

GHEBALY

DAVIDE BALULA



Previous

Hunter Longe "Morphic Memory" at LambdaLambdaLambda, Prishtina

## CONVERSATIONS

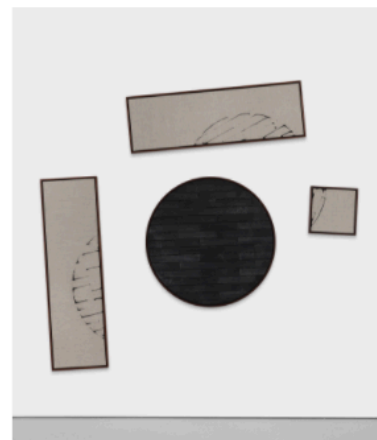
## Iron Levels: Davide Balula

Share

The French artist Davide Balula presents *Iron Levels*, his exhibition at the Roman Gagosian site, as an itinerary that takes into account your physical strength and whether or not you carry metal objects in your pockets.

The itinerary at the gallery is pretty straightforward, apart maybe from the middle room after the stairs, where you can make a choice whether to walk left or right to enter the same little room. But naturally, most people, like most electrons, tend to prefer short circuits, those "desire lines," as Gilles Deleuze liked to call them. The trajectory is less a concern than the rhythmic sequence created by the scale of each room: coming from the open field outdoors and opening to very large doors, then a room with a high ceiling and a street view (with front desk distraction), followed by open stairs bringing you closer to the same continuous ceiling, leading to a very small room with a floor now much closer to the same ceiling, then to a second room of similar height and slightly larger walls but not much bigger, and finally to a grand finale (or cul de sac, rather, where you have to do a U-turn to go back home), where you experience a dramatic change in scale, a jump from constriction to infinity, or what is close to an infinite room since no angle limits the perspective anymore—this, and an impressively high ceiling. In a way, I simply followed the architect's exponential crescendo. Holding a weight for some time and letting it go could maybe be aligned with this too, the experience of adjusting to a certain amount of gravitational force and, at a certain point after accommodation, a release and an access to its opposite vector. Of course, you are free to refuse to take part in any of it. That freedom in your own choices is crucial to this show, and of course instrumental to any dedicated viewing of an artwork.

The new works at the gallery are happening on different levels and scales. Some are ingested by the gallery staff, and therefore only partially visible to the public; some other works depend on the content of the audience's pockets and bags, as highlighted by the metal detector sculpture; another one depends on your muscles and on how long you can hold a ball of steel, which is affected by the oils on, and tempera-



1 2 3 4 5

Davide Balula *BPIBP (Unrolled for Rome 26-27-28-29), 2017*  
Photography by Matthew Booth. Courtesy Gagosian.

ture of, your hand. Another work, a small movie, is an attempt to separate a visual signal from its sensory experience. The last works, in the last room, are more visual and distanced—fragments that depend on a group that itself belongs to a larger (exploded) group, which in turn relies on the curved wall that holds the works, temporarily, in a randomized and uneven fashion. The works from that series can be installed each time in a different way, always in an intimate mutual relation.

at Gagosian, Rome  
until November 18, 2017



By Rosie Dalton

*Photography by Davide Balula.  
Courtesy of the artist, galerie frank  
elbaz, Paris, and Gagosian Gallery.*

JUNE 17, 2016

## DAVIDE BALULA'S MIMED SCULPTURES AT ART BASEL UNLIMITED

Davide Balula is an artist enthralled with sensory substitution, and not just in the realm of the eye. “I am fascinated by tools in general,” he explains of the role technology has played in his work. “I believe in the idea of an extended body. And the brain is not everything. We put so much hope into Artificial Intelligence, but what happens between two different brains goes beyond inner neurological interactions. We know so little, we feel so much.” So for his latest work, *Mimed Sculptures*, Balula has decided to depart from the technological realm and explore, instead, this relationship with feeling.

*Mimed Sculptures* is being unveiled at Art Basel Unlimited this week. The distinctive performance piece sees mimes mold the shape of iconic sculptures (by Henry Moore, Louise Bourgeois, Alberto Giacometti, and Barbara Hepworth, among others) in air, recreating their form through personal interpretation. “Beauty is a personal experience that is not reserved solely for sight or tangible things,” Balula explains. “Your own mental space is built with perception, which in turn helps define your affinity with others.” Here, this affinity exists not only between the artist and viewer, but also the mimes themselves. Although the audience does not feel the volumes personally, they do gain a sense of them by way of the mime artists, attaining a unique glimpse inside their particular field of perception.

According to Balula, the experience of touch (or pain) is one that is impossible to communicate. “It goes beyond the skin that covers your entire body, beyond the sound of a nut crackling between your teeth, beyond your words. But you can show physical representation to another person—for example, by showing the length of an inch with your thumb and forefinger.” This partial translatability is what he has brought to life with *Mimed Sculptures*—an intimate performance of physical representation. Influenced by a beautiful essay by David J. Getsy, Balula says he was intrigued by its recounting of a historical argument between two famous art historians, Clement Greenberg and Herbert Read. “One praises contrasted graphic lines and opticality, the other a compact form and tactility,” the artist elaborates. “It contrasts David Smith to Henry Moore; two icons of formal volume in space. The works I chose here reflect that duality, but I don’t believe they present the opposition of those two points of view anymore. Geometry becomes organic when represented in the air, and sensual curves are softer when cut by a machine.”

This sense of making organic that which is fixed suits Davide Balula to a tee. It is something he has explored with his technological incorporations as well, although he expresses a sort of ennui with the pervasive nature of technology, with the sense that it can numb our already imperfect perception—what with its various obsolete folders within the corporate cloud. Certainly, it can be used to our advantage, but must also be taken at face value—as merely a replica of the real thing. “Unfortunately, photography and video will miss most of what you experience while attending to the revelation of those invisible sculptures in person,” he explains. “And one of the reasons, besides it being highly dependent on your personal perception and the realities of a sensory 3-D space, is that those sculptures as a whole can only exist in your mind. Perception is imperfect, and that is how we make things ours, from our own inconsistent point of view and forever clumsy expression of it.” Ultimately, there is beauty in that clumsiness, which is one of the reasons that Balula often works with forces beyond his control, with extreme climatic conditions, or the “imperfect” perception of others, for example. Because, just like his works, “you, too, are alive.” Art Basel Unlimited runs through Sunday in Basel, Switzerland.

*Art Basel Unlimited runs through Sunday in Basel, Switzerland.*



MARKET

## 10 Unmissable Works at Art Basel Unlimited 2016

Hili Perlson, Tuesday, June 14, 2016



Hans Op de Beeck, details from *The Collector's House*, (2016). Photo courtesy Hili Perlson

Art Basel Unlimited, the sector dedicated to artworks too large for a fair booth, opened its doors to a throng of collectors and art world denizens on a rainy Monday night. Curated by Gianni Jetzer, curator at large for the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., this edition of Unlimited was the largest ever, with some 88 monumental art works making the huge hangar feel particularly crowded.

The sector brings both historical as well as newer works to the fair, including high-profile names like Anish Kapoor, Ai Weiwei, James Rosenquist, and Christo. But this year, there were a lot of performances taking place across the 16,000 square meters of space, and whoever happened to be in the audience was either tipped off by the gallerists, or just happened to be at the right place at the right time.

Unlimited's special idiosyncrasy lies in its careful balance between presentations that offer grand-scale divertissement—not to mention #artselfie opportunities—and ones that address difficult issues headlong, with this year's edition, opening a day after the devastating mass shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, feeling more political than ever.

Here are the 10 unmissable works at Unlimited:



Hans Op de Beeck, *The Collector's House* (2016). Courtesy of Marianne Boesky Gallery, Galleria Continua, and Galerie Krinzinger, Art Basel Unlimited, 2016.

### 1. Hans Op de Beeck, *The Collector's House* (2016)

Entering the monochromatic charcoal room, the viewer is overcome with the pleasure of the beauty of the titular collector's house—complete with an elegant pond running along it—and the sense that whoever may have lived among the many tasteful artifacts has perished gruesomely, the charcoal coating hinting at some modern-day Pompeii.

### 2. Samson Young, *Canon* (2015)

While this work by the young Hong Kong artist may be one you shouldn't miss, it is indeed rather easy to overlook. Atop a booth-sized cube, Young performs in police uniform with the sonic weapon used to disperse crowds at demonstrations, which is called the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD). At maximum volume, it can induce permanent hearing damage. However, the technology is also used to repel birds from private properties, and Young performed a series of distressed bird calls to a mesmerized audience.



Detail from Wolfgang Tillmans, *New York Installation PCR, 525* (2015), at Art Basel Unlimited 2016. Photo courtesy of Hili Perlson

### 3. Wolfgang Tillmans, *New York Installation PCR, 525 (2015)*

Following the horrific news of the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, a Wolfgang Tillmans image of two men kissing, which was posted by hundreds on their social media feeds, became a symbol of solidarity and defiance in the face of terror. Here at Unlimited, Tillmans has mounted a presentation similar to his recent show “PCR” at David Zwirner gallery, which mixes editorial work and photography featuring activists around the world. His series of gay couples in Russia, shot for *I-D* magazine, feels particularly poignant in light of Sunday’s massacre.

### 4. Kahlil Joseph, *m.A.A.d. (2014)*

Following the horrific news of the shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando, a Wolfgang Tillmans image of two men kissing, which was posted by hundreds on their social media feeds, became a symbol of solidarity and defiance in the face of terror. Here at Unlimited, Tillmans has mounted a presentation similar to his recent show “PCR” at David Zwirner gallery, which mixes editorial work and photography featuring activists around the world. His series of gay couples in Russia, shot for *I-D* magazine, feels particularly poignant in light of Sunday’s massacre.



Alicja Kwade, *Out of Ousia* (2016). Courtesy of 303 Gallery, König Galerie, kamel mennour, Art Basel Unlimited 2016.

### 5. Alicja Kwade, *Out of Ousia (2016)*

Presenting a new work, Alicja Kwade creates a confounding environment that challenges optical perception. A concrete wall, divided by a double-sided mirror, and a glass wall create four sections in which objects like a branch or a rock are placed. It is hard to distinguish whether the objects are reflected on either side of the glass, or if they exist doubly, as Kwade created exact copies cast in steel and positioned them on other side. A huge audience circulated the construction all throughout the opening hours.





AA Bronson, *Folly*, audio component by Ebe Oke. Courtesy of Esther Schipper, Art Basel Unlimited 2016.

