph by Michael Subotzky is at once a landscape and a portrait, that of a man cleaning a beach where tourists are having fun. It comes from a recent series in which the photographer documents the life and social rehabilitation of former prisoners. It paves the way for the next section, which speaks to us of identity.

Fiction 2

Identity

The African photographers featured in this section are all, in their way, activists. Whether thoughtfully and inwardly, or from the outside as engaged observers, their portraits bestow visibility on human communities, tracing the outlines of groups that evolve in response to historical and social circumstances.

With Guy Tillim, being engaged means bearing witness. While the spirit of his work on the DRC militias reminds us that he used to a photojournalist, his immersion in their world goes well beyond simple reportage. In this series, child soldiers rebelliously stare down the camera. The logs they hold instead of weapons and their parade-ground camouflage bespeak the

tragedy that befell many African countries in these never-ending post-independence wars. These boys share a common identity, caught up in political currents that are often beyond their grasp. But despite the homogeneity of the poses and the lighting, the photographer manages to capture their individual personalities. **Zanele Muholi** lives and works in South Africa where, although the constitution guarantees equality and sexual liberty (same-sex marriage is legal), the law is rarely respected by institutions and civil society. Muholi is an activist fighting against prejudice and affirming the pride of "difference." In 2006 she initiated her series of *Faces and Phases*, which she conceived as a "photographic combat," a project that seeks to bring the black lesbian community out of its near invisibility and give it a positive image.

Self-affirmation and self-assertion also come to the fore in the *Country Girls* series by **Sabelo Mlangeni.** If the title might be taken to suggest stereotyped images of African women in the countryside, there are in fact no women here, nor any countryside, but only transgender individuals striking rather glamorous poses in the little country towns where they live. Based in Johannesburg, Mlangeni spent six years back in the region of his birth documenting gay life in the countryside. **Rotimi Fani-Kayodé**, a Nigerian who fled the war in his country for London, produced self-portraits that address the themes of difference and transgression: "On three counts I am an outsider: in matters of sexuality; in terms of geographical and cultural dislocation; and in the sense of not having become the sort of respectably married professional my parents might have hoped for." In his enigmatic, staged images, rituals combining Yoruba and Christian cultural references present the artist's body as a tool both of introspection and assertion.

Fani-Kayodé died of AIDS in 1989, too early to witness the "discovery" of the studio photography of Seydou Keïta and **Malick Sidibé** in the early 1990s, which transformed our vision of the contemporary portrait. **Sidibé**'s photographs are more than anecdotal images conveying the joie de vivre of Malian youngsters adopting the European style and dancing the twist with a proud, carefree spirit in the clubs of Bamako. Taken in the 1960s and '70s, they show a society that has thrown off the colonial yoke and can at last revel in freedom.

Fiction 3

The novel

While the videos shown here address the same themes as the photographs, they also allot greater space to fiction, in other words, to a strictly subjective narrative system. The artists take historical events, legends and places to offer a singular reflection of the real. Their videos take us into another, parallel and destructured reality.

In *Trip to Mount Zuqualla*, **Theo Eshetu** goes on the annual pilgrimage to an old monastery located in the crater of an extinct volcano in Ethiopia, a holy place for both Christians and Muslims. In this piece, which evokes the persistence of old religious customs, Eshetu uses kaleidoscopic editing and a mixture of classical music and rap to place viewers at the

intersection between the holy and the secular, between the timelessness of traditions and beliefs and the present moment.
The video by **Christine Meisner** brings us back to questions of landscape and its connection with memory. Meisner is particularly interested in questions linked to colonisation, slavery and territorial expansion, and in *Disquieting Nature* she explores the Mississippi Delta and the memory of segregation and racism. This piece takes its rhythm from the Delta Blues, which derives from the songs of black slaves, evoked here through the music that the artist produced in collaboration with the New York-based composer William Tatge. The figure of Eshu, a god who serves as a messenger in Yoruba mythology (West Africa), serves to connect past and present, memory and landscape.
Obscure White Messenger, the video by **Penny Siopis**, uses archival images of amateur films to tell the story of Dimitri Tsafendas, a mixed-race man who was given a job as a messenger at the South African parliament because he was classified as white. On 6 September 1966 he assassinated Hendrik Verwoerd, the prime minister and "architect of apartheid." The South African media refused to acknowledge the hatred that such a system could engender in its victims and attributed the act of the "messenger-boy" Tsafendas to mental instability. It is said that his deed changed the course of South African history.

