

Laurent Montaron

28 January - 15 March 2009

Born in 1972 at Verneuil-sur-Avre (Eure, Upper Normandy), Laurent Montaron graduated from the Ecole Supérieure d'Art et de Design in Rheims in 1995. Represented by the schleicher+lange gallery, he lives and works in Paris.

Already present on the international stage (Kunstverein, Freiburg – Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Siegen – LMAKProjects, Chelsea, New York – la Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec,...), now to start the new year in 2009 Laurent Montaron is being given a moment in the limelight in France, with a monographic exhibition organised by the Institut d'Art Contemporain, and the *AYYLU* exhibition, running almost simultaneously at Frac Champagne-Ar-

denne (from 19 February to 19 April 2009).

At the Institut d'Art Contemporain, existing works and new productions give an account of the diversity of the artist's modes of expression, including films, installations, photographs, objects, and sound installations.

Laurent Montaron uses these different devices to treat the image and its representational codes (the photographic image, the film image, the image-object), in order to explore the possible relationship between the image and reality or narrative, and to address the issue of interpretation. It is also in this sense that he queries the conjunctions of image and sound

or image and language – language being, as in psychoanalysis, the major interpretative tool. Laurent Montaron is also interested in the transcription of time, in the “time-image” and the “movement-image” as analysed by the philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

The artist’s relationship to the cinema lies notably in his interest in the recording process and in the subtle setting in motion of the image, however still it may be. The illusionist dimension of the motion image (as in the cinema) is for instance revealed by adding a fan in front of a slide projection. Laurent Montaron seeks to anticipate on the viewer’s perception; he means to make not only images but also situations in front of the images.

The importance Laurent Montaron attaches to interpretation is materialised by the presence of numerous clues in his works – which preserve the enigmatic dimension of the whole – and by the role of the titles and captions. It also enables him to direct his attention towards the link between science and belief systems, through the question of a predetermined future and the many evocations of divinatory practices.

In this way, Laurent Montaron probes the experience of time and memory through images of the psyche and projection or prediction phenomena. The evocation of an individual’s extrasensory faculties, questions relating to destiny or possible “clairvoyance”, give Laurent Montaron’s research a

highly suggestive dimension. In the manner of Lacan’s Borromean knot, Laurent Montaron’s work crystallises the link between the imagination (our vision and our construction of images), of the symbolic (our use of language to give meaning) and reality (our experience of the world).

The attention paid to the notion of the itinerary and the design of devices is central to Laurent Montaron’s work. For the Institut d’Art Contemporain exhibition, which is to occupy all the rooms, the artist gives form to his in-depth research into spatialisation (of the image, sound, and time) in such a way that the visitor has the feeling of walking into a film.

Laurent Montaron wanted to create breathing spaces in the layout of the works by alternating the films (the majority his output), which you are plunged into, with the visual and sound works in more open spaces. The direction of the itinerary is deliberately neither linear nor oriented one way or another, in line with the question of randomness that pervades all his work.

[room 1]

***Sans titre (D'après la Sonosphère d'Elipson)* [Untitled (After the Elipson Sonosphere)] (2006)** is a sound installation produced with the help of the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse. To produce this piece, the artist had the orchestra tune up, not to an A on the oboe, but to the telephone dial tone, a sine wave emitted when you pick up the receiver.

Broadcast like a droning noise, this note continues, its oscillations being gradually modified, changing imperceptibly, going through every tone in the scale. During the ten minutes or so the recording lasts, the orchestra tries to tune together to this monochord. The almost static music is enveloped in dissonant harmonies, passing through upward movements followed by decelerations bordering on collapse. The piece's evocative power is embodied principally in the physical impact it can have on the viewer.

The artist set six stereo microphones in the concert hall, and here he restores the recording and broadcast process with a specific spatial arrangement; Laurent Montaron hangs a dodecahedron-shaped speaker system designed by Elipson with a loudspeaker on each face, in a room whose walls are lined with perforated hardboard. The space, thus turned into a listener's studio, is a return to sixties and seventies design and acoustics, notably in science-fiction films like Stanley Kubrick's *2001, A Space Odyssey* (with music by the

The Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne

A facility for creation and research in contemporary art, the Institut d'art contemporain holds exhibitions and meetings in situ. This is combined with the assembling of a collection of internationally reputed works.

