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CHRISTINE REBET

ARTFORUM

Christine Rebet

PARASOL UNIT FOUNDATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Christine Rebet's animated film *The Square*, 2011, glowed in a small darkened room. Like all of the artist's films (each just minutes long), this work is formed from thousands of hand-prepared still images, shot in 16 or 35 mm and thrust into movement. *The Square* invokes Samuel Beckett's 1981 television piece *Quad*, echoing the synchronized footsteps of *Quad*'s four dancers and the palette of their hooded costumes. With hand-laid trails of powdered wood, metal, plaster, and clay, Rebet's work traces the agonies of confinement and incarceration, while alluding to the simple, ennobling act of the protest march and the liberating shared space of the public square. Her art thrives in this shared space, built on the exchanges that take place there.

The piece was one of six animated films and thirty-eight drawings on view in "Time Levitation," a précis of fifteen years of her practice and the final show at the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art. The square is also a motif in *Thunderbird*, 2018, which in an electrifying sequence of jittery hand-drawn frames traces the story of the Sumerian ruler Gudea and the construction of his temple in the ancient city of Girsu, in what is today Iraq. Rebet consulted Sebastien

Rey, a British Museum archaeologist and the head of the site, on the development of the work. At the exhibition opening he explained to me the richness of the Sumerian cuneiform found there. The temple's name, White Thunderbird, does not refer to white in the sense of a color, but rather to "something shining, radiant, powerful. It is animation, images, and sounds that allow for the ideal translation."

For her most recent film, *Breathe In, Breathe Out*, 2019, Rebet drew on her recent journey to Thailand, where she conferred with the artist, curator, and former Buddhist monk Chitti Kasemkitvatana. Her resulting work narrates—in animated drawings, a hypnotizing voice-over, and a brilliant soundtrack by the French musician Mirwais—the descent of a monk from his mountain retreat to the sea, where a small boat, seemingly shipwrecked, is waiting. The feet of the ascetic change into those of an elephant, then into those of a bird. For the narration of this film, Rebet drew from conversations with the philosopher Emanuele Coccia, who was at the time preparing his book *Métamorphoses* (2020). "I have often dreamt of it," a male voice intones, "to awaken and live in a world that has nothing to do with what we know. Such a dream is the life of our planet. Such a dream is the history of life."

A latent violence is present in Rebet's films. The brutality and trauma of colonialism permeate the nightmarish *In the Soldier's Head*, 2015, in which we see rigging that looks like a torture device and pigment that drips like blood; what sounds like a ventilator—but is in fact a Foley effect created with flames licking glass—provides a haunting audio track. Rebet floods her bright compositions with water across consecutive frames, as if drowning her drawings; the animation, in turn, morphs from clear jewel-toned forms to more rounded, organic shapes. Meanwhile, the nineteenth-century aristocrats in *The Black Cabinet*, 2007, play an ominous game of roulette, and the twin sisters in *Brand Band News*, 2005, are shot dead. But Rebet pictures transcendence as well, and as the twins in this early film pick themselves up and stick out their thumbs to hitchhike, they fluidly take on the form of the wind and then that of a galloping horse. Transformed, they persist.

—Lillian Davies



Christine Rebet.
Brand Band News,
2005, three-channel
animation, 35 mm
transferred to HD,
color, sound,
3 minutes 21 seconds.

THE
NEW YORKER
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Christine Rebet



This spring, as a team of Iraqi women was starting fieldwork in the four-thousand-year-old Sumerian city of Girsu, **Christine Rebet**, a French artist in New York City, was finishing a five-minute film inspired by the site. The piece, now on view at Bureau (through Dec. 16), is a rapturous flow of twenty-five hundred color-soaked drawings, in which the temple of Ningirsu, long in ruins, seems to dream itself into being. (The unconscious mind is Rebet's abiding subject.) The women in Girsu and the artist share an adviser, the archeologist Sebastien Rey, of the British Museum, whose writings—a crash course in Mesopotamian deities and divinations—provide the lengthy captions for six ink-on-paper works that line a wall at the start of the show. Rendered in molten reds, lapis blues, palm-frond greens, and the browns of bodies and earth, Rebet's drawings have a deceptively cavalier style. For all her intensive research into the ancient world (another film and large, lyrical paintings concern the Warka Vase, excavated at Uruk circa 3000 B.C.), Rebet's real subject may be the liquid pleasures of ink on the page.