#### 6. AA Bronson, *Folly* (2015)

Bronson, who has integrated spirituality and shamanism into his art, presented a “queered” Zen garden filled with fetish objects ranging from Chinese antiques to kitschy, life-size deer figures. The lure of the red-and-white-striped tent is hard to resist, especially in the crowded opening: cushioned with plush fabrics, it suggests withdrawal and contemplation. Around 5 p.m., musician Ebe Oke performed on the wooden deck that surrounds the garden, chanting a pining circular tune.

#### 7. Louise Lawler, *Helms Amendment* (1989)

Among the most striking political works on view at Unlimited is Lawler’s piece reacting to a 1987 US Senate vote in favor of legislation that stipulated that “none of the funds made available under this Act to the Centers for Disease Control shall be used to provide AIDS education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activity.”

The chilling text appears on the wall repeatedly, in red and blue, once for each senator who voted for it. The walls are filled with 94 black-and-white photographs of plastic cups, and each states the name of one of the 94 senators who voted in favor. Two voted nay, and four did not vote.



Davide Balula, *Mimed Sculptures* (2016). Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, galerie frank elbaz, Art Basel Unlimited 2016.

#### 8. Davide Balula, *Mimed Sculptures* (2016)

A group of performers clad in white uniform save for their hot pink gloves (which reminded me of the pink-legged dog from Pierre Huyghe's Documenta 13 work) move around plinths of various sizes. They gesticulate, miming the outlines of sculptures such as Giacometti's *Le nez* (1947), Eva Hesse's *Hang up* (1966), Louise Bourgeois' *Unconscious Landscape* (1967-8), and more. It's like a game of art history charades, but beyond the appeal of trying to recognize the mimed sculpture, the performance also conjures a new, sensual relation to these works as the performers air-caress their details.

#### 9. Ariel Schlesinger, *Two Good Reasons* (2015)

There are quite a few kinetic sculptures on view at Unlimited this year, but during the opening hours, none attracted a larger crowd than Ariel Schlesinger's white sheets of polypropylene, which moved towards each other on the floor until they touched, and started to rise. The piece is exemplary of Schlesinger's practice, in which he animates lifeless objects using as much levity and wit as he does engineering and inventiveness. Expect this work to appear all over your Instagram feed.

#### 10. Mike Kelley, *Reconstructed history* (1989)

This series of 50 drawings by Kelley is not for the faint-hearted. Using pages out of old schoolbooks, Kelley added profanities and lewd scribbles to the found images. But beyond the juvenile gesture of a bored school kid, these hard-hitting doodles and notations effect a rethinking of how history is conveyed in images that in themselves are filled with information about the era in which they were created.

## 10 Artists to Watch During Art Basel

By Artspace Editors  
June 10, 2016



The artist Davide Balula, with chicken

From the new stars of the sprightly LISTE art fair to the veterans with new turns in Art Basel or the city's museums, these are the artists you're going to want to look out for during this week's art-market festivities in Switzerland.

### **DAVIDE BALULA** **Art Basel: Unlimited**

Does a performance-based art-historical guessing game sound as fun to you as it does to us? Then come on down to Art Basel's Unlimited section this week to check out the impressively valanced rising art star Davide Balula's piece with Gagosian Gallery, where a group of trained mimes wearing art-handling gloves and standing behind empty plinths will enact running their hands over specific artworks from the historical canon, including pieces by David Smith, Henry Moore, Giacometti, and Louise Bourgeois. Will you be able to judge from their movements what artwork they're caressing? If so, perhaps your parents should have encouraged you to play outside a little more as a child. (Though we're guessing the Giacometti may be a bit of a giveaway....)

**LIZ CRAFT**  
**LISTE**

For some people, artworks are becoming those things that ping around on Instagram and show up in Google Search, and then are occasionally spotted in their physical form at art fairs. The sculptures of Liz Craft are a bulwark against this tendency—because her extraordinary works, merging painting and the 3-D and creating scenarios that seem to arise from particularly creative nightmares, are theatrical experiences that need to be encountered, walked around, and communed with in the flesh. (For instance, her sculptural portrait of a graffiti-covered, be-shelled, naked mermaid on view now at the Whitney, lounging outside on a terrace, immediately transports the viewer to a world where such creatures are vividly real; it's transfixing.) This week, Craft—a co-founder of L.A.'s Paramount Ranch art fair—is going to have new work at LISTE in the booth of Geneva's Truth and Consequences gallery, so bring your popcorn and prepare yourself for some fireworks.

**AJAY KURIAN**  
**Art Basel: Statements**

In today's art world, it's always a cause for celebration when inspired difficulty finds its just reward, and Ajay Kurian (an occasional Artspace contributor) is swiftly becoming something of a sensation with his impeccably wrought, gorgeous sculpture expressing some pretty left-brain ideas. This week, the artist—who had head-turning appearances in shows from Greater New York (in a standout display alongside his friend Jamian Juliano-Villani) to Baltimore's Rowhouse Project—will have his most prominent stage yet, when a new suite of sculptures goes on view in 47 Canal's Art Basel Statements booth. Standalone mini-monuments that meld high-tech machinery with kiddie pools, sock puppets, Applejacks, and other child-friendly references, the series is loosely inspired by Pixar's "Inside Out" together with skeptical views of child development under American capitalism.

**KATHARINA FRITSCH**  
**Schlaulager, June 12 – Oct. 2**

Katharina Fritsch's career has been much like a pebble thrown in the sea; a series of widening ripples have brought her to international attention with nary a break in momentum. Born in Essen, now working in Düsseldorf, she represented her nation at the 1995 Venice Biennale two decades ago, six years later premiered a critically acclaimed show at Tate Modern and in 2013, her 15-foot blue rooster *Hahn/Cock* staked out Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth. In Basel, she and Minsk artist Alexej Koschkarow are now presenting a three-room installation at the Schaulager (home to her infamous 1993 ring-of-rodents sculpture *Rat King*) that opens to the public June 12.

**NED VENA**  
**LISTE**

Like Cheyney Thompson, Ned Vena has for a while been one of those painters who meld minimal, quasi-Op Art strategies with a kind of irreverent, lived-in humor (e.g. his show of black-and-white concentric-circle paintings at Société called "Menace II Société"). Now he's back with something new, and weird. At Project Native Informant's LISTE booth, Vena will be displaying several of his "Spiderman Eye Graffiti Skyline" paintings, renditions of the classic street-schlock trope of visions of the Manhattan skyline—sometimes with the Twin Towers, sometimes without—reflected in the black bug-eyes of your friendly neighborhood web-slinger. Peddled on the sidewalks of cities around the world, these odd crowd-favorites (which can be made by following a completely absorbing YouTube tutorial) are a distinct change of pace for Vena. It will be interesting to see how the sophisticates at LISTE respond.

## **HANS OP DE BEECK**

**Art Basel: Unlimited**

Pick two. That's what most "multidisciplinary" artists do: dabble in a mix of painting, film, sculpture, installation, drawing, et cetera, and then settle into a familiar groove favoring one or two media. Op de Beeck, however, has never narrowed down his options, and in Basel, at the same time his gothic-noir flavored watercolors and sculptures are on view at Marianne Boesky's Chelsea space, his immersive *The Collector's House* will be showcased at Art Unlimited. The elaborate installation, his fifth appearance at Unlimited, depicts an art collector's petrified library and music room. A critique, perhaps?

## **YNGVE HOLEN**

**Kunsthalle Basel, through Aug. 14**

To say that this Norwegian-German sculpture creates his work from industrial objects would be correct, but it misses the powerful, often chilling mood his bizarre pieces evoke. Holen, born in 1982, combines machines of the aeronautics, medical, automotive, and home-appliances industries—think CT-scanner tunnels, gleaming bus headlights, washing machines—in ways that juxtapose the futuristic and anachronistic, the soft and hard, the hopeful and the dark. This solo museum exhibition, his largest yet, memorably includes a slice of Porsche.

## **POPE.L**

**Art Basel: Unlimited**

The artist known as Pope.L (formerly/occasionally William Pope.L) is one of the shining stars in American performance art, and for good reason. His work represents some of the most incisive commentary on race in the United States being made today, and pieces like *The Great White Way* (in which the artist donned a superman costume, strapped a skateboard to his back, and crawled on his belly up the entire 22-mile length of Manhattan's Broadway—a feat that took him almost five years to complete and was documented for the 2002 Whitney Biennale) have become the stuff of legend. For his piece with Mitchell-Innes & Nash in Art Basel's Unlimited section, Pope.L has released tantalizing information about a planned performance that includes a white gorilla who disperses white plantains on his way to pick up wads of cash from the gallery's booth before decamping the fair the same way he arrived—in a white limousine.

## **MARY REID KELLEY**

**Art Basel: Statements**

The American artist and filmmaker Mary Reid Kelley makes black-and-white videos—often with delightfully punny titles like *You Make Me Iliad* or *The Syphilis of Sisyphus*—that focus on the experience of unsung female characters during moments of historical import. To be clear, these aren't reenactments: Kelley's scripts are lyrical and often rhyming constructions of interlocking complexity, and she dresses her actors in highly stylized outfits and her signature black-and-white makeup, with cartoonish eyes drawn over her actors' real eyelids. She's premiering a new work with Arratia Beer in Art Basel's Statements called *This Is Offal*, focusing on the trope of what she calls "the beautiful, dead, silent woman," which has been featured and exploited in settings ranging from medieval medicine to contemporary crime dramas. Far from silent, the female protagonist converses with her disembodied organs, using wit and wordplay to explore the absurd and "awful" realities of unchallenged sexism and death itself.



## **GRETCHEN BENDER**

### **Art Basel: Unlimited**

As a member of the storied Pictures Generation alongside peers like Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger, Gretchen Bender focused her artistic energy on that most pervasive of 1980s mediums: television. In the years before her death in 2004, she mined the language of good old American T.V. for a new kind of image, critiquing the structures and corporations that regulate mass media even as she employed their own strategies against them. Bender walked the walk, too—in addition to her decidedly anti-establishment artworks, she also designed the credits for “America’s Most Wanted” and edited and directed music videos for bands like Megadeth and Babes in Toyland, some real-world bona fides contemporary media artists can only dream of. Now Metro Pictures is bringing her 1987 piece Total Recall to Art Basel’s Unlimited section. Originally premiered at the Kitchen and consisting of some 24 projection screens, this is one project that will be hard to miss at the fair even if it wasn’t such necessary viewing.

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July 15, 2015 by Mark Westall

## Exclusive Q & A: French artist Davide Balula



AD caught up with Davide Balula while he was getting ready for his new exhibition at Alison Jacques Gallery *A Light To Repeat [ ] On The Wall*. We were able to ask him about his work and his take on reality.