Fiction 4

The city

This section is dominated by a documentary approach to the urban landscape, with a focus on its structure, rhythm and geometry. Here, a single image cannot suffice to capture the complexity of urban experience. Since 2008, **Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse** have been exploring the microcosm of *Ponte City*. This residential tower, the tallest in all Africa, is emblematic of 1970s Johannesburg. It was conceived as a kind of Radiant City that would offer its inhabitants every modern comfort. However, with the collapse of apartheid the tower became derelict, turning into a warren for marginals and paupers. The two artists lived there for six years. Their 360° panorama of Johannesburg was taken from the windows on each floor of the building. The photographs made in 1954 by **Yoshikazu Suzuki and Shohachi Kimura** immerse us in Ginza, the main shipping district of Tokyo. In this *leporello*, two long panning shots unfold opposite each other, symmetrically. The commentaries and descriptions of the shops integrated into the image take us away from pure documentary and towards conceptual photography. *Ginza Kaiwai / Ginza Haccho* is a unique representation of the urban history of Tokyo, a freeze-frame of Japanese society in the middle of the twentieth century. Its closeness to the project carried out by **Ed Ruscha** twelve years later is uncanny, to say the least. Between 1963 and 1978, Ruscha made sixteen photographic books taking a serial approach to features of the American landscape (apartment blocks, parking lots, swimming pools, gasoline stations, etc.).

The fourth of these books, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, published in 1966, methodically portrays that iconic avenue in Los Angeles. If his images appear systematic, Ruscha is actually giving us a parody of the purely documentary style. In the vernacular images of *Businesses along Sixth Avenue* the shops are systematically and frontally inventoried without effects of style. The functions of this kind of clinical photography are no doubt utilitarian: it provides a record for the municipal tax office or information for insurance assessments or real estate firms. The fronts of these barber's shops and drugstores, these modest buildings, take us into a proletarian Manhattan that has now all but disappeared. The same can be said of the Berlin captured by Arwed Messmer. In the years following the Second World War, Fritz Tiedemann was asked by the municipality to document the buildings of Berlin. Trained as a photographer, Tiedemann set about systematically preserving for posterity the facades of the buildings between the Ostbahnhof and Stalinallee in East Berlin. In 2013, Messmer digitised these thirty-two images, merging them to form a panorama giving an overall view of the Fruchtstraße, a unique visual memory of post-war Berlin. Stephen Shore took the approach of a surveyor. For his series on Sixth Avenue in New York, he defined a particular methodology in his way of covering each block of buildings while walking north, between 42nd Street and 59th Street, using infrared film to produce strongly contrasting, overexposed images. With this conceptual approach, Shore, too, moves away from traditional documentary and establishes the principles that now govern much of contemporary American photography. The work of Thomas Struth cannot be categorised as either documentary, whatever the form, or historical inventory. A representative of the famous Düsseldorf School, Struth was a student of Bernd Becher, and his master's influence is evident in his urban photographs from the late 1970s and '80s. The symmetry of the viewpoint and the uniform lighting help create images whose apparent objectivity leaves no room for emotion. Struth is particularly interested in the unpopulated areas he calls "unconscious places," which, in his view, express the character of a city. As for Luo Yongjin, he introduces a temporal dimension into the representation of urban reality. In the late 1990s he became aware of the drastic changes about to sweep through Chinese cities, and especially the capital Beijing, transforming the physiognomy of metropolises to the detriment of their history. In *Lotus Block*, Yongjin spent four years following the transformation of a site where a new group of buildings were about to be built. Each time he visited the site, he took sixty photographs, all from the same angle. But rather than showing his images in traditional chronological order, the photographer assembled them in a single composition in which we can simultaneously view different moments in the process.

