



tous cannibales

curator: Jeanette Zwingenberger

The ingestion of a human being by one of his fellows (friend or enemy) is a taboo in Western societies. Cannibalism as a practice is, nevertheless, a fascinating subject at the crossroads of disciplines such as anthropology, ethnology, psychoanalysis, history, sociology, religion and medicine.

"We are all cannibals," a phrase that inspired the name of this exhibition, is the title of an article by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, published in *La Repubblica* in 1993. Is there a real difference between ingesting the body of the other and voluntarily introducing parts or substances into one's own body by injection, graft or transplant? This is the central question of this text, which thus exorcises the notion of cannibalism and thereby suggests that "it is also present among us" in other forms.

This extended definition of cannibalism is what underpins Jeanette Zwingenberger's curating of the exhibition. Rejecting voyeurism and fascination with violence, she has considered cannibalism as a metaphor for

our relationship to the body and to the flesh, our own and that of others. The idea for the exhibition came to her through a personal observation: the feeling that contemporary artists have, for the past ten years, given a greater place than their predecessors did to the representation of the flesh and to the themes of absorption, assimilation and devouring. The exhibition brings together about 30 of these artists, whose works are placed in perspective with old works and historical documents of various epochs and regions.

One enters the exhibition on a red carpet of flesh. *Marble Floor* by **Wim Delvoye** turns out to be a fine marquetry of salami, mortadella and chorizo, worthy of an Italian baroque church. The animal and mineral realms combine beneath visitors' feet in the introductory gallery, but the human and animal kingdoms also mingle, as in the work of Delvoye, man and pig are assimilated one with the other. They are bound together by the flesh. Which is what cannibalism is about: eating human flesh as though it were animal flesh.

In the Western imagination, the cannibal is the "absolute Other". **Oda Jaune's** watercolour opens the exhibition with an ambiguity: a woman eats just as she is eaten and the face of the one she absorbs becomes her own face. Who is cannibalising whom?

Mythologies throughout the world have numerous stories of devouring. No doubt they express impulses and anxieties which are rooted in our deepest unconscious: devouring the other and being devoured. In Greek mythology, Cronos, Polyphemus, Tantalus, Saturn and others committed anthropophagy. The Christian world condemned it: Man's flesh is sacred, as it is created in the image of God. From the thirteenth century, representations of hell were populated with images of devouring. The punishments awaiting sinners were above all corporal, and the devil flayed, dismembered and, most especially, ingested and regurgitated the damned. From **Antonio Bettini's** fifteenth-century engraving to **Giovanni Battista Podesta's** art brut red mask, which reconnects with the iconography of the Middle Ages, the gaping mouth of the devil is the supreme punishment, the allegory of the entry into hell. The scenes of mutilation, dismemberment and consumption of bodies, all typical representations of diabolical punishment, are found in other iconographies. That of the werewolf, for example, represented here by an engraving by **Lucas Cranach the Elder**: the man, believing himself to be a wolf, devours his fellow men. There is also that of the witches' Sabbath, the nocturnal meetings when witches performed their magic rites and indulged in cannibal orgies, and which later interested Goya. In each case, anthropophagy appears as a malefic urge, menacing society and the church.

Authors such as the Greek Herodotus in the fifth century described monstrous, anthropophagic peoples to be found at the limits of the known world. The great explorations which began in the fifteenth century fleshed out these tales: they were recorded by navigators, such as Christopher Columbus who noted in his diary: "Beyond, towards the east, there are one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who eat human beings." These "savages", this nonhuman, served as a counterpoint to civilisation. The term *cariba* or *caniba* with which Columbus designated the native Indians of the Lesser Antilles became, from the sixteenth century, synonymous with anthropophagy - an eater of men. The illustrated accounts of the first expeditions to the Americas, such as those published by **Théodore de Bry** after the accounts of Jean de Léry and Hans Staden, nourished the European imagination. The cannibal appeared as a depraved being who should be turned from his idols to be converted to the true God. The conflict is highlighted in **Etienne Antoine Marsal's** picture, which puts the Jesuits, faithful to their religion, face-to-face with the Indians who are about to torture them. Like Christ, the two Jesuit Fathers offer themselves as sacrifices for their God. The legend, which held that their hearts were devoured by Huron Indians, is a means of recalling the Eucharist.