### **1 Can you tell us more about your work**

My pleasure

#### **and what are the main ideas you would like to express?**

Main ideas are hard to reduce into short lines but I would say that I am trying to develop something that involves flexibility and perpetual change, so as an idea it would be like a bacteria that feeds on context, which could potentially itself be integrated into other organisms.

## **2 How do you start the process of making work?**

I place a bucket outdoors and read into what I find there the next day. Depending on the weather, either the bucket or its harvested content becomes the work. Most of time, the ART lands right outside the container so I try to keep a large opening. I suppose I consider the idea more important than the form that walked you through it. It is therefore important to consider that what is not there might as well be a part of it.

## **3 Do you consider the viewer, when making your work?**

If I consider showing as part of it, i'd say yes, always. Not his eyes specifically though. (By "viewer" I assume you mean: "the person who experiences the work"?)



**4 Your work concerns nature: burnt wood, soaked canvases but you are also showing WiFi sculpture - Is technology now seeping into nature?**

I value technological evolution and knowledge legacy, so beyond me being a human I believe that it always has. The phone is the new stick. They both simply create a different type of smoke as residual matter.

**5 Do you struggle to know what is real ?**

Not when I consider that reality can be shared (not only through language). But I am not including social media here, just implying that your own life is not limited to your personal body.

**6 Did you always plan to show the two types of work in this exhibition together?**

Yes

**7 When the time comes will you upload yourself ?**

I do rely on remote servers every time I press "SEND". But i can't tell exactly how much of my body heat is added to the temperature of their processors.

**About**

Davide Balula was born in France in 1978 and currently lives and works in New York, NY. His work is included in museum and public collections including Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Paris and Musée d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne. His work has been included in group exhibitions at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Wiels centre d'art contemporain, Brussels; Bielefelder Kunstverein; Madison Museum for Contemporary Art; Museum of Contemporary Art North Miami and Museums Quartier Wien. Davide Balula is one of the four artists nominated for the 2015 Prix Marcel Duchamp. With thanks to Michelle D'Souza Fine Art, London.

Davide Balula A LIGHT TO REPEAT [ ] ON THE WALL through to 8th AUGUST  
2015 Alison Jacques Gallery

16-18 Berners Street London W1T 3LN [www.alisonjacquesgallery.com](http://www.alisonjacquesgallery.com)

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## *Daide Balula's "A journey through you and the leaves"*

GALERIE FRANK ELBAZ, Paris

February 21–March 28, 2015

Featuring bright colors and interactive technology, Davide Balula's current exhibition seems, at first glance, a significant departure from the artist's earthy process-oriented oeuvre. It's certainly in stark visual contrast to his last show with Frank Elbaz, "The Buried Works" in 2012, which turned the gallery into a vivarium with six blank canvases submerged under several tons of dirt where they were acted upon by natural corrosive and fungal processes. Here, "A journey through you and the leaves..." centers tidily around a series of internet-connected sculptures. Though less sensorial than his previous loamy environment, Balula's current installation is, conceptually speaking, likewise fecund.

"Coloring the WiFi Network" (2015), comprises 17 thin plastic and metal sculptures, each a unique steel squiggle painted a different color. A cluster of these vibrant minimalist works—arrayed around the center of the gallery—are mounted on barely-there white stands so that the whole lot appear to hover in space, just like a Dr. Seuss-ian skyline of wacky rooftop antennas. Elsewhere, tucked into corners, rounding doorways, and mounted on the wall, isolated antennae recall the once ubiquitous (oft jerry-rigged) TV set-top rabbit ears. Despite initially evoking analog transmitters, these works are of and about our digital age. Their linear forms refer to A-to-B routes plotted by car GPS systems and web-mapping services like Google Maps, and each work is hooked up to a Linksys wireless broadband router. All 17 modems, placed directly on the floor in plain sight, broadcast an individual WiFi signal named for the industrial paint color of its corresponding antenna. Illustrations of digital routes that also function as digital routers, these works court physical and virtual connections.

Though the exhibition's accompanying essay, written by former corporate attorney and current anthropology PhD student Lake Polan, explains the premise of "Coloring the WiFi Network," there are no explicit instructions posted in the gallery. Instead, the artist bets that visitors will inevitably take out their cell phones and, while taking a selfie or checking the time, chance upon an intriguing WiFi rainbow. Connecting to any of the paint chip-titled networks—BANANA WHITE, CARIBBEAN GREEN, MUSTARD YELLOW, POWER PINK, WARM RED, etc.—causes a corresponding monochrome to pop up on screen. Recognizing the increasing digital presence of artwork (from amateur photos of exhibitions posted on Flickr, to Artnet's online auctions, to the Google Art Project's vast database of entire museum collections), Balula wrests back some authorial control by coopting the screens that come between the viewer and his sculptures. Preempting the viewer who might be tempted to post photos of the show on Instagram or Tumblr, Balula does his own digitizing. Each on-screen monochrome is temporarily transferred to the viewer's personal electronic device along with complete checklist information.



In addition to offering the viewer the intimate experience of holding artwork in their own hands, “Coloring the WiFi Network” also has macro implications. It’s not confined to the context of the exhibition, but, rather, is designed to seep into the real world. Like any hotspot, Balula’s networks, once accessed, are stored in the phone’s settings. On a return trip to the exhibition, I kept my cell phone out while approaching the gallery and watched as the colorful list of networks reemerged about half a block away. A click reloaded each monochrome, enabling me to revisit these works without setting foot inside the show. Though I was actively seeking out “Coloring the WiFi,” its intentional outflow beyond the gallery walls means passersby may come across the work unexpectedly, in keeping with Balula’s penchant for chance encounters.

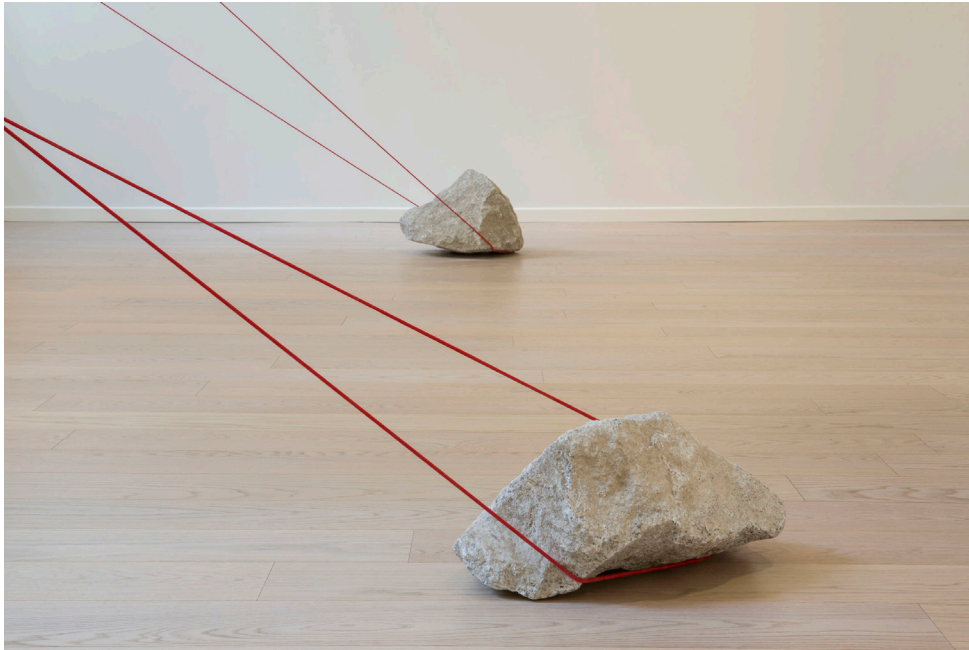
Also on view are two recent examples from Balula’s series “Artificially Aged Paintings” (2010–ongoing), which present another way in which the artist enlists technology as his unwitting collaborator. To create the pair of large-scale paintings (*both titled Artificially Aged Painting (Wet, Dry, Wet, Dry, Wet, Dry)*, [2014–15]) the artist placed primed, unstretched canvases inside a high-tech control chamber, where they were subjected to extreme climatic conditions. Shown amidst the thicket of WiFi antennae, Balula’s cracked and flaky paintings, which demonstrate a physical toll wrought by invisible forces both natural and artificial, suddenly make viewers acutely aware of the electromagnetic radiation passing through their own body.

A final component of the exhibition, *Between now [...] and now* (2015), exists entirely outside the gallery. Part performance, part document, and part conceptual stopwatch, this SMS-based piece comprises periodic text messages sent by the artist to a list of cell phone numbers collected at the show’s opening. Another example of the artist harnessing technology and introducing his work into the viewer’s private sphere, these texts act as odd and intimate time markers. One morning I received the note: “The thickness of your soles between now.” Nearly 12 hours later, the follow up, “and now,” closed the bracket. I’m told a final text will signal the end of the exhibition. Until then I remain connected, my phone providing a temporary avenue for Balula’s temporal musings.

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Mara Hoberman is a writer and curator based in Paris  
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## *Fruit of the forest*

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Grand Opening (the Window, the Wind, the Weather in); 2015, granite, bungee cord, blind, wind, window; courtesy the artist and Galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris; Ph. Agostino Osio

## **Davide Balula**

By Federica Tattoli

I had the pleasure to discover Davide Balula's works at the opening of Fondazione Carriero in Milan few weeks ago on the occasion of the inaugural exhibition of this new amazing cultural space. The exhibition, *imaginariii*, curated by Francesco Stocchi analyzes the contemporary notion of space and its experience, in this era where you see more artwork through a monitor, *imaginariii* tells us to take our time, go out and experiment art in the real physical space. The spatiality of nature in Davide Balula begins from common objects, habits, or events to create an anima mundi where the imagination communicates with the universe itself...

### **How would you present your work?**

Usually in daylight. Sometime with artificial light. Sometimes in the dark. Sometimes on pedestals. Sometimes inside you.

### **Where do you make your works?**

It depends on the project. I try to work on site as much as possible. I always try to keep a part of the work flexible enough to be adjusted on site. As for studio works, I fabricate things in NY and Paris. But most of my projects are also "realized" and complemented by their very context.

### **What is Nature for you and in which way is included in your artworks?**

Nature is what changes constantly, whether you notice it or not. It cannot exist by itself, it requires interaction and exchange of energy. It is the saliva in your mouth that accidentally gets deposited on the surface of a work as you talk in front of it. It is the mixture of bacteria and grease between your fingers and the touchscreen. It is the liquid

that captures and waters down the dust in the air in order to keep your eyes moist. It is that same tear that you have just looked through. It is all the permanent cohabitation of various organisms working together, no matter what scale or pace. It goes beyond human and technological perception. Because I think of it while putting a piece together, I believe it is included in my work as an active component, on a sensitive or structural level. I can create specific conditions so sediments and mold can grow on canvas. Sometimes it is a simple focus on the porosity of two spaces. Like in the show at Fondation Carriero where the temperature exchange associated with a distant sound is what constitutes the core of a work.