Fiction 5

The body

In contemporary work, performance and photography are closely connected: photography works toward the "iconic accomplishment" of performance, of which, in a way, it constitutes the final phase. The photographs in this section give

an idea of a process orchestrated by the artist in a specific time and space.

Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé uses the self-portrait to explore the different strata of his identity as a Nigerian brought up in Scotland, between two cultures. In *Celebrate*, he contorts his body, naked, in an enigmatic choreography. His uninhibited movements fill the space with their joyous energy. In *Chinese Landscape Tattoo*, **Huang Yan**'s nudity disappears under the delicate painting of a traditional Chinese landscape. The framing on the torso hides the artist's face: his body becomes the simple support of an emblematic expression of Chinese culture, which he substitutes for his identity.

With **Song Dong,** the body disappears behind the action. The 36 images that make up *Printing on Water* correspond to the number of poses on a film. They recapture a performance during which, for an hour, the artist sat in the Lhassa River in Tibet and repeatedly stamped the water with a large wooden seal engraved with the Chinese character *shui*, which means "water." If the action appears derisory, for Song Dong it shows the political importance of gesture or ritual, beyond its actual trace: even what is futile must be accomplished. **Ma Liuming** has invented a female alter-ego, Fen-Ma, which enables him to create a zone of ambiguity and set up a critical distance between his work and himself as a person. Choosing an iconic Chinese monument, the Great Wall, Fen-Ma Liuming staged a performance in which, naked, he scales this wall built to separate "civilisation" from "barbarism," thereby physically transcending the spatial limits that were created, historically, to confine, control and regulate social relations.

The action performed by **Ai Weiwei** in *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* is similarly ambiguous: is this an iconoclastic action demonstrating his contempt for the Chinese art of the past? Or a denunciation of the destruction of the Chinese cultural heritage perpetrated during both the Cultural Revolution and the modernising frenzy of the 1990s? Or is it a critique of the blind veneration accorded to antique objects? In any case, a great deal has been written on the question since 1995, when the work was made.

The sequences in which, starting in 1872, **Eadweard Muybridge** captured the phases of movement, are of a very different nature. This sequential study of human and animal locomotion was designed to provide painters and sculptors with detailed models. But the most spectacular result of his research was to create the illusion of movement from still images. Most of the nearly hundred thousand photographic sequences that he made were published in 1887 in the big eleven-volume book, *Animal Locomotion*, from which the plates here are taken.

The body featured in the performances and "photographic actions" by **Dieter Appelt** is always the artist's own. What he seeks to convey is something that cannot be spoken: the presence of things in time. Here, the misting-over of a mirror evokes the transience of life. Paradoxically, however, this materialisation of the artist's breath is what makes it impossible to clearly see his face in the self-portrait. **Zhang Huan** uses his body as a political and symbolic space. "The body," he says, "is

the only means I have of directly questioning society and that society has of apprehending me." In *Skin (20 Self-Portraits)*, one of the last works he made in Beijing before emigrating to New York in 1998, the artist uses his skin, his eyes, his ears and his nose in postures that create an alphabet of gestures expressing both anger and resilience.

Fiction 6

Masks

Introducing this section about masks, the *African Spirits* series by **Samuel Fosso** immediately establishes the portrait not as a place where the personality of the sitter is revealed, but as a theatre. He dresses up and imitates iconic depictions of African or African-American figures such as Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, Patrice Lumumba, or Malcolm X, so that his own self-portrait, as both subject and object, is superimposed and merges with the phantom reference-image.

The works assembled in this room could be described as "collective portraits": presented as ensembles, individual portraits come together to outline the identity of different social groups, with which the photographer himself often empathises.