—*Andrea K. Scott*

ELEPHANT

Hand-Drawn Animation Is Pure Suffering, So Why Still Do It?

Christine Rebet's sensitive drawing process is often utilized to create hundreds and thousands of works, comprising just a few minutes of animation. She has used this meticulous technique to rebuild destroyed historical sites in the most imaginative ways, and get closer to "the soul of cinema". Words by Jonathan McAloon



A Symbol of Endurance, from Brand Band News, 2005. Ink on paper, 30.5 x 24 cm. Collection of Julia Bidermann. All images Courtesy the artist and Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art unless stated

French artist [Christine Rebet](#) takes her shoes off to walk into the rooms of her own exhibition. A hand-drawn animation shows the story of the [Temple of Eninnu](#), which was constructed in the twenty-second century BC in ancient [Mesopotamia](#)—that covers the majority of Iraq and Kuwait, along with some of Syria, Iran and Turkey in today's geography—after a god “appeared” to a ruler called [Gudea](#) in a dream. Well, that's how the story goes. *Thunderbird* (2018) shows a landscape of mountains and puffing geysers which seems to melt into the sand and clay used to build the temple bricks. A soundtrack of a frantic Iraqi oud, which represents the sound of American bombardments and local destruction of cultural sites in recent years, plays from a hidden compartment in the wall. The room itself has only just been constructed, and will stand just two months before it is destroyed. Christine Rebet's *Time Levitation* will be the last exhibition in non-profit [Parasol unit](#)'s East London space.

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Left: Thunderbird, 2018; Right: Brand Band News, 2005; Both: Installation view of Time Levitation at Parasol unit, London, 2020. Photography by Benjamin Westoby

“Mesopotamians had techniques for being remembered,” Rebet tells me. “In the foundations of Gudea’s temple they buried this.” She shows me an image of a cone covered in glyphs. “The text of Gudea is inscribed on it, and it is also votive. A mini sculpture. If someone digs it up, it will tell them how to rebuild the temple as it was, so that every layer of it put down in the future is exactly the same as in the past. This culture knew that it would decline, that its temples would be destroyed, and at the same time they performed an act of resistance to total destruction. This was part of the civilization: built in. I thought about it as a working image of eternity.”

“We never knew where my father was during the war. We just knew that he disappeared”

After the recent widespread damage of the ancient heritage site [Palmyra](#), Rebet was looking to make a piece about it. “Then I read in the New York Times that the British Museum had found funding for rescue archaeology at various Iraqi sites. I thought, these archeologists are the people making sure that things are eternal. We worked in conjunction: while they excavated the temple, I creatively reanimated the dream that led to its construction.”

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Monk Walk, from Breathe In, Breathe Out, 2019. Ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm. Courtesy the artist

Animation as reanimation. Did Rebet choose to work in the medium because it was always bound to ideas of new life: renewal and even resurrection? “No. I found that part of my mission later. At first it was just natural for me to tell stories. When I started I was fascinated with how the first practitioners used it as an act of resistance. Animation started underground after film, and rose with sound and jazz. Early cartoons were considered subversive. [Betty Boop](#) was censored in the 1930s for being too erotic.” The German philosopher and literary critic [Walter Benjamin](#), for one, enjoyed the freedom animation had to comment on anything, being divorced from human actors. He was also worried about the “sadistic fantasies” that were played out. [Mickey Mouse](#) and his ilk were “figures of a collective dream”, functioning like “fairytales” and radically symbolizing the lives of those who watched them. The subjects of works in Rebet’s show range from ecological allegory to public protest, the rise of Fascism in the twentieth century and French colonialism.



The Black Cabinet (stills), 2007. Two-channel animation shot on 35mm transferred to HD, sound 3:50 min. Courtesy the artist

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Parasol unit first included one of Rebet's works in a 2007 group show about animation, Momentary Momentum. Now, Time Levitation will be the exhibition on which Parasol unit's Wharf Road London space ends a fifteen-year run of innovative installation-led shows. Founder Ziba Ardanan tells me it is the resourcefulness of Rebet's works—created “often with minimal budget, but incredible diligence”—that echoes the outlook of her own gallery space and influenced her choice of final show. “Rebet's work,” says Ardanan, “apart from constant change as the nature of animation requires, is about renewal and metamorphosis. I find this vision quite refreshing and in many ways it corresponds to my own vision: to always look for renewal. At this very moment when Parasol unit repositions its activities, I think showing Rebet's work is quite fitting.”



