

 GALERIE ERIC MOUCHET

Pierre Gaignard & Roy Köhnke

HYPER CARBONE

29 May - 4 September 2021



Pierre Gaignard, *Vapormax Hedera Helix*, 2021

Following on from ANTE:IRL, a kind of prelude on view at WONDER/Fortin during February 2021, Pierre Gaignard and Roy Köhnke present HYPER CARBONE at the Eric Mouchet gallery. This exhibition invites visitors to venture into the world of carbon, coal and combustion for a moment frozen in time. Here, flames blaze brightly once again, bringing into being tales of fires, regeneration – burnings producing new growth – and nocturnal gatherings. It's reminiscent of the landmark Surrealist exhibition in 1938¹ where a fire crackled in a brazier, illuminating a coal-dust covered space. HYPER CARBONE summons up the subconscious in all its anthropomorphic guises. Roy Köhnke and Pierre Gaignard bring a more modern take to these collective imaginings through science fiction, which holds out a future that's already old and a past that's constantly chopping and changing. If we were to describe where the two artists came together, we would picture a phantom and a hybrid as one. The phantom represents jumbled up, broken down pieces of memory, remembrance made tangible. The hybrid represents an anatomical amalgam, the de-composition of what had been physiologically whole.

The certainty that everything has already been written annuls us or renders us phantasmal²

Drawing on a gigantic selection of scanned and saved images, Pierre Gaignard stores away his surroundings. Like an enormous multimedia database, his sculptures, videos and installations form an interconnected memory map of destroyed buildings, vanished individuals and fleeting moments in time. De-formed by means of virtual imaging and 3D reconstruction, the artists' memories slowly transform into ghostly presences. Perfect examples of objects frozen in time, Pierre Gaignard's spectres are able to evade both the deadly grip of decomposition suffered by the living, and the fate of being forgotten.

¹ Organized by André Breton and Paul Éluard, the 'Exposition internationale du surréalisme' was held at the beginning of 1938 in the Galerie des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

² Jorge Luis Borges, 'La Bibliothèque de Babel' (1941), in *Fictions*, Gallimard, Paris, 1983, p. 80.

Half-way between archive and *hypertext*³, Pierre Gagnard plays around with time by recording and dematerializing 'reality'. In this way he creates a narrative space that's technological in nature, a post-historical⁴ consciousness: a place outside of time where rules can be turned upside down and endlessly invented and reinvented. This is the principle behind 'gameplay' (how players control the plot in a video game), adopted by Gagnard, whereby he invites onlookers to lose themselves in the meanders of their own stigmas. Letting virtual time blossom, the artist also witnesses the random growth of algorithmically-driven shapes – rather like the climbing plants in the work *Vapormax Hedera Helix* (2021). These life-size images with their inscrutable characters face us, watching us, waiting for an encounter that can never happen. Upon their diaphanous bodies, digital ivy has begun to sprout haphazardly. A haunted phenomenologist, Pierre Gagnard fashions beings-ruins frozen in a never-ending present – ghosts, if you like.

*See the world afresh, through the eyes of a rogue encoder*⁵

Neither entirely alive, nor completely inert, Roy Köhnke's works also take on the form of technological, hybrid entities. Working with plaster, felt and elastomer, the artist creates strange, translucent shapes that are born out of remnants of flesh, organs and tissue. Lying on the ground or hanging up like cuts in a butcher's shop, his works create a tension between the body as casing and what it contains within. The artist dismembers the image of the human body, imbuing it with a transient relationship with time, composing a meditation on the fragility of life.

Prior to these sculptures being produced, the artist creates human-sized drawings on paper that are designed to be 'sacrificed'. *Suspended Consumption in X-Ray Style* (2019) brings to mind simultaneously an abstract plant, a map of the heavens and a digital design. Burnt along their folds, these drawings all represent signs of the artist's presence and of his sensitivity towards and feel for materials.