**The importance of a title for an artwork (in general and for your works)?**

The title to a work can be its hat, its keychain or its coat... A title allows you to describe a work where only the text is visible, where no image can be attached. It can also complement the piece by revealing something directly unrelated, or indirectly related if you prefer. Nowadays, it is easy to find the image of a work -only of course if the work can be photographed. I like to believe that the title is a textual space with the power of triggering a different esthetic experience once associated with the piece.

**Could you describe me your poetic in five words?**

I suppose I can, see? (Read again without the punctuation).

**What can't be missing from your worktable?**

The power adaptor of my personal computer.

**A collection you wish at least one work of yours was part of?**

I know very little about collections but I would say ideally a collection that would be happy to show the most ambitious of my projects, regardless of its nature and difficulty to re-stage or re-install, and which would put all the care into sharing the piece with all the details being considered with its context. I don't know which collection that one would be... Probably many of them are ambitious in that way.

**A museum where you'd like to have an exhibition?**

Well, I don't have much preference over all the major museums, as long as I am given a full on Carte Blanche :)

**The market or your need to express?**

Not sure i get that question. I don't really know or understand the market, and I am not sure about my need to express. Although I like the term "express". Mostly because it makes me think of an old steam train.

**Lightness or depth?**

Both: The deeper you dig, the more light you need. Especially if you want to keep going deeper.

**Day or night?**

What's in between: the dusk and the dawn.

**Indians or cowboys?**

Definitely not cowboy. (Nothing against cows though).

**A question you've never been asked but one you've always wanted to answer?**

**Answer that question...**

The questions I like to be confronted with don't usually generate an answer I am able to provide. That is what makes it a good question! Those generate an answer that is not in the form of an answer. An answer that is technically more something like a question I believe.

**Could you briefly describe one of your latest works?**

Unknotting of an earphone cable.

**What are you reading?**

90% of my reading is a gathering of various articles found on the internet, mostly via my twitter feed. Mostly science (bioengineering, medical technologies, source and use of energy) and poetry.

As for ebooks (available in prints too), I just finished "Wittgenstein's Ladder" by Marjorie Perloff, and I am basically done with "Whiz Mob: A Correlation of the Technical Argot of Pickpockets with Their Behavior Pattern" by David W. Maurer. In the subway going to studio I was reading "A dark Dreambox of an Other Kind", poems of Alfred Hamilton (a present from my wife).

**A film?**

"F for fake" ! Orson Welles.

**Where would you like to live?**

In a bathtub. Or more conveniently, in and out my own body.

**Do you have reference artists? Artists you'd like to work with?**

Douglas Huebler is probably my favorite artist of all times. Shirley Jaffe whose friendship and inputs I cherish. It would be fun to do a project with people like Simone Forti, or Roman Ondak, or Lutz Bacher, or Yoko Ono or William Leavitt or ... I don't know... I would die for a meeting with Alan Lomax, or Russel Edson...

**A project, related to art, that you'd like to do?**

Yes, reorganizing my todo list in order of "preference" instead of "approaching deadlines".

**If you weren't an artist, what job would you like?**

A neuroscientist? A casual fisherman maybe ?

**Let's imagine a group show. Who would you like to exhibit with?**

I would like a show whose space has been designed by Robert Irvin, whose colors perception would have been temporarily altered by Flavin, where you would enter slowly after Robert Barry had left his invisible gesture, followed by a scent commissioned to Mary Ellen Carroll, with furnitures and sculptures by people like Wendell Castle or Shawn Maximo - those would be equally felt through VR perception as much as covered in fur. Where a text by Mei Mei Berssenbruggue wouldn't be printed but delivered by her incredible voice via telepathy, with no apparatus whatsoever. I guess I should try to make that happen. That actually sounds like something nearly possible to do !

**Yes or no to curators? If yes, who would you choose?**

Definitely yes to curators. We have a special relationship with francesco stocchi, each project we end up putting together is the result of very interesting discussions that are not solely limited to my work. He is the kind who is not being afraid of trying weird things, whether spectacular or invisible. I have a tendency to have too many ideas at once and that can be overwhelming sometimes for curators. It's always nice to be in a discussion with a curator who is good at canalizing and organizing the show as a set of legible ideas. There are a lot of different curators out there making ambitious and inspiring work. It's really hard to choose. So, I don't know, I would probably ask someone like Jay Sanders, Jessica Morgan or Ralph Rugoff, if I were the one picking more people to work with.

**A dream of yours?**

That time that I used a music stage as a blanket.



Installation view, *Artificially Aged Painting (Wet, Dry, Wet, Dry, Wet, Dry)*, 2014-15; factory pre-treated linen, wooden frame Ø 178 cm (with frame), Ø 173 cm (without frame); Collection Zadig et Voltaire, Paris; ph. Agostino Osio



*Burnt Painting, Imprint of a Burnt Painting*, 2015; diptych, charred wood, dust of charred wood on canvas, 195 x 130 cm each; Courtesy galerie frank elbaz, Paris; ph. Agostino Osio





Grand Opening (the Window, the Wind, the Weather in); 2015, granite, bungee cord, blind, wind, window; courtesy the artist and Galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris; Ph. Agostino Osio

ART MATTERS

# Art Matters | A Dangerous Method

CULTURE | BY LINDA YABLONSKY | FEBRUARY 27, 2014 9:00 AM



Clockwise from top: Davide Balula; "Burnt Painting, Imprint of the Burnt Painting (Ember Harbor #7)," 2013; "River Painting (La Seine, Paris)," 2009-2010. Credit Clockwise from left: Cedrick Eymenier; Jean-Pacôme Dedieu; Hugard & Vanoverschelde.

*Buried, burned and drowned, Davide Balula's canvases brave the elements in his pursuit of perfect imperfection.*

Rather than languish on a gallery wall, Davide Balula's art keeps busy: paintings grow mushrooms, spaces heat and bend and sculptures record surrounding movements, loudly playing back what they hear. "I take inspiration from natural phenomena," says the 36-year-old French artist, who now lives in New York City. His materials of choice are earth, wind, fire and water. With them, he creates situations open to chance and then lets nature do its thing. Blank canvases that he buries in soil attract microbes and mold; drowned in rivers, they collect mineral deposits and emerge as marbled abstractions.

For "Ember Harbor," his current show at [Galerie Rodolphe Janssen](#) in Brussels, he used a blowtorch to burn seven panels of wood blocks arranged in checkerboard patterns, squeezing each set into successively narrower frames. By pressing charred surfaces to virgin canvas, he created ghostly charcoal prints, then hung each opposite its original. As viewers pass between the increasingly tapered paintings, the walls seem to close in. "It's a weird sensation," admits Balula, who will exhibit new work at [Frieze New York](#) in May.

Lee Ranaldo, "Davide Balula", in *L'OFFICIEL Art* n°5, March-April-May 2013.