Its research activities are extended outside its walls by the dissemination of the Rhône-Alpes Collection throughout the region and the holding of exhibitions of work by up-and-coming artists. The Institut works with numerous partner establishments, thus strengthening the contemporary art network in the Rhône-Alpes region.

Hungarian composer György Ligeti). Synchronous broadcast, over the twelve speakers, of the six tracks on which the piece was recorded, produces slight phase-shift effects as the viewer walks around.

Laurent Montaron's approach may remind us of the research of Karlheinz Stockhausen, or de György Ligeti, pioneering forms of contemporary music for the notions of multi-listening and spatialisation of sound.

[room 2]

Rounded With A Sleep (2006), quotes the title of a film made that same year by the artist, showing a group of idle teenagers playing dangerous games of what is known as "playful strangulation", based on the fainting experience you get when being strangled. The title is a quote from Shakespeare's *Tempest*: "*We are such stuff / As dreams are made on / and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep*", Act IV Scene I]. In a space more like a passing place than an exhibition gallery, Laurent Montaron installs a blue neon light of the kind found in certain public places such as stations (mostly in Germany). The blue neons are intended to prevent drug-users from finding their veins and so cut down their addictive practice. Here the artist is pointing to the existence of a social body and its constraining system, and at the same time the thin borderline between real life and the "big sleep".

[room 3]

Comprising an echo chamber set into a wall, ***Melancholia (2005)*** is one of Laurent Montaron's works which he describes as "image-objects" and "assisted readymades". The "Space Echo" is a machine designed for musicians, and marketed in the late 1970s.

Using a loop of magnetic tape, this echo chamber was contrived to artificially reproduce the acoustics of spaces producing a reverberation or echo on the sound. The visible recording mechanism lends itself to allegory. Stripped of its sound function and presented as a low relief, the echo chamber focuses the attention on its formal makeup, and especially the coiled configuration of the magnetic tape. This is similar to the Möbius strip or band, which is a strip in a closed curve with its characteristic twist making it reversible.

The Möbius strip has come in for all kinds of speculation, including psychoanalytical (Lacan) and philosophical. The endless circular movement contained in the work *Melancholia* may evoke a certain view of time passing or just ticking over on account of some deep state of sadness, as suggested by the title, which is also the title of a famous engraved self-portrait by Albrecht Dürer (1514).

La Reine au-dessus du creux de main [The Queen Over the Hollow of My Hand] (2008) is the photograph of a hand tossing jacks. The open palm

shows the "Death's head" figure whereby four jacks are held between each finger and the fifth, red, one known as the "Queen", which must never fall onto the ground, is caught in mid-flight. In ancient Greece, jacks, sheep's knuckle-bones, were used both for games of chance and for telling the future. Now in plastic, they are seen chiefly as entertainment (a game of skill). Here the artist evokes divinatory practices that question the determinism or randomness of our lives. Laurent Montaron repeatedly stages this quest, always stressing the solutionless enigma, the part played by magic and mystery, here restored notably by the halo of light on the hand emerging from the darkness.

[room 4]

Silent Key (2009) is a piece based on the notions of presence or absence and the linkage between what is codified and so requires keys to interpretation, and what is transmitted (whether remote or delayed). Thus *Silent Key* operates in performative mode, its actual title stating the device it uses. The viewer walks into a room of emptiness and silence, heightened by special lighting tending towards daylight. It is not until you have left the space that you get to hear a recorded message, entitled "Silent Key". SK is a phrase of Morse code used by ham radio operators, an acknowledgment that immediately ends a radio transmission

(Stop Keying, used for the first time in 1961 during the war in Algeria). "Silent Key" also designates the actual instrument or key used for telegraph transmissions.

This message becomes audible for the viewer at the very moment it voices an imminent silence, a silence in which you have just been plunged. Simultaneously, the viewer discovers the materiality of a brick wall, the "backstage" scene here turned into the work. Laurent Montaron is interested in creating a piece that paradoxically only exists when we are not there and acts through the "wings".

[room 5]

Somniloquie [Sleeptalking] (2002) was produced for the *Subréel* exhibition at the [mac] Musée d'art contemporain, Marseilles. The work is made up of a large format photograph set in the wall and a vinyl turntable on which the viewer can play a "Dub plate" (vinyl disc where the mastering is gradually erased over successive listenings) with a recording of someone talking in their sleep.