Until the first half of the twentieth century, cannibalism was likened to the manifestation of a primitive state in which man was close to his animal instincts, thus distant in relation to the Darwinian model of evolution which led him progressively towards the sophistication of civilisation. "Ethnographic" photography, which held sway from the end of the nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, served to further this vision. The **Dufty brothers**, who from the 1860s to the 1890s had a photographic studio at Levuka in the Fiji Islands, set up the portrait of a group of men accused of having savagely killed and eaten a family. But nothing really distinguishes this forensic photography from the ethnographic portraits which were then circulating as postcards or visiting cards. In the same period, Carl Hagenbeck created the first "human zoo" in Hamburg: the reconstruction of entire villages in which hundreds of men, women and children from faraway countries were deposited and had to live under the eyes of a public eager for sensation and exoticism. The idea was to show "singular" individuals and the "anthropophagic savages" exhibited in the "Cannibal Village" in the 1920s pulled in the crowds. Postcards showing the most unsavoury racist stereotypes were offered as souvenirs. They reveal the image of the Other

which Westerners wished to convey in that period of colonial expansion: bestialising them was a means to glorify, by contrast, the colonial empires and their civilising mission.

The cannibal is thus at once Devil, animal and savage. He takes on a more familiar form as the "drinker of blood" which existed in many popular tales and folklore but which crystallised from the eighteenth century in the figure of the vampire. **Pieter Hugo** stages a stereotypical vampire scene, as found in abundance in Nollywood productions - the cinema industry of the Niger Delta (and the third most prolific in the world). Judging by *The Vampire Diaries*, *Buffy*, *Twilight*, *True Blood* and other TV series about vampires, it seems they retain a strong hold on our imagination.

While **Marcel Dzama's** playlets recalled visions of hell, Victor Brauner's double-headed portrait unveils our darker side. This 1941 painting suggests that the predator is not necessarily the Other, but that each person carries within themselves a sombre and threatening face.

In **Oda Jaune's** large picture, an area of formless flesh dominates the foreground of a classic landscape which becomes entangled with scenes in which the body is sometimes treated as meat, at others given over to erotic caresses. This continuum between body and landscape introduces a section of the exhibition where the artists explore the organic body, our own interior, as a universe in its own right.

On entering the first room, we discover an inert, exceptionally large man, apparently stranded on the floor. In **John Isaacs' *The Matrix of Amnesia*** the unidentifiable (headless) body, reproduced with hyperrealistic precision, becomes a formless and repulsive mass. It is as though humanity had regressed, as though its evolution had led it towards a former state of the flesh, not yet finished, closer to biological formlessness.

Nearby, **Norbert Bisky** seeks to make painting and flesh coincident, becoming an abstract motif, a landscape revealed by close inspection. The rhizome-like profusion of **Jérôme Zonder's** ink drawings makes us penetrate deeply into the body "until one is aware of the reality of the atom." In *L'Autre [The Other]*, a cellular form, expanded to the dimensions of the star, produces a hybrid material, combining organic and technological forms which, according to the artist, takes into account the invisible functioning of perception. **Álvaro Oyarzún's** characters seem to have stepped out of a comic strip. They calmly

work at their jobs, as indifferent to the magma of flesh that surrounds them as they are to the mutilation and putrefaction of their own bodies. In another drawing by Oyarzún, the duplicates of a separating couple fit into an organic, "living" topography. With **Gilles Barbier**, the flesh also speaks. The person is multiple and their body explodes in a multiverse (as opposed to a universe). In *No Elasticity*, they become a universe in formation, as the explosion of an ambassador produces a coloured constellation of organs, each becoming autonomous. His own organs (for the artist represents himself sprawled out in *Aaaah*) are also emancipated: their contamination by the "virus of advertising" has given to each its own aspirations. As a counterpoint to this tormented flesh, **Erik Dietman's** small monument appears as a talisman, a soothed and secret object to nurse real or symbolic wounds.