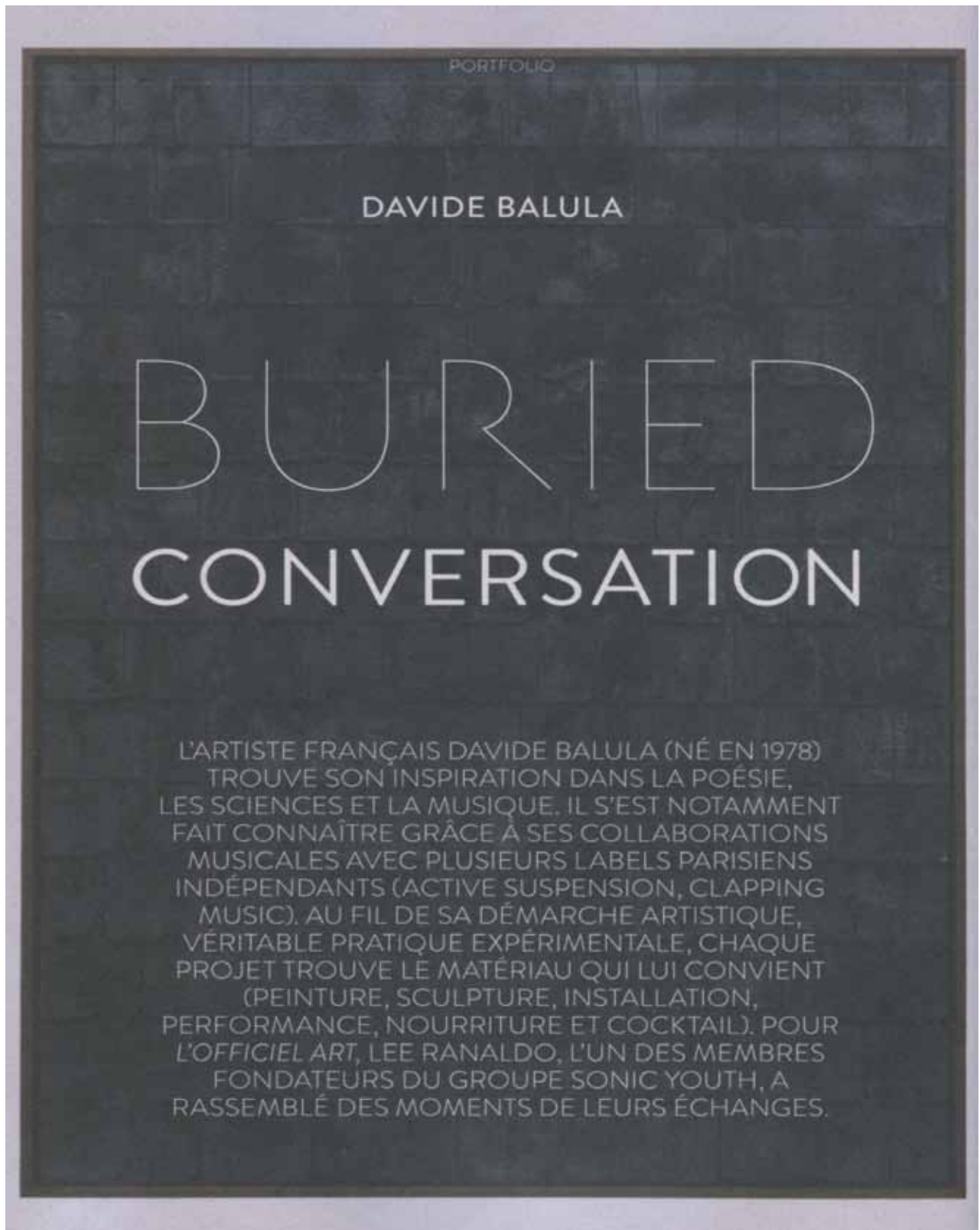


## SOMMAIRE

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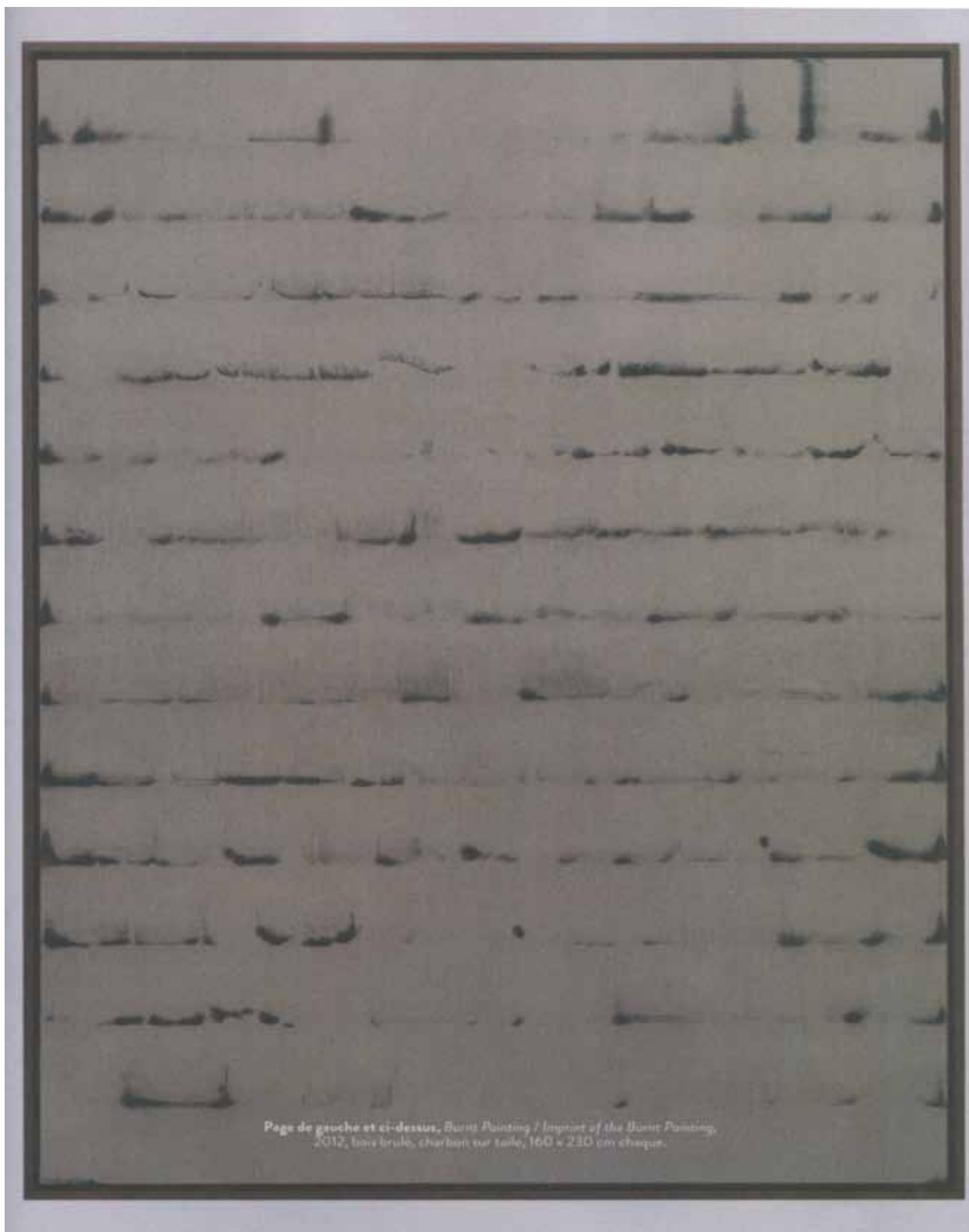
- 100 Schizophrenic monuments **Sterling Ruby**
- 110 Hors limites **Raf Simons**
- 116 Buried conversation **Davide Balula**
- 122 Objet / femme **Linder Sterling**
- 130 Art is Truth **Thierry Gillier**
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Lee Ranaldo, "Davide Balula", in *L'OFFICIEL Art* n°5, March-April-May 2013.



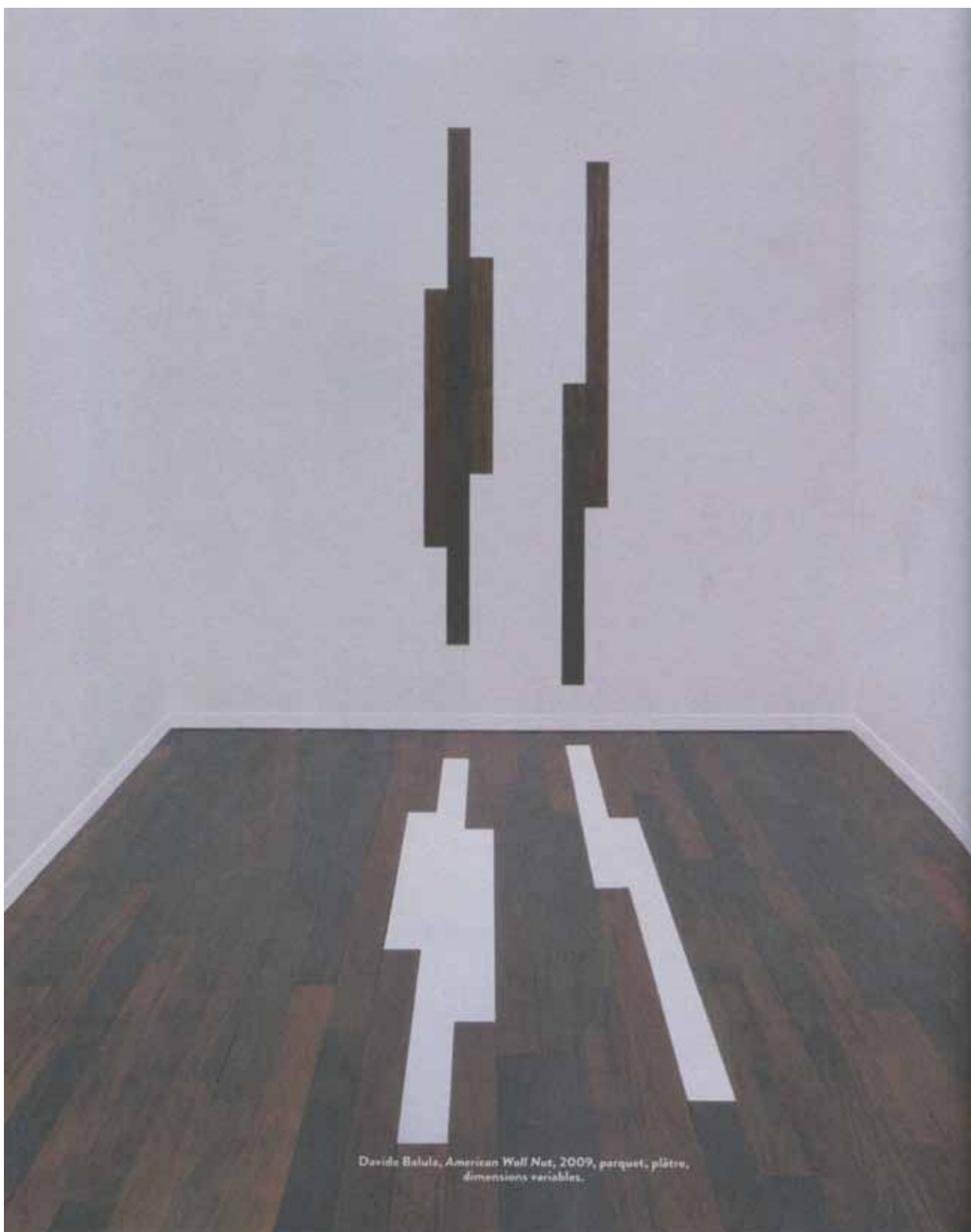
L'ARTISTE FRANÇAIS DAVIDE BALULA (NÉ EN 1978) TROUVE SON INSPIRATION DANS LA POÉSIE, LES SCIENCES ET LA MUSIQUE. IL S'EST NOTAMMENT FAIT CONNAÎTRE GRÂCE À SES COLLABORATIONS MUSICALES AVEC PLUSIEURS LABELS PARISIENS INDÉPENDANTS (ACTIVE SUSPENSION, CLAPPING MUSIC). AU FIL DE SA DÉMARCHE ARTISTIQUE, VÉRITABLE PRATIQUE EXPÉRIMENTALE, CHAQUE PROJET TROUVE LE MATÉRIAU QUI LUI CONVIENT (PEINTURE, SCULPTURE, INSTALLATION, PERFORMANCE, NOURRITURE ET COCKTAIL). POUR *L'OFFICIEL ART*, LEE RANALDO, L'UN DES MEMBRES FONDATEURS DU GROUPE SONIC YOUTH, A RASSEMBLÉ DES MOMENTS DE LEURS ÉCHANGES.

Lee Ranaldo, "Davide Balula", in *L'OFFICIEL Art* n°5, March-April-May 2013.





Lee Ranaldo, "Davide Balula", in *L'OFFICIEL Art* n°5, March-April-May 2013.



Davide Balula, *American Wall Nut*, 2009, parquet, plâtre, dimensions variables.

Durant l'été 2007, j'ai été invité, avec Leah Singer, à participer à une résidence d'artistes au Cneai sur l'île des Impressionnistes, près de Paris. Nous nous sommes installés avec nos deux fils dans la maison flottant sur la Seine, attenante au Cneai. C'est donc sur un fleuve – coïncidence ! – que j'ai rencontré Davide. Au coucher du soleil, nous buvions du vin rouge sur la terrasse, alors que les promeneurs commençaient à quitter les lieux. C'est durant cet été que nous avons fait connaissance. L'hiver suivant, nous étions dans les rues de Manhattan à nous lancer des boules de neige !