The portfolio of 60 portraits from *Antlitz der Zeit* (Face of Our Time) is only a small part of the ambitious project undertaken by **August Sander** just before the First World War, *People of the Twentieth Century*, which was still unfinished at his death in 1964. *Antlitz der Zeit* offers a portrait of Weimar Republic Germany, only a few years before the rise of National Socialism. The images also capture a rural society in the process of being transformed into an industrial one. Sander sought to show both the individuality of his models and their typicality as members of the groups that he identified ("peasants," "artisans," "women," "socioprofessional categories," "artists," "the city," and "the last people"). Sander's attempt to capture the full social reality of his time did not fit with Nazi ideology. *Antlitz der Zeit* was seized in 1936 and all copies that were found were destroyed. However, his typological approach strongly influenced later generations of photographers, from Walker Evans to the Bechers and then Thomas Ruff.

Like *Antlizt der Zeit*, the photographs taken by **Seydou Keïta** in Mali in the 1950s and 60s capture a turning point in the history of his country. Keïta opened his first studio in Bamako in 1948 and success came quickly. Everyone who was anyone came to pose before his camera until he closed the premises in the early 1960s. Keïta photographed his subjects often posed in a very studied way, with the accessories (jewellery, watches, flowers) and symbols of modernity (radio set, bike, scooter, car), set against the signature backdrops of patterned fabric that became synonymous with post-colonial African photography. Exhibited in France for the first time at the beginning of the 1990s, these portraits have become emblematic of modern African citizens' conquest of their own representation.

In contrast to Keïta's, the backdrops to the portraits in *The Family*, a series by **Richard Avedon**, are neutral, and there are no accessories. In addition to his work as a renowned fashion photographer, starting in the 1960s Avedon made a number of reportage projects on political subjects such anti-Vietnam

protests and figures from the counterculture. That made him a natural choice for a commission by *Rolling Stone* to portray the frontrunners in the US presidential election. What Avedon did was much more ambitious: he created a photographic pantheon of the American ruling class. His 69 portraits are a collective snapshot of the different "faces of power": politicians, business leaders, lawyers, union leaders – all members of the same "family."

Hiroh Kikai began his sociologically inflected reportage around the Buddhist temple of Sensoji in the early 1970s. Using the temple walls as an impromptu "street studio," he made it the unchanging setting for the portraits of the pilgrims and eccentrics who flocked to the site in Tokyo's Asakusa quarter, never spending more than ten minutes on any one. Each image is accompanied by a quotation taken from his conversation with the sitter, thereby extending the portrait into a dialogue between beholder and beheld. And where Sander and Avedon's titles are strictly indexical, Kikai's names contradict this essentialist approach to the portrait: in his works, the subjects exist according to their chosen identities only when they are facing the camera. Because he considers that a photograph cannot capture the complexity of an individual, Thomas Ruff deliberately limits himself to the surface. Seeking to make "contemporary portraits," he photographed his fellow students as the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. The close framing, the absence of facial expression and the uniform coloured grounds recall the plain, neutral style of ID or indeed legal photography, the subject of one of the next sections.

Fiction 7

Others

Shortly after the invention of photography in the nineteenth century, studios were set up in all the major African cities and, predictably, the portraits made there followed the conventions of the time, either in the bourgeois genre based on the codes of painting, complete with background, décor, costumes and accessories, or in the "African" ethnographic genre with all the attendant clichés and stereotypes: warrior, mother and child, naked woman, "tribal chief," etc., all feeding into the European image of African primitiveness and exoticism. The Walther Collection includes sizeable archives of these images made in Southern and East Africa, with portraits, photographic albums, cartes de visites and postcards from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

During the colonial period, photography was used to make typological studies designed to demonstrate racial differences. Africans were taken as the subject of "scientific" study and photographed as "specimens" to be analysed. Contemporary artists in Africa have revisited these anthropological and ethnographic images in order to bring out their essentialist clichés and reflect upon the objectification of their subjects, and thereby transform them into political discourses. In their works they ironically reconfigure these clichés. With Jodi Bieber, for example, black women's bodies are no longer the object of a voyeuristic, external gaze but are a subject of pride for these women who take control of their own image. Samuel Fosso exhibits himself as a "chief" or a "liberated woman" in