We are made of flesh and blood, but the flesh that makes up our body is invisible and unthinkable to us. Jacques Lacan wrote: "There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, of the secretory glands par excellence, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, insofar as its form is in itself something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final revelation of you are this - You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness."

Jana Sterbak's meat dress gives body to this vision of the interior, to the flesh that, according to Jeanette Zwingenberger, must be considered as "the interface with all that is living." It is as though the artist has inverted envelope and contents: she has turned the body inside out and offers us an edible and perishable costume in our own image. Conceived more than 20 years ago, this work seems to have retained all its power, since it inspired the costume which Lady Gaga wore at a recent ceremony. Faced with this vanity of the flesh, **Joel-Peter Witkin** offers a vanity inspired by seventeenth-century Flemish painting, which jumbles together fragments of human bodies with seafood and fruit.

In her paintings, **Adriana Varejão** opens up gaping wounds in the clean, smooth surfaces of *azulejos*, the glazed tiles typical of Portuguese colonial Brazil. The wall metonymically becomes a skin and the flesh that of the indigenous people decimated by Portuguese colonisation. Further into the exhibition, another canvas by Varejão opens not onto living flesh but an imaginary space where there are outcrops of mutilated corpses, "cannibalised"

from other canvases. The artist draws on the history of her country, marked by cannibalism, since the Tupinamba Indians of Brazil are known for having practised ritual anthropophagy, as the great explorers reported. The Brazilian modernist movements laid claim as a way of constructing the Brazilian identity. For the poet Oswald de Andrade, author of the *Cannibalist Manifesto* (1928), the cannibalist rite symbolically represents the idea of absorption, assimilation, transculturalism and cultural mixing that characterise Brazilian culture. This positive approach was reaffirmed at the 24th Sao Paulo Biennial in 1998, which chose anthropophagy as its theme. The artists in *Tous Cannibales* show the continued reality of this and approach incorporation from an even more radical point of view.

The work of **Melissa Ichiuji**, like that of Varejão or Sterbak, reveals a tension between the interior and the exterior of the human body whose substance artists like to transform. In a provocative pose, a woman in corseted lingerie and with a skin of flowers unveils flesh made of larvae and a vulva-face that opens to reveal a wasps' nest which elicits disgust. In contrast, the flesh of **Makoto Aida's** *Mi Mi Chan* is more appetising. He invents a fiction which brings cannibalism up-to-date, as he imagines a society that, thanks to genetic manipulation, has created a small edible animal that resembles a delightful miniature woman. These *Edible Artificial Girls* can be served in all possible ways. **Norbert Bisky** evokes a different culinary tradition, but also a pictorial one: the angelic-seeming cannibal also evokes Caravaggio and Goya. Like a modern ogre, with an air of detachment, he eats struggling young boys in his own image.

We are led into this mythological space by **ChantalPetit's** work, which invites us to a Feast of the Gods around the head of St John the Baptist, and by **Camille de Galbert's** "liberating and introspective reflection" video of another fratricidal conflict between Atreus and Thyestes. Pieter Hugo's portraits, however, speak of a very real cannibalism. *Looking Aside* shows us people suffering from albinism, a genetic condition which causes depigmentation of the skin, hair and eyes. Albinos have been the subject of persistent beliefs in certain parts of Africa, where sorcerers credit them with supernatural powers. Certain of their organs are sought after for making potions and are subject to trafficking, especially in Tanzania, around Lake Victoria.

The black universe of **Sandra Vazquez de la Horra's** drawings, which evoke both Goya and the Symbolists, is peopled with fantastic creatures from the

artist's own visions and nightmares. The erotic desire for absorption of the other manifests itself here in the representations of female vampires.

Kali, the Hindu mother-goddess of destruction and creation, is often represented holding a decapitated human head in one of her four hands. She is the force that is capable of destroying all and creating all. She overcame the indestructible demon Rakta-Vija, who devastated the Earth, by drinking all his blood and consuming his flesh, because each drop of blood that fell on the ground created a new demon.

By contrast, the anthropophagy suggested in the scenes which **Michaël Borremans** has drawn seems very domestic: part fairytale, part recipe, they lead us far from the sacred and from mythical accounts.

