

PRESS RELEASE

FROM 05.07 TO 10.08.2018

SUNDOWN

24, RUE DU VIEUX-BILLARD

OPENING ON 05.07 – 17H

WITH WORKS BY LAURIE ANDERSON, NOBUYOSHI ARAKI, ALIGHIERO BOETTI, DAVID CLAERBOUT, EMILIE DING, HUBERT DUPRAT, NEIL FARBER & MICHAEL DUMONTIER, ROBERT FILLIOU, IAN HAMILTON FINLAY, VIDYA GASTALDON, GENERAL IDEA, NAN GOLDIN, GUYTON/WALKER, FABRICE GYGI, CHARLOTTE HERZIG, MARTIN KIPPENBERGER, LOUISE LAWLER, FABIAN MARTI, ANDRE MASSON, PIERRE MOLINIER, OLIVIER MOSSET, BRUCE NAUMAN, NAM JUNE PAIK, MAN RAY, CLEMENT RODZIELSKI, UGO RONDINONE, JIM SHAW, JOSH SMITH, JEAN TINGUELY, NOT VITAL

**DESIGN: STÉPHANE BARBIER BOUVET
BASED ON AN IDEA BY YANN CHATEIGNÉ**

Designed by Yann Chateigné, *Sundown* brings together fifty works from the reserves of the Art Bärtschi & Cie gallery. The pieces, chosen for their special relationship with the motif of the Night, make up an intertwining ensemble without hierarchy of paintings, sculptures and photographs, drawings, lithographs and multiple works, associating artists active from the beginning of the 20th century to the present day. The staging of the exhibition, which occupies both spaces of the gallery, was conceived in collaboration with the designer Stéphane Barbier Bouvet. The exhibition is also accompanied by an interview with Jean-Marie Gallais, curator of an upcoming exhibition on the theme of painting and the night, to be held in October 2018 at the Centre Pompidou Metz.

Following the example of night, the moment of reversal, the exhibition opens with a gesture of inversion. The main space of the gallery is plunged into darkness, and is organised around only three works, which inhabit an almost empty space. In the background, Ugo Rondinone's casting of a window radiates, the fluorescent green of the mirrored tinted windows creating an almost science fiction atmosphere. On the floor, a rusted steel capsule by Fabrice Gygi is left abandoned, dismantled. On the wall, a black Guyton/Walker flag brings a threatening sign, image of a deposed power or emblem of libertarian piracy, set in a disused world, after a cataclysm. A series of Stéphane Barbier Bouvet's lamps, tinkered with, precarious, is made from lights found in the streets of Athens, which at the time usually signalled places of pleasure. A schematic manhole cover, placed in the shadows, completes the scene of an outdoor space at night.

On the other side of the gallery, the showroom is transformed into an indoor space. It looks like a bedroom, with a bed with only the head of the bed, a coffee table, a desk, a shelf. Populated by Stéphane Barbier Bouvet's objects, occupying the walls from floor to ceiling, a set of about forty works is hung in the manner of an expanding constellation. In a space this time with a domestic tonality, linked together through a rather open logic, they associate as images do in a dream.

On the floor, a cushion diffuses a sound piece by Laurie Anderson evoking an endless night, while a watch that does not tell the time, but the time of one year by Alighiero Boetti is placed not far away on the bedside table. A cosmic egg by Fabian Marti dialogues with a drawing by Jean Tinguely, evoking the mechanical and vital energy of a modern firework display. A drawing on hotel stationery by Martin Kippenberger refers to the emblems celebrating General Idea's drunkenness and nocturnal pleasure. Charlotte Herzig's lunar, vegetal landscape illuminates from a distance an interior scene, a work table by Ugo Rondinone, becoming a nocturnal meditation on the imaginary. Emilie Ding's geometrical abstraction refers to the suspended time of the experience of the city at night, and echoes, as if in a mirror, David Claerbout's dreamlike montages. The tortured eroticism of Pierre Molinier's disguise rubs shoulders with a photograph by Nobuyoshi Araki in which pleasure and constraint are mixed in the secret of the night. While Jim Shaw's nightmarish visions reveal the realm of shadows in the exhibition, the mystical light of Vidya Gastaldon's paintings reflects another way of inner exploration.

Yann Chateigné is a critic, curator and professor at the Haute école d'art et de design - Geneva. He lives between Berlin and Geneva.

Stéphane Barbier Bouvet is a designer and artist. He lives between Brussels and Geneva. He is a professor at the Design Academy in Eindhoven.