Nous passions alors plus de temps à Paris et Davide se rendait de plus en plus fréquemment à New York pour ses recherches et ses expositions. L'une d'elles s'est déroulée à Fake Estate, une minuscule galerie dirigée par Julia Trotta, qui s'est révélée être notre voisine dans le sud de Manhattan. Notre amitié a donné lieu à des collaborations artistiques et un échange de passions et de curiosités : une corde de guitare par-ci, un Stomach Rainbow par-là, une conversation enfouie et exhumée. J'ai eu la chance de suivre attentivement les activités de Davide, aussi j'ai été invité à m'immerger dans certains des thèmes bouillonnants de ses œuvres. Les extraits qui suivent sont issus de nos conversations.

Davide Balula, entretien avec Lee Ranaldo  
Janvier 2013, New York et Los Angeles.

LEE RANALDO : On arrive à la surface de tes œuvres, notamment celles de l'exposition "Le Compas dans l'œil", par des voies diverses : le feu, l'enfouissement fluvial, la moisissure, le vieillissement accéléré. Elles se manifestent sur de nombreux supports – toile, bois, papier oxydé, carton. Les rênes de l'abstraction semblent tenues d'une main légère, mais les résultats sous-entendent un effort non seulement pour documenter certains processus naturels, mais également pour y déceler une forme de beauté. Quelle importance ces œuvres entretiennent-elles avec le beau, la beauté abstraite ou "beauté zen" ?

DAVIDE BALULA : Cette exposition représente un moment important pour moi puisqu'elle faisait part, pour la première fois en France, de mes recherches commencées à New York en 2008. Je n'avais encore jamais présenté de peintures à Paris. Mais pour ce qui est du beau, je ne sais pas, les chansons et les mécaniques imaginaires me restent généralement plus longtemps à l'esprit que les images. Peut-être parce qu'elles embrassent leurs propres variations : ma mémoire imparfaite possède une grande tolérance au changement. Cela ne veut pas dire que je suis contre une émotion plus physique. Mais cette beauté-là est une expérience éphémère, elle nécessite que j'y revienne en personne, encore et encore, si je veux en refaire l'expérience. J'aime me rappeler que le même air inspiré et expiré par le public rencontre la surface de toute œuvre exposée et accélère le vieillissement de ses couleurs. Pour "Le Compas dans l'œil", j'ai fait appel à des phénomènes naturels similaires pour créer des peintures. Travailler avec les éléments de la nature impose qu'on accepte que le résultat puisse changer au cours du temps. C'est assez facile de se passionner pour certains sujets dès lors qu'on creuse un peu, qu'on passe du

temps avec eux. On commence alors à éprouver une certaine forme d'affection. Ce qu'on prenait pour des défauts devient une identité précieuse et singulière. Je sélectionne beaucoup, je recadre, je supprime, j'isole les étrangetés produites par les éléments naturels. J'ai du mal à définir ce qui constitue l'équilibre final. Il me semble que la beauté doit aussi être vécue avant de finaliser une œuvre, afin de la conserver dans la démarche elle-même et qu'elle prenne sa propre place dans la mémoire. Ce n'est pas nécessairement la forme finale qui déclenche l'émotion. Personnellement, je prends plus de plaisir si j'emprunte un certain chemin pour y parvenir. Le temps et le contexte constituent sans doute l'élément central de

mon appréciation du beau et donc des décisions que je prends au cours de ma démarche. Avec les œuvres que je réalise en extérieur, les conditions météo dictent le résultat de mes expériences. J'ai donc tendance à choisir un lieu à la fois pratique et secret : un endroit où j'aime passer du temps, seul ou avec un ami, un endroit que je veux garder en mémoire. J'aime y aller à l'aube ou au crépuscule pour éviter d'y croiser des gens, surtout quand j'emballer des pierres avec de la toile !

## "J'ADORE ME RAPPELER, QUE L'AIR INSPIRÉ ET EXPIRÉ PAR LE PUBLIC ENTRE EN CONTACT AVEC LA SURFACE DE TOUTE ŒUVRE EXPOSÉE."

Tes peintures déposées au fond des rivières ont quelque chose de très sensible : constituées de sédiments recueillis sur toile, elles évoquent presque une expérience scientifique, avec des algues et des cultures de moisissures, mais présentées à plat, en tant que "peintures". Quelles sont tes intentions concernant ces œuvres ? Il me semble y voir un dessin profondément poétique : des œuvres sur lesquelles la main de l'artiste se pose avec légèreté à la manière d'une composition de Cage.

Lorsque je voyage, j'essaie de lâcher des toiles dans les rivières, comme pour marquer mon itinéraire. Les peintures de cette série constituent une archive qui témoigne de tout ce qui s'accumule

depuis des années au fond d'un cours d'eau, comme on prélèverait un carottage. La toile devient alors un espace où les éléments naturels interagissent, se développent et évoluent au fil du temps. Un ami m'a fait remarquer la corrélation entre ces œuvres et mon passé musical : il les appelle des "Field Recordings". Je trouve cela très juste. Ce que je capture sur la toile est un fragment pris dans le temps, un moment d'écosystème en évolution permanente. Exposer cet enregistrement au mur revient à le rejouer au ralenti. J'expose ces toiles à des conditions météo diverses : il est donc important de donner au contexte et aux éléments naturels suffisamment de place pour qu'ils puissent suggérer une composition par eux-mêmes. Avant qu'elles ne deviennent des peintures, je dois essayer de rester ouvert à ce qui doit être encadré, à ce qui se laisse apprivoiser.

**Les peintures de la série Buried Paintings sont-elles des cousines proches de la série River Paintings ?**

Les toiles déposées dans les rivières et les toiles enterrées ont été créées à l'extérieur, avec l'influence des conditions météo. Quant à l'exposition *The Buried Works*, j'ai enseveli des toiles à l'intérieur de la galerie Frank Elbaz. Même si j'ai profondément modifié l'architecture du lieu, je voulais que le climat et le temps eux-mêmes deviennent le sujet principal de l'exposition. On avait accès aux peintures via des trappes au sol de la galerie, mais il était encore trop tôt pour pouvoir les regarder. Derrière les trappes, on ne trouvait que de la terre et des mauvaises herbes. On pouvait faire l'expérience inhabituelle d'une certaine humidité, de l'odeur du bois et de la terre : on pouvait juger de la taille des peintures et de leur placement éventuel aux murs. Mais on ne pouvait pas en voir le contenu puisqu'elles étaient en formation sous nos pieds.

**Nombre de tes œuvres semblent**

tourner autour de la notion de composition, qui évoque la partition musicale et sa relation à une image visuelle ou à des événements qui se déroulent au fil du temps – des choses qui évoluent. Des œuvres telles que *Mechanical Clock for 60 Dancers*, *Niagara Falls & Cranberry Leaves* ou *A Car Ride is a Music Score* semblent aborder à la fois la notion du temps et celle de la performance. De plus, la pièce des chutes du Niagara et le repas servi à partir des œuvres enfouies dans la terre tournent tous les deux autour d'un genre bien spécifique de performance où l'on "accueille l'art" dans son propre corps, que ce soit comme nourriture ou comme expérience. Quelles sont les idées sous-jacentes aux différents courants de ce travail ? Les structures temporelles existantes sont très faciles à réinterpréter puisqu'elles éliminent le problème de la narration dans la performance. Par exemple, les œuvres enfouies ont servi de point de départ à un repas que j'ai créé en collaboration avec la chef Agata Felluga. Nous sommes partis de l'idée d'une croissance verticale très lente : d'abord de la terre comestible, puis

des racines, des bulbes, des germes, des tiges, des feuilles, des fruits... Lorsque la structure pour une performance est en place, les interprètes partagent la même chronologie, alors qu'en même temps, le public peut se focaliser sur une expérience qui lui est propre et dans laquelle il peut facilement se retrouver. Une promenade, un plan du sol, un menu, un cocktail diurétique, des sécrétions corporelles... tout cela représente autant de structures temporelles pouvant être utilisées comme partition musicale. C'est le terrain parfait pour une pratique expérimentale.

(Y a-t-il un espace d'exposition plus amusant que les cellules et leur métabolisme ?) La musique constitue l'outil idéal pour faire l'expérience du temps au sein d'un groupe. Elle ne demande rien. Elle pénètre d'elle-même. On n'a même pas besoin d'avalir.

**Tracer les courbes du Musée Guggenheim pour les reproduire sous forme de tableaux incurvés : quelque part, ce geste semble proche de tes séries de peintures brûlées, enfouies ou déposées dans des rivières. Dans un sens, cette documentation de la célèbre rotonde en spirale du Guggenheim serait un enregistrement (en "peinture") d'un phénomène naturel de plus.**

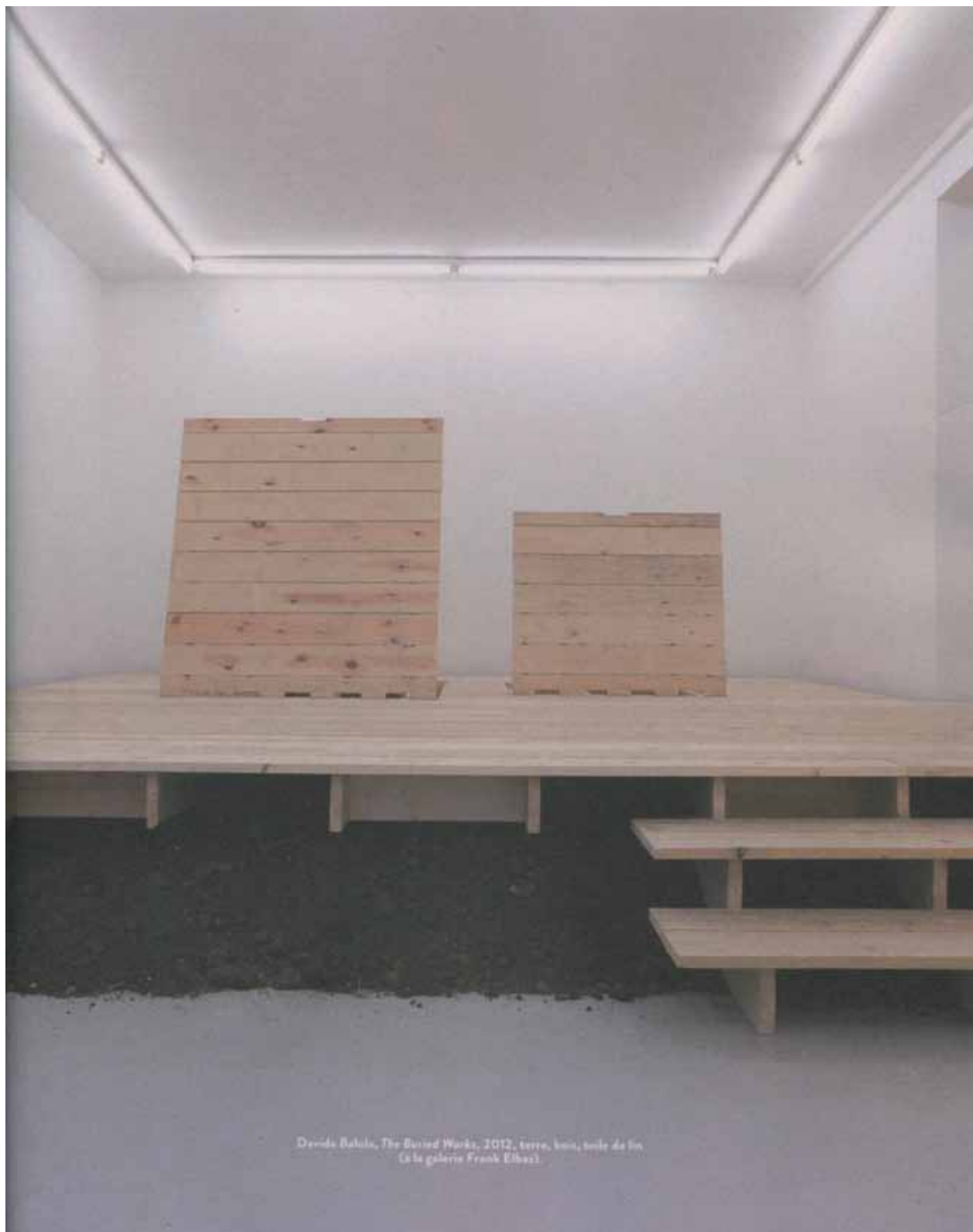
La rotonde du Guggenheim en tant que phénomène naturel... hm, je me demande comment ce serait analysé en tant que monument en hommage au pré-psychédéisme... Pour l'exposition à Los Angeles, en plus des peintures du Guggenheim, j'ai travaillé avec une gymnaste rythmique qui a employé un ruban pour redessiner l'architecture du musée dans l'air. C'est assez hypnotisant de voir un geste légèrement en retard sur le mouvement original se déplacer le long du ruban avant de disparaître. Même si les peintures ressemblent à