Cannibalism resulting from famine or pathology has existed everywhere and at all times. Perpetrated by desperate or demented individuals, it says nothing about a society. Ritualised cannibalism, however, is altogether different; practised collectively in accordance with elaborate, codified rules, it takes on a metaphysical dimension. Homage or act of vengeance, it translates a group's relationship with its own members (endocannibalism) or with those of an external group (exocannibalism). In the Fiji Islands or in New Guinea, for example, headhunting and ritual cannibalism seems to have persisted into the late nineteenth century. In the Sepik River region of Papua New Guinea, various objects associated with these practices have been preserved in the sacred space of the "men's house" or ancestors' house. *Yipwon* (large, hooked-shaped sculptures) were the spirit vessels and served to hang the trophies of enemies killed during head-hunting expeditions.

Alongside these ethnographic objects, evidence of ritual cannibalism, contemporary works are presented that explore its secular side. "I am my favourite victim," says **Gilles Barbier**, who admits to being obsessed by cannibalism, having heard tales about it during his childhood in Vanuatu. In *Polyfocus*, he and his clones act out a cannibal feast scene of classic composition, and which evokes the iconography of Théodore de Bry. In his series of drawings, **Patrizio di Massimo** seeks traces of post-colonialism in contemporary make-believe: references to Picasso are mixed up with images of the bodies of naked men, which become scenes of brutality, echoes of racial violence in Italy. The hybrid beings created by **Wangechi Mutu** have incorporated heterogeneous elements into their skin and their anatomy, signs of the multiculturalism and globalisation that are specific to our contemporary society.

The imaginary cannibalism of **Dana Schutz** is a process of positive autophagy, as her vibrant palette suggests. The artist has imagined a society of self-eaters who consume themselves in order to reconstruct themselves in a potentially endless process. Such a subject is also an artistic challenge for the artist, as is visible in her drawing: how does one represent somebody who is eating their own face?

Goya painted the actual walls of his house near Madrid, the "Deaf Man's House," with "black paintings." These were later transferred to canvas and are kept in the Prado Museum. One of these works is *Saturn Devouring His Children*, which refers to an event in Greek mythology in which Cronos (Saturn in Roman mythology) devoured each of his children at birth to prevent the fulfilment of the prophecy that he would be overthrown by one of them. The masterpiece is evoked here in versions by two contemporary artists. **Yasumasa Morimura** plays Saturn in *Exchange of Devouring*. An "appropriationist" artist, Morimura specialises in the hijacking of universally recognised images. In his *Self-Portrait As Art History* series, he substitutes himself for the subjects of masterpieces of art history, from Velazquez to Warhol via Goya (whose *Caprices* he also transposed in 2004). For his part, **Vik Muniz** also re-materialises famous paintings, but using unexpected materials (chocolate, caviar, dust). This photograph, like all the works in the *Picture of Junk* series, was produced with young people from the favelas around Rio, whom the artist asked to collect waste objects which he then assembled to recreate the image of Saturn. The "monstrous accumulation of rubbish produced by humanity which devours the living space of our planet" takes the place of the infanticide god.

In his series of etchings, *Caprices* (1799), **Goya** portrays a degraded humanity, governed by its instincts. Through nightmarish fictional scenes, he distils a biting criticism of Spanish society, then under the influence of the Inquisition. The later series *Disasters of War* (1810-1815), bears witness to the atrocities committed by the Napoleonic troops in Spain.

Barbarity, violence and cruelty are recurrent themes with **Jake and Dinos Chapman**, who focus on the most bestial aspects of humanity. Their interest in Goya should come as no surprise, first transposing the *Disasters of War* into sculpture, then working directly on the Spanish master's prints, to which they added their own fantasies and style. These variations on black or white paper, sombre, disquieting and grotesque, remain in total sympathy with the world of the Spanish master.

Barbarity and social violence are also at the core of **Renato Garza Cervera's** work on the Mara Salvatrucha (MS). These gangs, which originated in El Salvador and have spread to the West coast of the United States, engage in criminal activities and are known for their extreme violence. The remains of a man, presented as a trophy like an animal, suggests as much to the savagery of the victim as that of his executioner.