extravagant stagings. The montages made by **Sammy Baloji** recontextualise ethnographic images of the Congo in contemporary landscapes. **Candice Breitz** exhibits racial clichés, covering in white the bodies of South African women on tourist postcards. **Zanele Muholi** portrays elegant young homosexuals and transsexuals wearing bead accessories typical of Zulu crafts. **Sabelo Mlangeni, Jo Racliffe and David Goldblatt** show individuals in "traditional" costumes, worn not as exotic accessories but as modern affirmations of cultural identity. **Pieter Hugo** digitally manipulates the colour of his skin and that of his friends in portraits that recall legal identification photography.

However, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also, if more infrequently, offer instances of photographs that seek to present Africans not only as fully-fledged individuals, but as modern ones, too. These images show important figures (chiefs, politicians) and the emerging middle class. The sitters, who commissioned the photographs and were equal in social status to the photographer, are in charge of their own representation. In the 1990s **Santu Mofokeng** started gathering images of this kind, both studio portraits and family pictures of the black urban working and middle classes, along with the fragments of their personal histories. The images of *The Black Photo Album*, which are contemporaneous with and sometimes even predate those in the albums by A.M. Duggan-Cronin, constitute a "counter-archive." They offer a counterpoint to anthropological and ethnographic approaches, raising essential questions about the power of representation and its codes, examining a little-known chapter in the history of photography. Nearby, a transport crate exhibits its contents and reveals a more secret but also more prosaic dimension of The Walther Collection as the curator humorously alludes to three essential aspects of the collecting process: accumulation, conservation and classification.

A special section is dedicated to the typological photography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The principle of these classifications is to identify those who do not match the norms of the dominant group. This category contains both the anthropometric taxonomies of Alphonse Bertillon, legal identification photographs (mug shots), and studies of the expressions of patients under hypnosis (Jules Bernard Luys) or electrical stimulation (Duchenne de Boulogne).

Fiction 8

The Voyeur

Japan is a land of taboos and rigid codes, but it also has a very old tradition of erotic art and literature, for private use. Daido Moriyama, Nabuyoshi Araki and Kohei Yoshiyuki all felt the need to transgress these codes and overcome these barriers by exploring the notions of intimacy, eroticism and privacy, in their original series of black-and-white photographs. Whether we like it or not, their images put us in the position of voyeurs.

From 1971 to 1979, **Kohei Yoshiyuki** photographed the sexual encounters that took place in the public parks of Tokyo at nightfall. The images in *The Park* take us from the intimate, private world of sexuality to the more controversial one of

exhibitionism. Yoshiyuki documented these scenes using infrared-sensitive film and a special flash. The way these images were "stolen" makes them eminently voyeuristic. Their first exhibition in 1980 and the publication of the accompanying book caused a furore, so much so that *The Park* was not shown again until twenty-five years later.

Nobuyoshi Araki concentrates on the private sphere: "My own memory disappears at the very moment when I take the photograph. The camera serves as my memory." The whole of his photographic output can be seen as a "private diary," a term which was used to subtitle his series *101 Works for Robert Frank*. Each photo carries the date when it was taken and, together, the series takes us through the photographer's days: women in various erotic poses (sometimes involving bondage), still lifes, domestic scenes and landscape form a harmonious whole which celebrates the poetry of the everyday.

Belonging to the same generation as Araki, **Daido Moriyama** is known, above all, for his street scenes, snapped in the old quarters of Tokyo. His characteristic "raw, blurred and murky" images are very much in evidence in *A Room*, a series comprising 64 nudes and still lifes that exude a sense of uncertainty.

At the end of this sequence, and by way of a climax, **Yang Fudong**'s video installation takes us into a post-nuclear world peopled by humans and stray dogs struggling to survive in apocalyptic landscapes – like an exhortation to find the way back to the Garden of Eden.

Baptiste Debombourg
Acceleration Field

Once a year, les amis de la maison rouge chooses and produces a work for the foundation's patio. In 2015, its members have selected French sculptor and installation artist Baptiste Debombourg.