The photograph is of an interior with two characters: a woman asleep on a bed, and beside her, a man busy recording. The installation fills the exhibition room in such a way as to recreate a private area similar to a listening room.

For this work, Laurent Montaron has

used an analogue recording mode, with a tape recorder and microphone, to capture, almost like a documentary, the voice of the woman talking in her sleep.

The work is arranged spatially so as to play on a two-way movement between distance and closeness. The composition of the photographic image helps to create a closed space in which each character is absorbed into their inner world. It is through the listening room that the viewer can break into this private scene, with access to the most unconscious part of language of one of the characters, her sleep talk, as it were out of body.

Often in his works, Laurent Montaron creates a disconnect between the sound and picture, just as he blurs the boundary between reality and its representation, through a *mise en abîme* of the recording process.

[room 6]

BALBVTIO (2009)

Co-produced with Frac Champagne-Ardenne, *BALBVTIO* is a new work composed of two identical films projected side by side. It is a cinematographic narrative, but also a distancing of the cinema's own rhetoric. Generated through two different shootings based on a single screenplay, the films place the content of the story on a different plane from the materiality of the image.

From the very first images, the viewer

is confronted with a double vision that is slightly out of sync, placed in the situation of instantly perceiving a film, its duplication (but which one is the other's double?) and the tiny discrepancy between the two, and his own slight difference from this discrepancy as well. The work refers back to the reflection of the philosopher Clément Rosset in *Le Réel et son double. Essai sur l'illusion* (1976):

"Such indeed is the basic structure of the illusion: an art of seeing aright but coming to the wrong conclusion. The person under an illusion thus turns the single event he witnesses into two events that do not coincide, in such a way that the thing perceived is placed elsewhere and *not in a position to be confused with itself*. It is as if the event were magically split in two, or rather as if two aspects of the same event were to take on a life of their own."

The work's title designates this repetition of the same, a stammer or stutter, that can be understood as babble, somewhere between original speech and a universal language. It indicates the artist's reflection on the narrative function and on problems of language in relation to issues of translation and interpretation.

[room 7]

***Bruit blanc [White Noise]* (2006)** uses a Doepfer modular analogue synthesiser to randomly create the sound of

wind. This sound processing may remind us of that used by Hitchcock in 1963 for his film *The Birds* (bird cries electronically manipulated by a synthesiser).

In physics, white noise is defined by a random process whereby all frequencies are at the same intensity. The impression is one of background noise, like the sound version of "snow" on a poorly adjusted television screen.

***The Body of the river knows no boundaries* (2008)**

This work comes as a clue in the overall effort of spatialisation devised for his show by Laurent Montaron.

Four guns are wrapped in a cloth greased with tallow. They are shown in a display case, like precious items in some history museum. They refer to a bygone period that has not yet faded from the memories of the current younger generation, the last to have had the story handed down by their forebears.

[room 8]

***Readings* (2005)** is a film shot at the Meudon Observatory. The location's identity is revealed only gradually, as the camera slowly sweeps round the circular space plunged in semidarkness and peopled by the discreet presence of scientists in white coats. A grating sound accompaniment contributes to the overall feeling of oppressiveness. The image is punctuated with

subtitles instead of a voice over: injunctive sentences, enabling the viewer to identify directly with the film's narrator. The words are taken from things Laurent Montaron has gathered from New York fortune-tellers, so they sound like predictions of a private nature that are vague enough to allow each person to place their own subjective, universal interpretation on them.

The film's final scene focuses on the bloody hands of a researcher who has just lost a tooth. Here Laurent Montaron creates an allegory of time, the time of the universe and the time of human existence, by confronting two forms of observation: astronomy, through the setting, at an observatory of the heavens; and astrology or clairvoyance, turned towards the finitude of the human destiny.

[room 9]

***After* (2007)** is a still image (an ekta) projected and constantly being cut by the blades of a modified industrial fan inserted between the slide projector and the screen. The image appears and disappears rapidly, passing quickly from evanescence to evidence. The fan's rotary speed has been changed so as to intercept the light beam from the projection at a speed recalling the gap between two images. The intermittence of the image creates a sensation of retinal persistence,

halfway between disappearing and appearing, like unconscious or dream images.

The impression of the eternal return is restated by the subject of the image; the staging of a soldier wearing winter camouflage and lost in a blizzard, himself being on a cinema set. The footprints in the snow suddenly stopping in front of the character underline the suspended movement and disturb our understanding of time, between that of the scene and that of the image.