A vast drawing by **Ralf Ziervogel** portrays humanity given over to chaos and brutality. A sort of collective hysteria seems to have overtaken men, who engage with savage abandon in group violence. We are reminded of the imagery of Hieronymus Bosch and of mediaeval representations of hell, as much as of the clean lines of the comic strip.

A former seminarist and a major representative of Body Art in France, **Michel Journiac** gave a performance called *Mass for a Body* in 1969, and again in 1975. In it, he celebrated a Latin Mass then invited the audience to take communion with a rather special Host: his own blood made into a sausage. In his own words, he wanted to represent "the archetype of creation": humanity feeding on itself and people feeding on the artist.

The first cannibal is the infant in the mother's womb; the first food the newborn demands after birth is a human food, its mother's milk. Christian iconography includes breastfeeding Virgins (*Maria Lactans*): scenes of motherhood that justify the unveiling of the female body. It is exactly this iconography that inspires Cindy Sherman in the photograph from the *History Portraits* series. Dressed as Madonna without child, she offers a breast whose artificiality echoes medieval painters' lack of understanding of female anatomy. Confronted with a picture of Charity (in the guise of a woman saving her father from starvation by offering him her milk), **Bettina Rheims** proposes an unusual Virgin. In this photograph from the *INRI* series, which transposes scenes from the life of Christ to a contemporary context, she substitutes a drop of blood for the milk of the Virgin, symbol of her son's sacrifice.

Patty Chang tackles a stereotype of the female body and associates it literally with food, presenting herself in *Melons* with fruits as mammary prostheses, which she consumes in an act of self-cannibalism while telling a personal story. With the plate as halo, she identifies himself with Saint Agatha with amputated breasts.

In this part of the exhibition, given over to the Edible Body, **Saverio Lucariello's** still lives refer to art history and classical painting. The term

"vanity" which is applied to allegorical still lives, signifying the fragility of human life and the emptiness of earthly existence, here takes on a new sense with the multiplication of the figure of the artist. This is more about self-mockery on Lucariello's part than it is about vanity, his face being at the centre of all his work.

"When you love, you want to taste," **Philippe Mayaux** tells us. "Like a good fantasy cannibal, I want to be one with [her], assimilating, absorbing and becoming a bit of her." And so he transforms the significant parts of this beloved intimate body into a delicious treat: a *Tasty Bit of You*. Taking inspiration from eighteenth-century French painting, **Will Cotton** also imagines tasty women but of another type. Decked out in diadems of meringue and cupcakes, they evolve in fantasy landscapes of candy floss and vanilla ice cream: an idyllic vision which echoes children's fairytales as much as it does glamour photos for adults.

The work of **Jérôme Zonder** leads us into a world of childhood. This is an ambiguous world of innocence and cruelty, where a child's game seems to turn into a scene of torture. Fairytales are ferocious: ogres love to eat the tender and tasty flesh of young children, as shown in **Gustave Doré's** engravings. Heirs of the god Cronos, ogres and ogresses personify the unconscious fears of children: fear of separation and abandonment, fear of being devoured, fear of adults, fear of parental authority, fear of breaking the rules. Indulging their appetites without restraint, ogres represent the primitive instinct and savagery which is repressed by society. Children, on the contrary, incarnate social order which always triumphs in the end. Through the voyage of initiation which brings them face to face with these monsters, the heroes symbolically reach the age of adulthood. **Pilar Albarracín** is inspired by another fairytale, Little Red Riding Hood, whose roles she overturns. In *She Wolf*, she shows herself on an equal footing with the wolf, with which she shares feasts of raw flesh and wine. **Frédérique Loutz** superimposes the fairytale world of Hansel and Gretel onto the story of how the Bretzel, bread shaped like arms crossed in prayer, was supposedly invented, which she learned during her stay at the Villa Medici in Rome. **Théo Mercier's** melancholic *Le Solitaire [The Loner]* is far from terrifying: a sad-eyed spaghetti monster, he is potentially edible and, truth be told, dreams of being eaten...