Baptiste Debombourg has been working with glass since 2005 and *Champ d'accélération* (Acceleration Field) is his most intricate large-scale installation (250 square meters) to date, the first one, too, to expose itself to outside natural light. This installation belongs to a cycle where glass colonizes space, sometimes processed to turn into black as in *Matière noire* (Dark Matter) in Strasbourg (La Chaufferie, October 1-November 15,

2015), or left in the raw with its blue-ish and green tones (*Flow*, 2013, Québec), or playing with stained glass as in a room of Brauweiler Abbey in Germany, where the material takes over the windows (*Aerial*, 2012).

Glass doesn't interest the artist for the artisanal craft it requires, its intrinsic fragility or its purity. Viewed through the prism of Marcel Duchamp's famed and accidentally cracked Large Glass, glass is for Debombourg the product of a dark alchemy, a lively material. Moreover, the laminated glass plates he uses are fastidiously cracked with a hammer, without scattering (the material is made out of two bonded layers). Glass can then reveal its toughness, its ability to transform itself into a constellation, with a history that comes up to the surface, which until then was smooth, without asperities. Intensely constructed, modeled, submitted to a rigorous leveling, the artwork is nevertheless noticeable for an element of randomness, and a duration that calls to mind its ephemeral and transitory nature, where time keeps on being torn apart.

Baptiste Debombourg has a contradictory spirit anyway. Where we could read the work as an act of aggression against this type of glass reputed to be hard and almost unbreakable, or as the result of a gesture of rage or anger against these laminations designed as so not to break into a million pieces when subjected to violent impacts; where we would feel a subdued latent violence, the artist sees himself more like someone deconstructing and conceiving the accidents that transform the material to get to another level of reality. Where a piece of glass would be rejected for a break, an asperity, a bubble or a hairline crack, Debombourg cultivates mistakes by pushing experimentation to the limits of destruction. Where we would endeavor to closely dissect the glass's properties, its transparency; the artist transposes his gesture in the realm of painting. Where we would be tempted to see glass objects, the artist dodges the issue and places his artworks close to the wall, to avoid objectification and get closer to painting. When a toponymic title might be expected in front of a glass field, with its soft curves, Acceleration Field leans more toward science-fiction and the universe of space. As the artist states, "the tradition in the history of art is to represent what is beyond us". Speed, the matter of the universe, particles and black holes all belong to Baptiste Debombourg's interests.

Acceleration Field is a sculpture, but more importantly it is an in vitro landscape, an axonometric elevation whose structure can be perceived in this incidental topography by following its curves and undulations. With Debombourg's work, each installation is ephemeral and contextual; moreover here at La Maison Rouge, where time seems to truly stand still behind the patio's windows, in a suspended state between a fluid, tempestuous material and a certain form of inertia and gravity. Everything is under tension, between a feeling of speediness that dissolves outlines and structures with a wave effect, and one of control and mastery. Nothing is haphazard here; all blows are accounted for with the patience of a goldsmith.

With this work altering the properties of glass, Acceleration Field lightens it, plays with sunlight, and imposes its living, shifting material. It is a place, a décor, a rugged surface, damaged with a paradoxical skillfulness, a delicate game of balance inaccessible to the visitor. The latter is asked to stay behind the smooth, inert and seamless glass wall [of the patio], to look at this other piece of glass that has lived and transcended its constitution to become a sensitive space.

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After *Matière noire* presented at the Chaufferie gallery in Strasbourg, *Champ d'accélération* is the second part of a trilogy in glass works, the third part will take place at the Patricia Dorfmann Gallery in Paris (*Radiance*, from October 24 to November 21).

Upcoming exhibitions at la maison rouge

From March 9 to June 16, 2016
CERAMIX. Art and ceramic from Rodin à Schütte
Exhibition in two parts, in partnership with Sèvres – Cité de la céramique

From July 8 to September 2016
Two exhibitions :
Eugène Gabritchevsky
Nicolas Darrot

From October 2016 to January 2017
Hervé Di Rosa and his collections