Comprising ethernet cables, acting as the veins and tissue of the overall structure, the cyber-tech body designed by Roy Köhnke causes us to reconsider both our perception of biological integrity and the idea of scientific 'progress' itself. As the artist works, they subvert the process of dissection, which, from the 16th century on, formed the foundation of 'western' anatomical science through the study of dead bodies. By appropriating modern technology in the shape of medical imaging and observational instruments, Roy Köhnke lays bare the fiction of the internal mechanism. With the help of non-western creation myths (for example, he finds inspiration from Australian aboriginal paintings), the artist challenges the incompleteness of our knowledge.

*This collection belongs neither to the land of shadows nor of light. It's on the border between them*⁶

Directing our gaze towards the invisible things that make up our ecosystem, Roy Köhnke and Pierre Gagnard's work may also be thought of in terms of how it relates to wasteground and biodiversity in the *Earth's crust*⁷. Chaotic in appearance, wasteground is by definition on the fringes, often peripheral. It marks the boundaries of a place where regeneration can take place, a place of refuge and of migration. Liberated from the straitjacket of arrangements and schemes where productivity is all, wasteland offers carte blanche for the random encounters of the living.

Pierre Gagnard and Roy Köhnke have been good friends for several years and work closely together at WONDER⁸, which has been based in Clichy since 2020. This self-managed arts space is both home and workspace to almost 60 people and was set up in the Paris suburbs in 2013. Obligated to move from place to place, this artistic and community-centred initiative sets up home in disused buildings, occupying places abandoned by capitalism. The artist-residents get to experience the possibilities of a lifestyle that doesn't conform, of collective experiments and of organizing life together in a way that's mutually beneficial. Upon this fertile ground sprouts Roy Köhnke and Pierre Gagnard's creative output, spreading like ruderal species (plants inhabiting cracks in rocks and buildings and along roadside verges).

An unresolved story, the HYPER CARBONE exhibition beckons us to lose ourselves in a techno-poetic world marked by signs in the shape of living still lifes. Absence embodied, the works of Pierre Gagnard and Roy Köhnke morph into a mycelium web: an underground labyrinth from which appear shining creations, burnt to cinders. It's a collaborative approach which calls us to the practice of 'dreaming the dark'⁹.

Simona Dvořáková & Tadeo Kohan

³ In information technology, hypertext is defined as text that is connected to other text via hyperlinks, enabling the reading of interconnected online content. Hypertextuality is also a literary concept first described by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (Le Seuil, Paris, 1982) which defines the relationship that any written text has with earlier texts. The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges penned many short stories exploring this idea.

⁴ This term, defined in 1983 by the Czech philosopher Vilém Flusser, refers to time being manipulated by the flow of digital data. (See the French translation: Vilém Flusser, *Post-histoire*, Cité du design / T&P work unit, 2019).

⁵ Donna Haraway, 'Savoirs situés' (1988), in *Manifeste cyborg et autres essais*, Exils, Paris, 2007, p. 135. In this publication, the author explores questions of objectivity and patriarchal domination in the field of scientific research.

⁶ Gilles Clément, *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage*, 2004, p.4 (licence-free, available here: [disponible ici](#))

⁷ We have recently discovered that almost 70% of microbial life on Earth exists in layers of rock beneath the ocean floor in the Earth's crust. See <https://www.geo.fr/environnement/les-entrailles-de-la-terre-grouillent-de-vie-intraterrestre-193797>. Only just beneath our feet, the soil is swarming with microscopic lifeforms that are crucial for our environment. 'A handful of woodland soil contains more living organisms than there are human beings on the planet' (Peter Wohlleben, *La vie secrète des arbres*, Les Arènes, Paris, 2017, p. 99).

⁸ <https://lewonder.com/>

⁹ Title of a work published in 1982 by Starhawk, making a case for a society in harmony with nature, the human body and otherness through the practice of collective rituals.