Chiharu Shiota

Home of Memory

The visual idiom which the Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota (b. 1972, Osaka) developed in the mid-1990s is of heady and effective simplicity. Using thread as her preferred material, and which has become her signature, she creates often spectacular installations of tangles stretched out in space, which impede both the movement and the vision of the visitor. The latter is confined to the edge of her installations, which often include objects taken from daily life, objects that relate to the human dimension but in particular to the artist's personal mythology: a charred piano, clothes, hospital beds, children's toys, a chair, etc.

In *After the Dream*, an installation created in situ at la maison rouge, five white dresses float in the centre of a huge black canvas. They create an ambivalent impression: are they protected by these threads, as in a cocoon, or are they, on the contrary, trapped like insects in a spider's web? The title, *After the Dream*, identifies them as a dreamlike vision, the fragile traces left by a dream at the moment of awakening. Frozen, both present and inaccessible behind the interplay of threads whose density forms a screen, the dresses also seem to be a metaphor of memory and remembrance. What traces are borne

by these dresses? A certain innocence? Femininity? A body, in all events, that of the artist present in their folds; it has deserted the dresses but is visible in the gestures of weaving, industrious to the point of obsession. The black threads record the artist's movements like pencil strokes in space. Chiharu Shiota herself highlights this rapprochement of weaving and drawing, as though the thread reflects her emotions.

In this light, the meanders of the thread, like its colour (she uses only black and red), read as an imprint of the unconscious, the projection of feelings of anxiety, fear and oppression that Shiota often records and which are palpable in her work. The use of threads in art is often linked to the projection onto objects of a way of existing in the world. In the 1970s, Tetsumi Kudo - another Japanese artist whose work was shown at la maison rouge in 2007 - began using coloured threads to envelop objects and in doing so portray the energy of thought and memory, and the flow of life across body, mind and objects. This is also present in Chiharu Shiota's reticulated installations, which constantly interrogate the cycles of life and death, and the origin of things.

The question of identity, the feeling of alienation and the difficulty of finding her place are recurring themes in Shiota's work. *From Where We Come and What We Are*, an original installation for this exhibition, may be linked to this theme. It unites two archetypal forms, both loaded with meaning: the first is the shape of a house as children draw it (a shape, made of window frames, which she has already used in *House of Windows* (Berlin, 2005)); the second are banal, second-hand suitcases having the "minimal" qualities required of a suitcase. On the one hand the symbol of an anchorage point, on the other an object whose function is travel and movement. What do these cases contain? What moves, what journeys, what separations and what homecomings have they witnessed?

The accumulation here is of a different kind to the one of *After the Dream*, being not exactly the accumulation of a single material but of its varieties. By using suitcases from another age, picked up from Berlin flea markets, Chiharu Shiota summons the individual, personal histories whose traces these suitcases still bear. Some present unexpected, trivial vestiges, trapped in cement. This process of collection to some extent recalls the "monuments" and "archives" that Christian Boltanski has produced since the 1980s, seeking to bear witness to "small history" as opposed to the "large history" of books. However, Shiota's installation does not have this mausoleum dimension. It

seems to be in the process of alteration: the walls of the house extend beyond its structure and the displacement of the wall of suitcases seems to open a breach in the surrounding space.

By its sense of scale, light and the staging of objects, Chiharu Shiota (who has produced several stage sets) transforms the enclosed space of the house into a theatrical scene, awaiting an event and ready to gather in our presence and our emotions.

Chiharu Shiota was born in 1972 in Osaka, Japan. She has lived and worked in Berlin since 1997. She is represented by Galerie Christophe Gaillard in Paris and in Berlin. She came to Germany in 1994, shortly after graduating from Kyoto University. Choosing to continue her studies in Europe, she enrolled at the Braunschweig University of Art in Hamburg where she studied under Marina Abramovic. She also worked with Rebecca Horn in her Berlin studio. Chiharu Shiota's early works are openly influenced by artists such as Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Ana Mendieta; her pictorial language is linked to the productions of the subconscious mind, and to work and performances by 1970s women artists. During the mid-1990s and alongside her installations, she herself was involved in performances that reprise the work of the aforementioned artists and consider the relationship between the artist's body and the world around it.