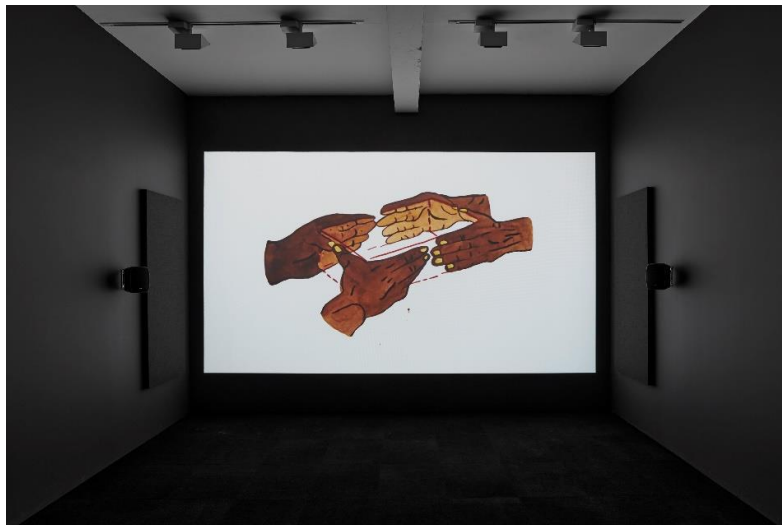
Christine Rebet, *In the Soldier's Head* (still), 2015. Animation shot on 16mm transferred to HD, sound, 4:25 min. Courtesy the artist and Bureau, New York

It's a space that utilizes every hidden nook of its architecture. Over the years here I've seen [boats suspended in high shafts](#), and sculpture stretch through the glass to the yard outside. For Rebet's show, individual screening rooms have been built and decorated to become immersive capsules for viewers. “This aspect was there from the beginning in my work, because I come from theatre,” Rebet tells me. “I've always had a space in mind for the work to be shown, a landscape for it.” For the recent work *Breathe In, Breathe Out*—in which a monk in Thailand undergoes transformations into a range of animals, plants and architecture—viewers can sit on a bench or straw tatami poufs on the gallery floor. For 2007's *The Black Cabinet*, which describes a Fin de Siècle seance, the viewing room has been covered in a red damask wallpaper and hung with a crystal chandelier. Victorian chairs have been ordered in. For more austere animations, such as 2015's *In the Soldier's Head*, we are limited to a traditional dark room. (“The theatre of the mind,” Rebet calls it.)

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“This culture knew that it would decline, that its temples would be destroyed”

Animation, and the obsessiveness of character it requires, has at times driven Rebet away from the form. “The drawing can take eight months,” she tells me. “You have to do each drawing and there are 3000 of them. So I have to make the process quick for it to stay vivid for me, and to stay engaged. Once you dive into the animation there is less room for creativity. It just becomes something that you suffer. Even psychologically you suffer. You wake up and you have to calculate each drawing for a day. You spend eight months on something which takes two minutes to watch.”



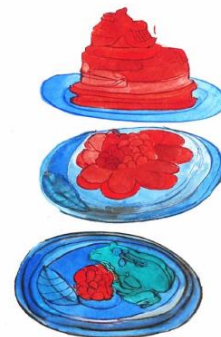
Christine Rebet, Thunderbird, 2018. Installation view of Time Levitation at Parasol unit, London, 2020. Photography by Benjamin Westoby

For 2011’s kinetic sculpture *The Square*, she spent months shuffling four different powders into position around a slab of white plaster for the animation. “After months I broke it. I couldn’t do it anymore. I was fed up. It was responding to Beckett’s television play *Quad* but that was nine minutes long and I was never going to get through. So I smashed the plaster and made that part of the piece.”

In response to her own working boredom, Rebet also started to look for ways of imbuing the meticulous process of animation itself with abstraction and an element of chance. For *In the Soldier’s Head* she immersed some of her drawings in water, the degradation mirroring her father’s PTSD after his participation in the French-Algerian War. “I filmed them as they soaked, and I added ink to the water. We shot the drawing being animated, and then the water dissolved the animation because the animation can’t function anymore. It’s also a performance as it happens. I always have to go through a

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performance. Making and viewing it, you are feeling what it is like to be disappearing. We never knew where my father was during the war. We just knew that he disappeared.”