Parler la nuit

Yann Chateigné: It was strange to realize that you and I were working, you and I, at a distance and without knowing it, practically on the same subject. When we were put in touch by a mutual friend a few months ago and we shared the first results of our research, I had the feeling that two realities that had formed in parallel suddenly connected. For my part, I was working "on the night" in a rather instinctive way. To tell the truth, I think it was a notion that lay behind several of my works, without me really realizing it, but it was from the *Constellations* project, which I had organized for the Swiss Institute in Rome, and from a text, *Constellational*, which I was writing in parallel for the catalogue of the Sao Paulo Biennale on the same subject, that things became somewhat structured. I realized then, when I looked in more detail at the ways in which some artists of today were interested in astronomy, in contemporary astrophysics as well as its astrological sources, that this question actually runs through the whole of modernity, from the studies of the historian Aby Warburg on the Renaissance to the astrological themes of Fernando Pessoa, via the cosmic photographs of Berenice Abbott. It is, moreover, a primarily historical, even archaeological approach to the relationship between artists and the night that you have undertaken for your project at the Centre Pompidou-Metz, isn't it? How did you come to be interested in this subject?

Jean-Marie Gallais: I had the same feeling as you, and I sometimes discover that this constellation of night enthusiasts, or even "nocturnologists", is constantly growing in various fields - the University of Nanterre has created a research group on the "anthropology of the night" for example. It seems to me that the night is one of the great subjects of our time, in constant evolution, at the same time capital and not yet so much explored. For my part, it all started in a rather instinctive way in the end, when I realized that there was probably not a single museum of paintings in the world, from all periods, that did not have a night scene in its inventory. On the other hand, that in these nocturnal paintings, the old masters are incredibly inventive, because the night leads to a simplification of forms, even to the abandonment of perspective, to the confusion of plans: so many "modern" ways of detaching oneself from reality. So, it is first of all night as a vector of abstraction in painting that intrigued me. From this, a more historical approach actually emerged: how, at the turn of the 19th century, widespread lighting, urban lifestyles, etc. transformed the night and the way it was represented. Does the night help modernity to build itself or is it fundamentally anti-modern? I have to say that I have also become attached to a question of medium, linking night and painting, and questioning this relationship throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Y. C.: For reasons that it would be interesting to explore in a little more detail, indeed, modernity, and not only in painting, is generally associated with light. In the Enlightenment, even more precisely: when I was studying art history at university, the Modern period, as it was taught, was presented as originating in the second half of the 18th century, in the moment of the emergence of a new rationality that was based on a critique of belief systems based on the exact sciences on the one hand, and on the other hand on the advent of a democratic model in opposition to the arbitrary domination of an elite over the greatest number.

The narrative we were given at the time was based on an association between this scientific rationality and the emergence of new political, ethical and aesthetic models that structured the succession of "isms", movements and artistic currents that mark modernity. I had not thought, before our conversation, for example, that a painting such as *Impression, soleil levant* by Claude Monet, which dates from the early 1870s, and which marks an essential break in the history of representation by deconstructing the subject, a navy, in the port of Le Havre, in pure colour and light, and which could herald the abstraction to come, is in reality as much related to the observation of the emerging daylight, as to the presence of the night which always invades the landscape. But, I am curious, which works do you think about in particular, and which one was the starting point of your research on the night?