Stéphane Thidet *vie sauvage*

"Where are they?" That is the question visitors ask themselves on discovering Stéphane Thidet's *Vie Sauvage* in the patio. His installation seems incomplete, and we find ourselves scrutinising the space around it. From where will they appear, ready to amuse us with their antics? Tyre swings, ropes, tree trunks and nets are the play apparatus; all that is missing are the apes. They remind us of childhood trips to the zoo and moments of expectation, the intense wishing for adventure.

Considering another of the artist's works, *La Meute* [*The Pack*], this is a reasonable expectation. Invited to take part in the *Estuaire 2009* art trail in Nantes, Thidet released a pack of wolves into the moat of the Château des Ducs de Bretagne. Regular visitors to la maison rouge will also recall the presence of the living in the work by the American artist Andrea Blum in 2008, a *Birdhouse* inhabited by birds. In *Vie Sauvage*, Thidet does not use the living as a material: rather, he expresses its absence. In this instance, the living is not at the centre of the installation but on its periphery, encircling the installation by looking at it.

As with other works by Stéphane Thidet - (*Untitled*) *Le Portique* (a child's swing under glass) or (*Untitled*) *Le Refuge* (a wooden cabin inside which rain falls continuously) - the spectator is excluded from the device, compartmentalised in the role of observer. While his work makes frequent reference to play and entertainment (using swings, billiards, dances and funfairs), it forbids interaction and creates situations of inaccessibility, even frustration.

The idea for *Vie Sauvage* came to the artist through the actual layout of the patio. Its vast glazed windows around an interior that is open to the sky reminded him of the glass cages of zoo menageries, and in particular those parts where *hominidae* are kept. The artist's interest in these animal spaces has already been shown in *Wildlife* (a series of photographs he began in 2006). It explores the unexpected beauty of various artificial landscapes which zoos give to the animals as a substitute for the wild.

This course of action, anchored in reality, is typical of Stéphane Thidet's creative process: "I like to take from the real world and displace it into the exhibition space, the kind of thing you can see in natural history museums." The basic aspects of the object, whose plastic qualities retain his attention, are preserved but changes interfere with their "reconstruction" by the artist. In *Vie Sauvage*, Thidet selects, recreates and combines several types of "environmental enrichments for nonhuman primates," to borrow the term used when referring to the equipment placed in the cages of primates in captivity to encourage them to practise physical or manipulative activities. Their function is to help the animals escape the dramatic boredom of life in captivity so that they may, in turn, entertain us. Displaced from their original context, these "enrichments" reveal an astonishing visual energy. As Thidet highlights, they refer us to various methods used in modern and contemporary sculpture: to assemble, to overlay, to hang, to compress, to put on a pedestal, to crush etc., as listed by Richard Serra in his *Verb List* (1967-1968).

This formal research becomes the point of convergence between the two places that cohabit in Thidet's installation: human territory (the museum) and animal territory (the zoo). The installation thus also reflects upon the very device of an exhibition: "This frontier between 'exhibition and 'exposition', the thin line between notions of entertainment and culture are real questions for me.". In *Vie Sauvage*, it is the confrontation with an "exhibition device" that renders the visitor at la maison rouge rather like a visitor to a zoo who has come to be entertained by caged primates.

The artist does not set out to give us a lesson nor a demonstration on the status of artworks and exhibitions, but to create a device that puts the act of looking, observing, at its centre and invites us to rediscover the real, and its sculptural and poetic potential.

A graduate of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris (2002) and the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Rouen (1996), **Stéphane Thidet** (b. 1974, Paris) works equally with installation, video, sculpture and photography. He curated *Guet-apens* in 2006 at La Générale and *Et pour quelques dollars de plus* in 2007 at the Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard. He is represented by Galerie Aline Vidal in Paris.

1. *Déranger l'ordinaire*, an interview of Stéphane Thidet by Valérie Da Costa in *Stéphane Thidet, Acte I*, published by Le Lab-Labanque (Béthune), Le Grand Café (Saint-Nazaire), Le CRAC Alsace (Altkirch) and Galerie Aline Vidal (Paris), 2009.