From left: Tree of Life, 2019. From the series Breathe In, Breathe Out. Ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm; Centre: From Larva to Magic Mountain, 2019. From the series Breathe In, Breathe Out. Ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm; Right: Nénuphar, 2019. From the series Breathe In, Breathe Out. Ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm. All images courtesy the artist

Moving from room to room, we speak about the uncanny and what Rebet describes as “the soul of cinema”: the ancient, flickering effect that can be observed while watching animations. In an age of digital production, where animation can be produced on a computer without drawing each individual frame, does she think the soul of cinema—and animation as an art form—needs saving?

“I think what you can do in the digital age is great. But I am interested in preserving hand-drawn animation for myself because it is my act, my gesture. My gesture is to draw. The magic of the hand. That’s why I like this piece, Thunderbird—because it’s really about construction.” We look to a frame from that film which is hung on the gallery wall. The hands that lay the ancient bricks are drawn. And in the film they will turn into photographed hands in the present, wiping dust off the excavated past. “That’s my mission.”

The New York Times

Christine Rebet



Christine Rebet's "The Ritual of the First Brick" (2018), in which four hands mark out a temple's first corners. Christine Rebet

What's wonderful about drawing, more than any other medium, is the immediacy with which it transmits one person's sensual experience to another. To look at Eugène Delacroix's sketches of horses, for example, is to see this 19th-century French painter's fingers moving in some ever-living time out of time.

In her video and drawing show "[Thunderbird](#)," the contemporary French artist [Christine Rebet](#) taps this eerie timelessness, and the mysterious transition of ideas into material being more generally, as her subject as well as a resource.

In a short animated video, the divine title creature commands one Gudea of Lagash to build him a temple; and in the ink and acrylic drawing "The Ritual of the First Brick," four hands mark out that hypothetical temple's first corners. Small inconsistencies in the video, like a red sun turning momentarily yellow, remind you that you're watching a sequence of static images, but the motion, for all that it's only happening in the mind, feels real.

Another drawing, "Procession to the Lady of Heaven," details one fragment of an ornate vase. Male figures carrying baskets of red fruit and docile sacrificial goats march back and forth across the shard. The way Ms. Rebet abbreviates the men, especially, is lovely, like an elegant hieratic calligraphy. But the detail that struck me most forcefully was the brightness of the red ink: Every time I visited the gallery, over a matter of weeks, it looked as if the artist had painted it on only moments before. WILL HEINRICH

ARTNEWS

REVIEWS — SPRING 2019

Degrees of Mystery: B. Wurtz on Exhibitions Around New York

BY *B. Wurtz* POSTED 02/27/19 11:11 AM

On Lorraine O'Grady, Tauba Auerbach, Christine Rebet, Seth Price, Michael Krebber, and more

In December I spent a few days looking at gallery exhibitions in New York. I saw things on the Lower East Side and made a couple of trips to Chelsea. Of course I missed a lot too, as happens to so many of us in this city blessed with more art offerings than anywhere else in the world. We live our busy lives. This wonderful gift can also be a bit overwhelming.

Or perhaps better to say underwhelming. In so much art you see these days, the meaning is immediately, painfully obvious; it's art that treats the viewer as something of an imbecile with no imagination. And so I am pleased to say that, going around in December, I was met with a degree of mystery. The works I saw led me to unexpected places. It was fun to find myself thinking, What the hell am I looking at?

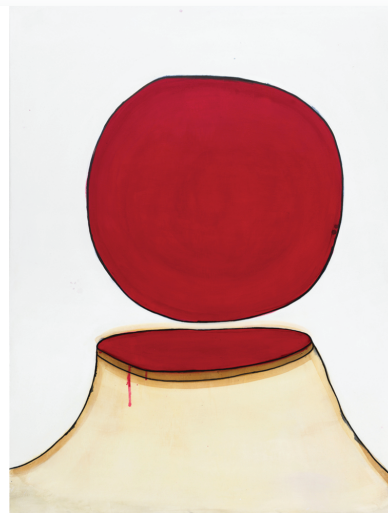
Chapter NY showed work by an artist named **Autumn Ramsey**, whose paintings were all medium or small in size but rather intense. There was something refreshingly emotional and out of the ordinary about them, what struck me first being their unusual mixture of colors. The grays made the other colors more potent. Then there was the imagery, seemingly from other times: animals, birds, human figures, which brought to mind paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that hang far from the modern rooms. Still, my first impression was: light fare.

