

# GALERIE ALB

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## Press release MATTHIEU MARTIN



« WINTER PALACE » - 5 september - 17 october 2015

For his second solo show at Galerie ALB, Mathieu Martin presents “Winter Palace”, a project based on his series of drawings called «Principe de précaution» (“Principles of Precaution”), resulting from a long photographic survey at the heart of spaces inside galleries, museums and other institutions. Those photographs document the various means and devices set up to keep a distance between work and viewer, hindering free circulation and thus restricting the visitor’s experience of those institutions. The exhibit consists of three large-size drawings of classical places – The Palais de l’Ermitage in St Petersburg, Alte National Galerie in Berlin, in contrast with the Pompidou Center in Paris. Brought together, this palace or these new palaces of Culture, with their composite spaces, some including columns and moldings, others cables and metallic beams, are used as a departure point for a new graphic experience, with drawings of perspectives, punctuated by sculptures that are shown together with the drawings.

We are presenting here, as an introduction to the work of Mathieu Martin, a conversation between the artist and Raphaël Brunel - Critic, curator and journalist – which took place at the gallery for the occasion of this exhibit. ©Galerie ALB

*“Your show at Galerie ALB includes three large-size drawings, the fragments of which make up a perspective on the inner architecture of famous museums. Almost simultaneously, starting on October 15th, 2015, 45 drawing from the “Principe de précaution” series will be shown as part of the “Dimensions variables” show at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal, in collaboration with your gallery. Could you talk about the genesis of this project?”*

« Principe de précaution » is a collection of drawings done in ball point or black felt pen on cream-colored paper, which are identical replicates of photographs taken in exhibition spaces of museums and galleries. The works are the only thing missing. The process and devices involved in showing the art while keeping the viewer at bay, such as tapes and barricades, are revealed by this absence, and their suddenly overblown presence perturbs the balance of the original space. This work took shape following a period of several years of observation and collecting of images in galleries and museums I visited during that time.

The work could be considered as a sort of inventory of those various means and devices. The first lot consists of about 80 A4 drawings, 45 of which will be shown at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal. They are very sparse, ligne claire drawings. They were drawn daily (most often during the night) following a very precise procedure requiring intense concentration that brought me to a near meditative state. For Galerie ALB, I just did three large drawings (220 x 250 cm) made up of several sheets of paper with a few millimeters between the sheets (a technical constraint having to do with the paper and which I wished to integrate within those pieces.) They are representations of prestigious places such as the Ermitage Palace (Winter Palace or Ermitage Museum) in St Petersburg, which gave the exhibit its title. The richness of details and the sophistication of such spaces were impossible to depict in small sizes, so I thought using the same approach while switching to another scale was an interesting process, offering the possibility of a wandering, fragmented gaze.

*An interesting point is how much these works derive from a set of filters having to do with shooting conditions, with the nature of photography itself and its transposition, which is done through a process of reduction, where a few lines are enough to structure the image and create tension. In a sense, the drawings evoke mental spaces or memory palaces in which ancient orators projected images and objects that would help them remember their speeches. Except that here*

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*the usual object of attention has disappeared, leaving full liberty for the expression of the environment itself, as a sort of frame. How important are the notions of traces and erasure in your artistic approach?*

Very much so. The notion of erasure, for instance, is very present in the “Cover Up” project, which probably had an influence on the current series. It’s an artist book documenting the covering up of urban graffiti with a layer of paint. What I find fascinating is the possibility of a revealing effect brought about by that action, the new reading deriving from the absence. The “painting over” makes us reflect on the graffiti in the same way that the disappearance of the works in my drawings causes us to question their status within the museums. All those cordons and protecting barriers are part of our experience of the works and, I believe, considerably hinder that experience. The series started as a way to prolong my experience and redefine my relationship to those works.

*Do all those means to keep us at a distance from the artwork mostly interest you from a critical standpoint or do you see in them a singular esthetic potential?*

The drawings were imagined as a response to those devices. They are a starting point used to break down the structure of the museum and insert instead my own plastic language. There is in this project the intention to write and compose within the architecture, to project myself into it. I am more interested in the notion of resistance, of playing with the institution, than in criticism. Finding the most “protective” museums, traveling there, visiting them while eluding the attendants’ attention to take pictures... There is an odd atmosphere inside some museums, a form of tension, about which I didn’t intend to stay silent, and this project is a manner of response. The institution must essentially be open.

*You have a particular interest in public spaces. Are you trying to express a parallel between the space inside museums and broader issues concerning the city and urbanism?*

Both types of spaces are a constant source of inspiration for me. The current project couldn’t have come to fruition in this form if I hadn’t in parallel done the “Povera Mobility”, consisting of sculptures made up of chunks of rock over 1500 lbs, mounted on wheels so they become movable – which were actually shown for my first exhibit at the gallery. The complexity of their fabrication was what prompted me to switch to something more immediate, that I could create in the studio by myself. In a way, those rocks are the counterparts to the protective devices in the public space since, typically placed at the edge of trails and roadways, they serve as borders, limiting circulation or parking of vehicles. There is a converging concern for the restriction of space, whether in the urban or the museum set-up. The physical border that is imposed to us and keeps our body out or inhibits movement in a clearly marked out area is something I am most interested in.

*This work with lines and stark perspectives that seem suspended in space with the sheet of paper is of course reminiscent of Fred Sandback’s, or of drawings by such conceptual artists as Mel Bochner or Stanley Brouwn. Is this limited to a principle of surveying and tracing or could this evolving vocabulary lead to three-dimensional representations?*

For this exhibit, I imagined a new series of sculptures with, as a common starting point, a specific type of protection device made up of two tubes of different diameters, reminiscent of the two thicknesses of lines I systematically use in my drawings. The barricades are not merely replicated but rather deformed through slight interventions aiming at perturbing the viewer’s attention. In fact, I would like to have the opportunity to place those pieces within museums and observe how they disrupt their usual rigorousness.»