J.-M. G. : We often think of the night in terms of Romanticism, and to a large extent it is, but in fact, as soon as the Enlightenment, it emerges as a time and a place to cultivate a wise folly. This is Diderot's paradox, who advised painters at the 1767 Salon: "Be dark! "and who declared that "clarity is good for convincing, it is worth nothing for moving". I also noticed that several key works of modernity were nocturnal: you quote Monet as a precursor, but what about later essential steps such as Malevitch's *Carré noir sur fond blanc* in 1915, which can already be found in the sets and costumes of the opera Zaoum *Victoire sur le soleil* in 1913 (it's all in the title!), or Marcel Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* and *Etant Donnés? Guernica* by Pablo Picasso? So many different values given to the night by modernity. To come back to the point of origin of the exhibition, there are in fact several of them. For a very long time now I have been obsessed by a painting kept at the Musée d'Orsay because of its nocturnal character: Winslow Homer's *Nuit d'été*, painted in 1890. There is something radical and artificial that testifies to the tensions of modernity in this American work: no light source is depicted, but you can feel that a large full moon is present above the painting, as well as a lamppost on the right. The bodies become shapeless masses in the shadows, and two dancers are illuminated, staggeringly appearing, on a rectilinear stage in the foreground, as if to announce that the painting is a theatre, a stage. The shadows of the dancers seem to float on the ocean and the foam reflects the moonlight mixed with the glow of the lamppost. Perhaps it is a sentimentality linked to my childhood nights spent by the sea in Brittany... Nevertheless, I have always considered this painting as a UFO in the Orsay collections. Another starting point is in the *Crucifixion with the Virgin and St. John* by Rogier van der Weyden painted around 1460 and kept in Philadelphia: the rectilinear, minimal, red of the fabric, contrasting with the uniform grey of the wall (a modern wall!), then when the gaze goes back up: a black, so intense that you don't know if it's night... Finally, more recently, I found myself face to face with a small mythical painting on copper: Adam Elsheimer's *La fuite en Egypte*, painted in 1609, the year in which Galileo perfected the telescope. The impression given by this painting, the first known realistic representation of the Milky Way and lunar craters in the West, is indescribable. It does not lead to abstraction, but opens the way to a "cosmic vertigo" that can still be found in today's artists, intact. I imagine that it is also at work in the works you have chosen?

Y. C. : At the time I imagined what became *Sundown*, I was working, I had just finished an essay for the magazine *Mousse* entitled *Against the Day*, which took the form of a montage based on extracts, fragments of a newspaper dealing with time, night space, sensations linked to works that allowed me to imagine another way of thinking about history.

This text had a deliberately poetic, intimate, cosmic tone, it was like a hedonistic way of trying to consider art history in the night, as a moment when time is felt differently. The text ended with a long and beautiful quotation by Giorgio Agamben on the question of pleasure: it "closed the loop" of the montage with something like a theoretical solution to the question with which the text opened, and which began with the story of a night of dancing at a party at the end of which, as the day was coming to an end, a sentence came to my mind, for no apparent reason, and which has been with me ever since: "We are dancing against the Sun". Agamben explains in his text that happiness, emancipation, like revolution, is based on a way - before anything else - of rethinking, of revolutionizing time, our time, the time we live, not as a line that goes from point A to point B, but as a "succession of perfect moments". What the night allows, it seems to me, is this break, this breach in the prison of time. What the night itself is, it is this space that allows us to glimpse another dimension of time, fluid, liquid, non-quantifiable, in the sense that it induces, in the reverse of daytime, continuous, regulated - according to different modes, different norms, different habits - another form of continuity, a time finally liberated. At the same time, precisely at the same time, I was working on a course for the HEAD - Geneva, which I had called *La Nuit Moderne*, a real art history course this time. It began with the image of the Camps at their opening in 1945, which symbolized for me another story of the night: the one that had fallen on Europe a little over 70 years ago. It is as if what happened at that very moment heralded the tipping point in which we find ourselves today. I was talking about Antonin Artaud's glossolalies, lugubrious incantations, possessed, so crazy and alive, situationist, romantic, deliberately precarious forms of art and life, based on the idea of rebuilding a world in loss, in disarray, the dissolution of life in poetry, New Realists, Pop and Happening on a global scale, not as a mere observation of the sublime end of a known world, but as the implementation of other strategies to exist in spending, in shadow, in combustion. I myself was surprised at the relationship - I believe it was extremely productive - between the question of pleasure, of the living, of celebration and that of the apocalypse, of destruction and war, which this other side of the research, this time more historical, introduced. To say it quickly, I had the impression that what is at stake today, as it was then, with and in the night, lies in this intensification of vital energy in relation to the violence of a world in which war is infinite, and the irritation that the night induces, allows, perhaps paradoxically, the necessary play of art to exist as the promise of a possible. Is there, on your side, in your exhibition too, a "political" reading of the night?

J.-M. G. : I believe that the night is always political, for those who are not satisfied with sleep. On the Berlin Wall there was graffiti: "You have the power, we have the night" ("*Ihr habt die Macht / doch wir haben die Nacht*"), and on the walls of Italy in the 1970s, this slogan addressed to prisoners: "We are with you in the night" ("*Siamo con voi nella notte*"). In the exhibition *Painting at Night*, I first wanted to set aside the political dimension, by setting a few rules, such as setting aside allegories and metaphors, in order to concentrate on a common thread that was linked to the perception and pictorial translation of sensations. How does the night affect perception, how does it transform us? But quickly and inevitably, the metaphorical and political value of the night emerged and persists in an underlying way in the exhibition, as it is inseparable from the time and space of the night. I like it when you talk about the link between night and temporality, I think this is indeed one of the keys to the subject.