des *Shaped Canvas* classiques, elles fonctionnent plus comme un échantillon de l'architecture originale. Modifier le contexte d'un pan de mur évoque l'idée de superposer différents espaces, de les déplier et de les replier dans son esprit. Imagine que tu écoutes un enregistrement effectué à Central Park en marchant dans le Jardin des Tuileries. Cela revient plus ou moins à faire s'entrechoquer deux géographies. Je trouve cela très beau de pouvoir déformer par la pensée des environnements naturels ou toute autre construction physique. C'est un peu ce qui se passe avec l'installation *American Wall Nut*, j'ai intégré le mur dans le sol et le sol dans le mur, pour rendre une pièce unique mentalement flexible. Et tout comme mes peintures brûlées, un fragment d'architecture est appliqué et frotté sur une toile, puis retiré à nouveau. On peut ressentir la tension entre les deux images en miroir du diptyque. Que les tableaux soient installés côte à côte ou situés dans des pièces différentes. L'un ne peut exister que grâce à l'autre.

Davide Balula est représenté par la galerie Frank Elbaz, Paris.



Lee Ranaldo, "Davide Balula", in *L'OFFICIEL Art* n°5, March-April-May 2013.



# kowal+odermatt

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DAVIDE BALULA – LOS ANGELES TIMES

**Los Angeles Times**



**CULTURE MONSTER**  
ALL ARTS, ALL THE TIME

“Review: Davide Balula jams the circuits of light, space”

Knight, Christopher

February 21 2013

French artist Davide Balula takes a deep dive into a shallow pool for his new painting installation. The disarming reversals are confounding.

The stairs, floor and three surrounding walls of the step-down room at Francois Ghebaly Gallery, where Balula is having his Los Angeles debut, are painted a rich turquoise blue, its watery luminosity enhanced by the skylight overhead. Three large, pristine white canvases hang on the walls.

Like Robert Rauschenberg’s 1951 white paintings, Balula’s capture only ambient light and shadow. But the French artist’s paintings are not conventional rectangles. Instead, three-dimensional polygons slope at the bottom and curve away from the wall, almost like peeling paint.

The paintings’ eccentric format derives from the tilted, sloping curved walls on the spiral ramp of the Guggenheim Museum, which architect Frank Lloyd Wright conceived as an ideal foil for easel paintings. The design, transferred here from New York to L.A., also switches the established relationship between Wright’s walls and rectangular paintings hanging on them. The color likewise flips, trading in the Northeast Atlantic for a Southwest Pacific hue.

Balula’s installation is titled with a set of instructions: “1. Turn West / 2. Form a Circle With Your Mouth / 3. Let the Sun Set In.” Standing in his chromatically saturated, unconventional space makes one oddly lightheaded, all the while demanding close scrutiny in order to determine what is generating the swoon.

At the entry Balula stuck pairs of colored pencils into several electrical sockets. An enigmatic gesture, it turns out to neatly prefigure the way the painting installation jams the circuits of standard Light and Space art.



Mara Hoberman, "Davide Balula", in *artforum.com*, June 4th, 2012.

## ARTFORUM

### David Balula

GALERIE FRANK ELBAZ

7 rue Saint-Claude

April 21–June 16

By piling several tons of dirt onto the gallery floor and covering the mound with a custom-built deck—upon which visitors are invited to climb and walk—David Balula has created a large-scale vivarium in Le Marais—a district whose name translates as “the marsh,” which is exactly what this now chic and gallery-laden Parisian neighborhood was, prior to the twelfth century. Grasses and other weeds have already sprung up through the slatted wood flooring and around its edges, hinting at the fecundity of this historically reminiscent ecosystem. Yet there is more than plant matter germinating here. In the spirit of previous works that Balula has made using natural elements (“River Paintings,” 2008, and “Burnt Paintings,” 2009), here he has buried six blank canvases, subjecting them to organic corrosion for a two-month period. The

“Buried Works,” 2012, will not be exhumed or displayed during this exhibition. Instead, Balula focuses on the odd experience of a biotic studio: a “natural” environment that has been contrived to specifically—and independently—create art. Enveloped by the palpable odor and succulence of damp soil, the viewer enjoys a removed—but still visceral—encounter with the invisible minerals, matter, and molds that Balula has coopted as artistic collaborators.

Though the installation may be physically akin to an institutional critique—calling to mind, for example, Urs Fischer’s eight-foot-deep crater at Gavin Brown’s Enterprise (*You*, 2007)—conceptually, Balula’s penchant for art generated by nature harks back to Yves Klein, who in the early 1960s exposed canvases to wind, rain, sun, and dust to create a series called “Cosmogonies.” Balula’s results will likely be subtler than Klein’s (who once famously drove from Paris to the Côte d’Azur with a canvas affixed to the roof of his car), but we will have to wait to see. The gallery is charged with keeping the soil moist and the temperature regulated during the exhibition, but the artist has not yet determined when or where the unearthed “Buried Works” will be shown publicly.

— Mara Hoberman



View of “Buried Works,” 2012.

Autopsy of an Artwork, French artist DAVIDE BALULA

## **“From Christian Marclay to Davide Balula: Where time leads? or Artwork Autopsy of “Humeurs”, a piece by Davide Balula”**

**by Beatrice Chassepot**

*“Christian Marclay won the Golden Lion’s prize at the Venice Biennale with “The Clock”, an art installation piece that uses snippets from films and television to keep real 24-hour time”. I should have been focus to the reading of the article about “one of the most important artist of the decade” as it is said, when automatically and unconsciously it recalled me a piece I saw by French artist, Davide Balula\* at Frank Elbaz gallery for its first solo exhibition in Paris in 2007.*

The piece is called “Humeurs/Moods”. It is a set of twelve clocks with different gears one per clock- that indicate other possible speeds for the passage of time. The small hand of one clock goes round fast when another other clock on its side goes round slowly and another below goes really really fast and so on for each one.

That rhythm brings a strange mood to each clock, the kind of sensitivity we associate to human people, like a bad mood, a stress, happiness or sadness. It could be seen like a crowd of people in which each clock/ person responds to “her” next door neighbor, from below or above. One like out of breath seems to say “- I’m in a hurry”; another appears desperate and seems to say “no rush please we have time”; another desperate says like in her last breath “no way, leave me alone I’m going to stop this”, another one “next door” goes round regularly. “She” seems to move proudly in her life.

With that brilliant installation from the artist the notion of time switches to a different meaning. It is not a universal time anymore that we all can trust and refer to. Time becomes totally subjective in itself because the time is never the same, and by the interpretation a viewer can have.

Since this installation has been created in 2007, the purpose of Balula’s entire work is about the notion of time and its different approaches. In addition to the rhythm already mentioned in “Humeurs” the artist shows to us that time can pass in different ways: we can “see” it for example when we see a color getting less shiny because of the test of time as we see in

the piece titled "Accelerated Aging of a Blue Paper" from 2010. We can hear? the time when we listen to a music time is passing by, and Balula is also a composer and a singer.

I interviewed him about these different approaches of the time he shows in his work:

Davide Balula: "Time has naturally joined my work from the very beginning. Not only as a subject for representation but also as a component in the making of the pieces. A large part of my production has to do with the fact that organic elements present in many materials you can use in contemporary sculpture evolve with time and that it is vain to try to entirely freeze the natural chemical mechanisms. Therefore, the form and your relation to the objects or situations depend on the environment that indubitably has joined the process as well. From an ink that vanishes among the yellowing of a paper, from personal clock in which you can choose your own pace by tuning the speed of the passage of its time, from an ice sculpture representing an explosion that melts in slow motion, to a mushroom, mould, insect, pigeon or algae farming, or to solids and liquids which interact with your body like for instance during an ingestion and the release of it once filtered by your body... everything you want to share your experience with (esthetic or not) has to be considered as part of a larger space and timeframe. That time window of the experience is what interests me the most. Even when you are looking for your own recollections, your memory has transformed time into space, that time you shared with the world has been compressed into that emotional space you cannot entirely share but with the core of yourself".

Besides the genuine interest I took in watching again Balula's artwork I thought that art is obviously very interesting. When your attention is focused on a specific piece by artist X, it is sometimes so powerful that the topic can lead to remind you another piece of art by another artist you saw years before in another country and an artwork you didn't even know you had memorized it so well. This should be called "the secret life of art within your brain".

**Los Angeles, October 11th, 2011**  
**Beatrice Chassepot.**

\*Davide Balula was born in 1978 in Annecy, France. He lives and works in Paris. He has been exhibited in New York (USA) Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka (Japan) Milano (Italy) Amsterdam (The Netherlands) and many museums in France.