The viewer is at once confronted with an illusion of cinema, a narrative with a key and a kinetic sculpture...

[room 10]

Pace (2009) places a projection at a distance by using systems of interposed "screens" to show the artifice behind the device. The silent picture of a 16 mm projection is visible in the background behind a window, the foreground being taken up with the presence of the projection and sound broadcast apparatus. The image consists of a carp's heart still beating in the palm of a hand. Shown in a loop throughout the entire exhibition, the film is subject to natural wear while it endlessly shows the pulsing of this heart although detached from any life. In this way, Laurent Montaron offers a *mise en abîme* of an artificial process that questions how we relate to the

image, to truthfulness and meaning.

Nœud borroméen [Borromean Knot] (2009) is another clue left by Laurent Montaron along the exhibition itinerary, becoming a real key to understanding his entire work. This particular work presents a Cartier ring in a niche resembling a jewel-case, through a mirror reflection. Inspired by the graphic forms of Art Deco, the original piece was designed by Jean Cocteau in 1924. What Laurent Montaron is interested in is the analogy between this *Trinity* ring – three rings intertwined – and the Borromean knot. The word "real" engraved by the artist inside one of the rings refers explicitly to the theory of the Borromean knot developed by Lacan – following that of the "mirror stage" – the structuralist principle behind this lies in the entanglement in the subject of three functions enabling an understanding of psychic phenomena: the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders. You can never touch reality, is what this work by Laurent Montaron is stating, here materialising the elusiveness of the object and its image, through a specular device and a *mise en abîme* of language.

Sans titre [Untitled] (2008) is a camera photograph taken of a fisherman standing on some rocks by the seashore, at the entrance to a cave. His gesture is a coded signal used by seamen for smugglers. His left hand is holding a lantern and his right hand

a signalling mirror; all we see of it is the flash of light which mostly masks it. The presence of light in the image is doubly significant. It contributes to the allegory of composition, referring to Plato's cave (Book VII of *The Republic*) in which people have their backs to the light and can only see their shadows projected onto the wall. Plato highlights a path of initiation taking man from the world of the senses (matter and appearances) towards the intelligible world (of ideas) in order to get beyond his prejudices, beliefs and conformist thinking. Knowledge of reality, although hard to attain, would then ensure proper transmission of it, leading to a form of freedom and responsibility.

The light also comes from the sun illuminating the landscape, off the picture, and hence in the viewer's place. So the photograph can be likened to a box pierced by a ray of light, like a pinhole camera: at the dawn of photography, in other words of the artificial capture of a fragment of reality.

[room 11]

***Will there be a sea battle tomorrow?* (2008)** is a film retracing the course of an experiment on the study of the individual's extrasensory faculties. It is inspired by research conducted by various institutes, one being the Freiburg institute of parapsychology (Germany), which used a machine called the "Psi-recorder". This random

generator is used for instance in experiments into clairvoyance, telepathy and precognition. Here, a woman, guided by the voice of a scientist, tries to guess which of five symbols will be drawn by lot by the machine located in a neighbouring room.