The night allows, as you say, to escape from linearity, it is the moment when the horizon line disappears in every sense of the word, in favour of an obscure substance to cross. Do you know Joanne Kyger's poem *Night Palace*? It probably has little to do with the night except its title, inspired by the place where she wrote it, but I like to imagine that in this dizzying relationship to time, night is the medium, the substance in which to navigate. The night is in fact linked to the idea of creation, birth, origin, but it is also a matter of transition, religious texts have exploited it and anthropology shows that it is a fairly universal phenomenon that can be found from one culture to another: life and rebirth go through a nocturnal stage. What is fascinating is that this reading takes place at all levels, both in the spiritual realm, but also in our earthly lives: it is at night that we go out, transgress, have fun or resist. Why is that? To live at night is to live without witnesses, explains Michaël Foessel in his last book, it is the world upside down of the carnival that becomes possible at each sunset. I find it a particularly suitable theme to go back over the history of a gallery, the night is these temporal comings and goings, and looking at a starry sky, looking at the night is reading history, the past, and predicting the future, which is what astrophysicists do every day. Speaking of sunsets, can you tell me where the title of your exhibit, *Sundown*, comes from?

Y. C. I don't know Joanne Kyger... But it's a very nice title indeed... Does this poem have anything to do with Alberto Giacometti's fantastic work, *Le palais à quatre heures du matin*, from 1932? This sculpture echoed the artist's love for a person named Denise, with whom he said he used to build and visit palaces at night, fragile, complex forms, in balance... Palaces that faded away every morning and had to be rebuilt every night. I had discovered this work in a text by Robert Smithson on the question of the museum, as an alternative image of memory, of a dreamlike relationship to history. Smithson's essays and works were important in my research. I am thinking in particular of his meditations on time and history in which he liked to lose himself, at night in this case, as in a maze of mirrors, between reflections, opacity, illusions, in a sort of nocturnal and imaginary library à la Jorge Luis Borges, an author who was very important to him. The cosmic relationship to history, which you evoke, is embodied for me in an ideal way in the literature, between texts and images, of the writer W. G. Sebald. He is an author who has accompanied me for years, and it is true that I have long sought to nourish myself with the density, precision and delicacy of masterpieces such as, for example, *Les anneaux de Saturne*, which I often re-read. *Sundown* is in fact organized around a constellation of works, which I found through intuitive inquiry. I found it interesting at first that the summer exhibition, which seemed to me most often for the galleries I know to be the occasion to organize exhibitions that are a little "lighter" than usual, was an opportunity to look for another depth. And the theme of the night came very quickly, as I was beginning to accumulate works for the project: chance - but is it really chance? - so that many of the pieces I was interested in had a direct connection with the night, from a fireworks display by Jean Tinguely to a melancholy photograph by Nan Goldin, from a drawing on hotel stationery by Martin Kippenberger to a sun by Vidya Gastaldon. The key was given to me when I saw this work by Man Ray in the gallery's storerooms, *L'étoile de verre* from 1965, a sunset drawn on sandpaper, the sun being frozen by a diamond plunging into a sea of graphite.

Sundown, which I prefer to write "Sun down", is a bit like a minimal poem, to go back to the beginning of your question and to what you were just talking about: "Sun /set" or "Sun / sunset". Just two words, a picture, a gesture. An injunction, a choreography, a mental movement, a living landscape, that we would like to repeat over and over again, without affecting the beauty of this world...

J.-M. G.: Turning off the sun on demand is the dream of the surrealists. In *l'Alphabet pour adultes*, Man Ray draws a hand around the word "night" that comes to caress the sun, and gently extinguishing it, blocking its rays, it resonates quite well with what you have just said. The night is inseparable from the sunset, this promise of a return, with a hint of fear however that the sun will never return the next day! One must let oneself be carried away with confidence in this dance, this cosmic ballet... In the exhibition, I wanted some contemporary artists to be present from the very first sections, because we find this linearity broken by the night: certain problems cross time. Recently an artist in the exhibition told me that he had a strange feeling when he went out at night in a remote valley where there were prehistoric shelters: far from any source of light, he wondered whether the night he was contemplating was the same night that our ancestors contemplated in the same place tens of thousands of years ago. I like this idea of vertigo, which I like to associate with nocturnal perception. This triple vertigo: sensory, inner and cosmic, is found in Monet as well as in Jennifer Douzenel, Daisuke Yokota, Charbel-joseph H. Boutros or Fiete Stolte for example. The two sections on the upper level are called "Les mangeurs d'étoiles" after Georges Bataille, and "La nuit m'enveloppe" after Claude Merleau-Ponty. What interested me was the way these artists paradoxically try to capture the elusive substance of the night, either by connecting to the stars or by taming the nocturnal matter on their canvas. But it's more about your exhibition that we should be talking about here! How did you arrive at this, shall we say, unusual setting in space?