Galerie Frank Elbaz: <http://www.galeriefrankelbaz.com/wp/artists/davide-balula/davide-balula-images/>

<http://www.myspace.com/davidebalula>  
<http://www.lappareil.com>

Upcoming show:

November 20th, 2011 at **Georges Pompidou Museum**, performance « THE ENDLESS PACE (MECHANICAL CLOCK for 60 DANCERS)?

Lillian Davies, "The Reluctant Studio Practice of Davide Balula" in *www.artinamericamagazine.com*, January 21st, 2011



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## The Reluctant Studio Practice of Davide Balula

*lillian davies* 01/21/10

Currently artist in residence at La Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec, French artist Davide Balula welcomed me to his studio in the Parisian banlieue on a snowy day in mid-January. Completing a nine-month residency at the public art space run by Director Marianne Lanavère, he is in the process of preparing work for group shows at La Galerie and Thaddeus Ropac (opens February 13), and a solo show at Frank Elbaz (opens February 27).

"A studio practice is really a very recent thing for me—before it was just the computer and the telephone," explained Balula, who moved into his first studio in November 2008 as an artist in residence with Lower Manhattan Cultural Council in New York City. "I'm still doing the same type of work... it's just the attitude that may have changed." We first spoke about his work *Endless Pace (Variation for 60 Dancers)* (2009), which was included in the PERFORMA 09 program. Since his laptop has been relegated to the kitchen, we watched a bird's-eye-view recording of the event on the artist's iPhone.

"Work in two dimensions has always made me uncomfortable," said Balula as he introduced the work in his street level studio. "I've always worked with sculpture, but I recently had the desire to develop a graphic practice—while keeping the idea of things that change with time." Describing painting as a "trace of action," this past year he has been working on a series of two-dimensional compositions on cardboard and wood: an archive of gestures—random scratches, splattered paint, pieces of colored tape—made during the realization of other works. While reflecting the artist's actions over time, as well as the real volume of the cardboard surface and the depth incurred by inscription, he considers works like *Cardboard Painting from the Watercolor Pencil Series* (2010) autonomous, and plans to show them as paintings.

Addressing the painterly representation of landscape, he has also begun another series in two dimensions: images of riverbeds, including those of the East River and the Seine, made by throwing a large piece of canvas, filled with pebbles and tied with a rope, into the waterways. After leaving the canvas submerged for about two hours, he pulls it back to shore, creating a visual record in water stains, algae and mud. Expanses of untreated canvas, the final works, *East River Painting* (2009), *La Seine Painting* (2010), and *Douro Painting* (2010), feature green or black smudges (depending on the health of the river), accumulations of silt and the occasional leaf of an underwater plant—poetic compositions shaped by Balula's plunge into the natural environment.

Above the stairway, a new monochromatic work, *Burnt Painting #2* (2009) made from six even planks of dark charred wood aligned in a neatly framed rectangle recalls Balula's ongoing concern with temperature, and materials that change over time. He mentioned Alberto Burri and Lucio Fontana—recalling the latter's assault on the monochromatic picture plane—as references in the creation of the carbonized surface. Nearby, on a white wooden board Balula found in the basement of La Galerie, he has cultivated an expanse of mold (*Mildew Painting*, 2009). With the help of a humidifier, he has encouraged the growth of a wide swathe of black spores. I suggested the English word "corral" as a way to describe his treatment of material in each of these works. Engaging with fire, mold, riverbeds and the traces of actions gone "wild" in his studio, Balula is like a ranch-hand herding cattle, maintaining their safe transference and containment. Working with deliberate, arbitrary constraints, he opens his constructions to nature and chance. Balula agreed with my assessment, and tapped the piece of cowboy vocabulary into his phone.

The last series of works Balula showed me were drawings made by sharpening a pencil above a textured sheet of paper in the rain. *Cobalt Green*, for example, from the series *Watercolor Pencil Sharpened Under The Rain* (2009), looks like the trace of a small explosion. Blue green pencil shavings and a powdery dust bloom across the page, melting into the paper towards the edges with the flow of the rain. Referencing Marcel Broodthaers' film *La Pluie (Project pour un Texte)* (1969), in which the artist writes in the rain only to see his words vanish with the falling drops, Balula taps into the poetry of futile action while successfully creating an enduring image. He gave a number of the works from this series to his family for Christmas presents—"the best ones of course," he laughed. Looking outside we decided it might be a good idea to try making a few more drawings in the snow.



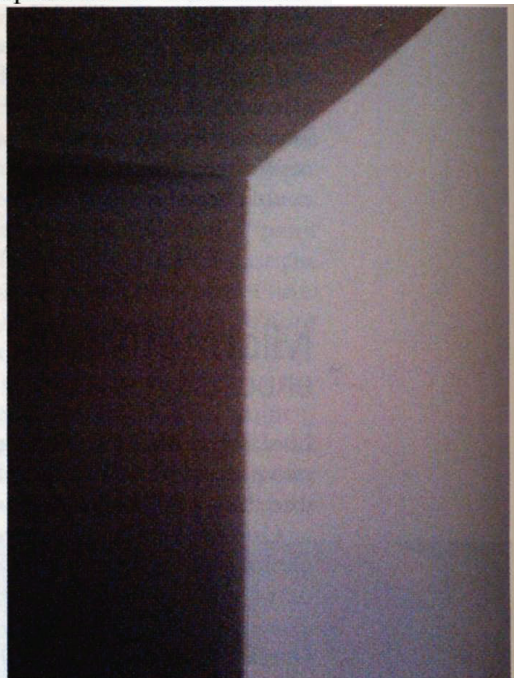
## Davide Balula

BLACKSTON

Upon entering Davide Balula's recent show, your first notion might have been that the forty-odd images hung in a line at eye level (all *Untitled*, from the series "Walls Meet Walls," 2007–10) made up another instance of "abstract photography." Some works brought to mind James Welling or Eileen Quinlan, and others seemed like pastiches of the midcentury styles (Rothko, Newman) from which this recently much-hyped genre borrows its claims on our attention. Yet, perhaps indicating an oblique connection to more distant precursors (Moholy-Nagy, Rodchenko), the implicit dichotomy of abstraction and representation was quickly undone as two dimensions turned into three: The images—more or less candidly, depending—in fact depict commonplace details of the contemporary physical-architectural world. We see perpendicular walls meeting a ceiling, for instance, a wall turning a corner, or what might be a staircase forming planes of color intersected by fuzzy lines.

The photographs by necessity also emphasize what is involved in the act of capturing a detail of the world in a photographic print. ("Raw and cropped" is how the artist, in an interview with Artlog, refers to these digital photographs, noting that their vivid hues are "the result of the interpretation of the camera.") The distorted coloration, the framing to fit a portrait format, and the low-resolution blurriness all demand that one take into account the circumstances of these images' production. The ready assumption would be that Balula selected sections of preexisting photographs that lent themselves, in retrospect, to such repurposing.

This was, that is to say, a grand act of undoing initial assumptions. The narrative that evolved here was twice revelatory, in equivocal, even contradictory directions—uncovering, on one hand, that what at first seemed abstract was mimetic representation, and, on the other, that the mechanisms of digital photography have turned these representations back into a loose geometry of lines and colored planes. What is behind each photograph is a) physical reality, in the form of architecture and b) the "material" (in this case, digital) process, and also, crucially, c) the human intervention of selection, finely tuned to a surprisingly broad range of easily recognizable artistic or pseudo-artistic lineages—from tropes of abstract painting and photography to a *Blair*





*Witch Project*—style basement or the corner of a Necker cube.

Balula's preoccupation with the link between artworks and the built environment—and how artworks can jiggle that connection—was also evident in the artist's 2009 show at Fake Estate in New York, for which he displaced sections of the tiny gallery's wooden floor with plaster, and mounted the floorboards into the wall. Noteworthy as well is that Balula, who is also actively a musician, organized a tap dance performance at that exhibition (archived on YouTube); he has said that the photographs in "Walls Meet Walls" are likewise "ready to be danced or interpreted by a musician." There is rhythm in these images, too.

With such thoughts in mind, those who wandered into the second gallery found, under office-style white fluorescent lighting, two pairs of colored pencils jammed into electric sockets low on kitty-corner walls. The interpretive looking demanded by the front gallery here emerged as the first stage of a one-two punch. Having fine-tuned viewers' detective skills by nurturing the puzzle-solving mentality demanded by the transition between two and three dimensions—from abstract iconography to architectural detail (most images took half a second, some a few seconds, some forever to work out) and back again—Balula upped the ante, using the lingering aftereffect of that multistable perception to lend an intensity to the speculative interaction of pigment and electric grid. Given the kind of mental exertion required to parse the images in the first gallery, visitors were here prompted to embark on a flight of fancy about infusing color into a hidden world thick with underground cables. The whiff of hokeyness was partially offset by the lesson learned: We must hold open both options of the binary choice between what we can see and what we can only imagine.

—Alexander Scrimgeour

Davide Balula,  
*Untitled*, 2007–2010,  
color photograph,  
13¼ x 10". From the  
series "Walls Meet  
Walls," 2007–2010.

Holland Cotter, "American Wall Nut" in [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com), April 3rd, 2009



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April 3, 2009

## Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER

DAVIDE BALULA

'American Wall Nut'

Fake Estate

526 West 26th Street, Chelsea

Through Saturday

Fake Estate, opened by Julia Trotta in 2007, may not be the smallest gallery in town, but it certainly is minute, being confined to a former utility closet in a building that houses other galleries of regulation size. And the young French artist Davide Balula makes good use of the space in a solo show that consists of a single, succinct visual gesture that questions the solidity of architecture.

For the piece, titled "American Wall Nut," Mr. Balula appears to have transposed two odd-shaped sections of the gallery's floor and wall. A double strip of what looks like plasterboard seems to be embedded in the floor, replacing pieces of hardwood flooring of the same size that are affixed to the wall.

The multitasking Mr. Balula is probably best known as a composer of music that mingles and digitally manipulates both performed and found sound. The result are melodies, some quite lovely, made up interventions, and a species of music so hybrid that it can be defined by no one category or source. "American Wall Nut," organized by the independent curator Beatrice Gross, is a kind of concrete version of this method, gently scrambling the optical elements that we depend on to establish coordinates like "up" and "down" in enclosed space.

Working on a monumental scale the artist Gordon Matta-Clark, from whose work the gallery takes its name, similarly redefined architecture in the 1970s, using massive slicings and excisions to suggest, among other things, the instability of the concept of property and the ephemerality of what we call real estate. Mr. Balula delivers something like the same message in a nutshell. HOLLAND COTTER