ARTIST'S BIO

ETIENNE CHAMBAUD (b. 1980, France) lives in Paris. He has had solo shows at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, in 2009, and the Nomas Foundation, Rome, Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, and David Roberts Art Foundation, London, in 2010. He is represented by Labor, Mexico City, where his latest solo exhibition, titled "On Hospitality," was held in Summer 2010.

CURRENT & FORTHCOMING

ETIENNE CHAMBAUD will present "The Decapitated Museum," a solo exhibition, at Sies+Hoke, Düsseldorf, from 3 September to 2 October 2010.

The work of Etienne Chambaud can be considered a rhetoric of subtraction, a practice of withdrawal that allegorizes a rule associating the accumulation of knowledge with the legibility of its evidence. Yet the work is less a question of this evidence than a manifestation of what separates us from it. One could say that the purpose of Chambaud's work is negatively exposed, his works consisting more in the language trying to circumscribe them than in their actual presence. The semiotic and linguistic processes deployed by the artist willfully expose his relationship to the history of conceptual art, a relationship which is freighted with irony and deliberate misunderstandings: the works proceed from a kind of metaphorical writing that knows it will not necessarily be assimilated, but rather will retain a sense of separation, miscomprehension and insincerity.

The cut, which is so essential to Chambaud's formal and conceptual vocabulary, is formalized by motifs of blindness and muteness. In the series "*Exclusion de la Tautologie*" (Exclusion of the tautology), initiated in 2007, the artist presents a succession of "tautological objects" emphasizing their tautological character. These objects function like autonomous loops, rapid reifications of ready-made ideas and concepts. The series features, for example, a modernist lamp illuminating its own electrical source (*L'Electricité*), a vial of artificial tears placed on a pedestal [*Les Larmes*, (tears)], and a mirror facing another mirror (*L'Infini*). Static and ungraspable, literal and indefinable, frontally presented to one's gaze and subtracted from immediate comprehension, these delusive tautologies, by focusing on the process of the allegorization of thought as opposed to the allegorized object, grant access to the economy of specious signs that undergird them. They thus superimpose the following two extremities: the formal statement of their title and presence as works of art, excluding them from the world of everyday objects, and the misunderstanding of the internal dialogue that animates them and excludes them from the realm of tautologies. Double exclusion, in other words, which in turn foregrounds the dumbfounding character of these objects. At once transparent and impenetrable, these tautologies are the semantic equivalents of the "blind spot" around which our vision organizes itself; they articulate the site of an experience of blindness, proposing that ultimately, we see nothing, neither reading nor penetrating that which is in our field of vision. Conceived as black holes of thought, Chambaud's tautological objects describe nothing about the world, they tell us nothing; one could say that they are "mute." Furthermore, with their meaning obliterated, they are, figuratively speaking, "blind" objects themselves. Pierced, they become, in a metaphorical sense, objects whose eyes have been gouged out.

What is more, ironically maintaining the naïve ambition of reconciling the conceptual work with its formalization, these allegories state the terms with which they offer themselves to the viewer's apprehension, which is by way of a cut: they demarcate this logic of exclusion, a satirical inversion in which objects that turn their backs on the viewer nevertheless open in that viewer's mind endless possible interpretations and meanings. These tautologies, by failing to be fully grasped, and by suggesting a decipherment that never comes, disappear through the knowledge we attempt to extract from them, and refuse to be seized by any means but an attempt to circumscribe their symbolic perimeter through language. Existing solely by way of this perimeter, they produce something like a negative definition of the art object, a transitory formation that is irreconcilable with the cadaverous rigidity of the reified objects.

Hidden or masked objects lead to latent, productive misunderstandings and temporal obstructions, which in turn establish a context of delayed apprehension. To use Derrida's terms, these works, thanks to the use of a mise-en-abyme, *differ* their accessibility, and as such, provide themselves with the possibility of being *differed* from themselves, becoming their own *differances*, reintroducing the issue of time into their very composition. This much can be seen in the series "Atlas," initiated in 2008. A number of atlases, certain pages of which have been perforated by large holes, are presented open, framed on a wall or placed on pedestals. Juxtaposing the contents of different maps, these modified books produce an erratic topography in which various lacunal geographies are made to blend together. These works reproduce something like the mental image of flipping through a book. Through the hollowing out of the pages and the illusion of transparency that it produces, the "Altlases" introduce discontinuity and a sense of fragmentation into the otherwise continuous, unbroken expanse of data, the hierarchical economy of information, and the linear permanence of written knowledge of which the book consists. The "Atlases" therefore literalize how an abstract visualization of time might be introduced into a classic representation of space. Throughout the perpetually unresolved game of alterations produced here, the fabric of book-based knowledge finds itself undone by a partial disappearance or abstraction of its contents, and the coordinates of knowledge are redefined according to the scale of that which it lacks rather than what remains, formalizing a kind of "negative" construction of knowledge.

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