Y. C.: It's interesting, the term "star eaters". I was recently in Athens, and I fell in admiration, in one of the city's museums, in front of a Cycladic statuette dating back to 4,000 years before our era, representing a standing female figure, looking up at the sky, whose meaning, as with most productions from that period, is enigmatic, but which had once been described as "contemplating the stars". In the night of the museum, this gave such a current presence to this body carved in stone, something almost futuristic. So I understand the way you yourself have played with chronologies. If the night is also the moment of reversal, then I thought of the exhibition through a first gesture of reversal. We worked with the designer and artist Stéphane Barbier Bouvet, with whom I often collaborate for exhibition projects for which I have a little bit of means. I proposed that the gallery's main exhibition space, the largest, be left almost empty. It is organized around three works, which inhabit a disused space, immersed in an "American night", created with the help of dark filters placed on the gallery's windows, translucent films that are usually used to cover car windshields. I imagine this space as an outdoor space, a street at night, that you walk along silently when you get home after the sun has been down for a long time. At the back of the space, a fluorescent green window by Ugo Rondinone creates an almost science fiction atmosphere. On the floor, a capsule by Fabrice Gygi, made of rusty steel, is as if left there after a cataclysm. On the wall, a black flag by Guyton/Walker brings a threatening sign, between power and piracy. I imagine that the dust of the montage remains on the ground, that a few abandoned objects create confusion about what we are really experiencing.

I've always been fascinated, like many, by films in which the night is recreated in the studio, from Steven Spielberg's films to those of François Truffaut in the 1980s, in which Joachim Koester was interested with *Day for Night* in 1996, and J.J. Abrams, who recently paid homage with *Super 8*, to the atmosphere of the "Stranger Things" series today. There is a real magic that resides in this artificial night. Stéphane has installed a series of lamps found in the streets of Athens, precisely, tinkered with, precarious, which usually signal the places of pleasure. On the other side of the gallery, the showroom is transformed into an interior space. One can perhaps recognize something like a bedroom, with a bed of which only the head remains, a coffee table, a shelf. On the floor, a pillow diffuses a sound piece by Laurie Anderson, and the rest of the 45 works on display is hung like an expanding constellation. The space is loaded with works from floor to ceiling, exploding in the space, linked together through a rather open logic, as one associates images in a dream. It is a room that tries to give the feeling that someone could have slept here and dreamed this exhibition. As I did, by the way... Maybe... Just a year ago, I realize it now, in a completely different context. Maybe, by the way, this project was unconsciously born from the strange experience of having slept almost on the floor in this space last summer, while I was watching an artist preparing her upcoming exhibition a few days later, and finishing a painting, at night...

J.-M. G.: In short, you take us to Giacometti's Night Museum, and you turn the visitor into a night owl - which is another common feature of our exhibitions there. I believe that this type of exhibition should be visited with one eye open and one eye closed, the famous inner eye that the Surrealists are so fond of, in search of objective chance. The works are taken from a sleep ("The paintings are asleep. The current state of the paintings, the state of the paintings in our time is sleep," he says. (...) A museum was just a huge dormitory, a centuries-old sleep, of abyssal depth," he says), but they are just waiting for a look to wake up. Let's leave the last words of our conversation to André Breton and Philippe Soupault, before going back to dreaming, for I believe that when we walk through the gallery door, we could hear them whispering in our ears or see them written on the doorstep like a mirage: "Open that door wide, and tell yourself that it's completely dark, that the day has died for the last time".

Conversation carried out by e-mail, between June 19 and July 3, 2018.

Jean-Marie Gallais is in charge of the programming pole of the Centre Pompidou-Metz and curator of the exhibition "Painting the Night" (Centre Pompidou-Metz, 13 October 2018 - 15 April 2019).