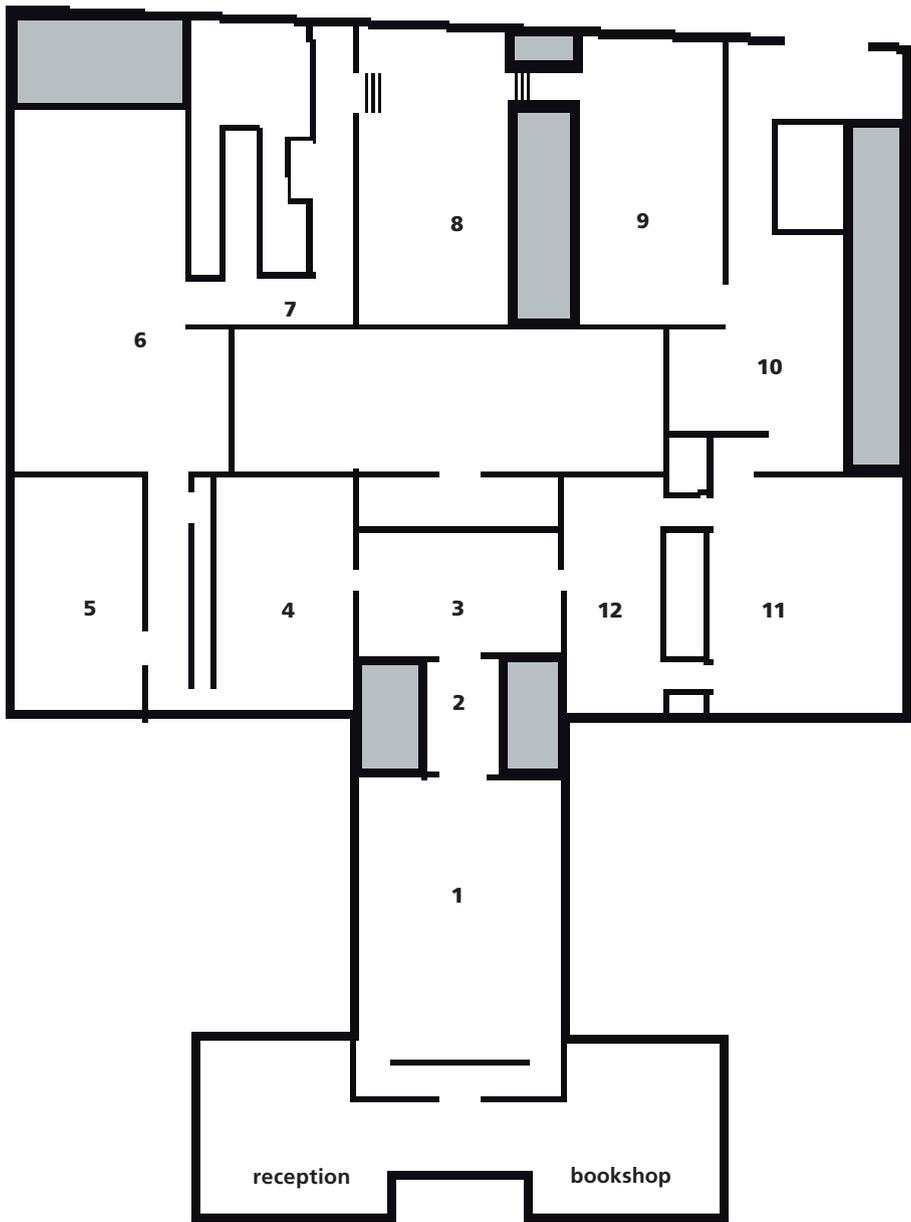
The title of the film is a question of logic raised in ancient Greece by Diodorus Cronus (commonly known as the master or ruling argument), then by Aristotle, which led to the formulation of "future contingents": the proposition having no firm answer (the predicate is either true or false, depending on whether the event is necessary or impossible), it rather engenders alternative hypotheses depending on both missing information and chance.

Laurent Montaron is interested here in the ontological status of the future: is the future predetermined? Are there principles of causality governing the world and what it becomes? How do the bases of logic and philosophical thought take hold of the concept of truth? How does science fit in with belief systems?

[room 12]

***How is it that this long night is interrupted?* (2008)** is a work produced by Laurent Montaron following on from the film *Will there be a sea battle tomorrow?*, with the idea of the random generator. Also its title is a phrase that crops up in this film.

Two identical light bulbs are placed symmetrically about the centre line of an empty wall. A nearby switch triggers an electrical command circuit and an algorithm generates a random choice to light up either one of the bulbs. This binary random generator is activated whenever the switch is thrown. Laurent Montaron has used a chip invented in the 1960s, which applies an algorithm and generates chance. This choice is part of the artist's ongoing interest for "pre-computing" tools and certain simple forms of technology to restore an intermittent image of our understanding of the world. The question of the laws of chance and foreseeability of an outcome is again raised.



Practical information

Laurent Montaron

Exhibition from January 28 to March 15, 2009

Opening times

Wednesday to Sunday – 1pm to 7pm

Admission

Full price € 4 / Reduced price € 2.50

Guided tours

Free on Saturday and Sunday at 3pm or with advance booking

Group tours with advance booking

Information centre open with advance booking

Bookshop specialising in contemporary art, open during exhibition opening times

How to get there

Bus C3 to Institut d'art contemporain

Metro line A to République

The Institut d'art contemporain is near Lyon Part-Dieu station and a minute's walk from a Vélo'v bike-hire station

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