But then themes began to emerge, notably death. For example, one work shows a bird of prey clutching a limp monkey, and another, an upside-down goose looking decidedly not alive. I'm not someone who would particularly relate to artworks about death, but then of course there is Goya, one of my absolute favorite artists. In Ramsey's works the death theme is so subtle that it made me more willing to contemplate it. There was also a painting called *Psyche*, in which a nude woman was depicted with a beast-type head. It made me think of all those figurative paintings in which a nude figure, the person posing in the artist's studio, becomes a kind of object. What thoughts might be swirling around in that person's head?

Nearby, at **Bureau**, was a show by **Christine Rebet** that comprised wall works and two films. The theme was Mesopotamia, and the show toggled between the legend of how a temple came to be built there in the 22nd century B.C. and the story of a present-day destruction of an ancient vase. Rebet's paintings have a lightness and airiness to them, an almost cartoon quality. One work shows illustrated pottery vessels and another, a fragment of a larger vessel, executed in a drippy, faded-watercolor style. It was a curious approach to such heavy subject matter, and I saw an interesting relationship with the work of Ramsey, whose paintings also had a kind of sketchiness to them. This underworked quality pointed to the fragility of memory.

In her leap from the origins of civilization to the contemporary wrecking of a cultural artifact—a dizzying compression of time—Rebet got me thinking, but not by particularly didactic means, about what mixed bags we are as human beings, so creative and, at the same time, so incredibly destructive. I read [an article](#) a while ago in the *New Yorker* about hunter-gatherers. They had in many ways a much more reasonable and fair way of life than ours today, so much more in harmony with the planet. Then the storage of grain changed all that. Along came autocrats, slavery, greed, war, etc., but also art, literature, and the mind-boggling brilliance of what we could call culture.

B. Wurtz is a New York-based artist.



Christine Rebet, *The Ritual of the First Brick*, 2018, acrylic and ink on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. Bureau.
COURTESY THE ARTIST AND BUREAU, NEW YORK

DRAWING CONNECTIONS

Basma Alsharif in conversation with artist Christine Rebet on their work and how the collective is a way to affirm your position in the present.

Basma Alsharif: In my most recent piece, *Comfortable in our New Homes*, I use the concept of the "eternal return" as a way to bring together disparate landscapes and people. It's as a way of fusing the Gaza Strip with other parts of the world and to ask questions about civilisation and humanity – though fairly indirectly. This is something I do in a lot of my works (bringing disparate locations and ideas together), just as I think curiosity is a huge part of what drives my interests: wanting to find out how certain things will work together, or not. With this piece, I had a political agenda, but I also very clearly knew that I wanted to move beyond my own subjective inquiries and desires. And yet I found that impossible: how does one separate oneself from the work one makes? I'm curious to know how you think about this in your work.

Christine Rebet: I believe there's a personal take on any event. What triggers our thoughts could be both personal and political. The closer we are to a personal tale, the more collective it can become. When we start a work, I believe it's important to delve into the subject deeply to find the backbone of what matters. I understood it in making the animation *In the Soldier's Head*. I delve into the very intimate and painful subject of the traumatised psyche of a soldier during the Algerian war. The film mines the collective terrain of a colonised landscape and mind. I'm French and I've questioned the past of my country. I come from a country that has colonised many other countries. It's a reverse.

BA What do you mean a reverse?

CR It's going in reverse in the sense of observing colonisation from a different perspective. As a kid I grew up with political refugees and have developed sensitivities towards the history and origin of displacement.

BA Is it curiosity?

CR Curiosity, and I enjoy the exchange as well.

BA What made you this way?

CR It comes from my family: they taught me from a very young age to respect everybody. I never felt disconnected from kids who came from different

parts of the world.

BA You've spoken about how you're from a colonising country. In *In the Soldier's Head* you talk about your father, a soldier in Algeria who then suffered from PTSD. You reveal that you bonded with his experience when you suffered hallucinations from malaria fever, ultimately leading you to make the work you did. Can you tell me a bit more about this?

CR During the fever your body and psyche change, you almost shift into a third person. Similarly, when making an animation, your mind reaches another state. It's deep.

BA Because of the nature of animation being a slower process?

CR Because it's very repetitive and you have to commit to your subject and embrace the consequences for a long period of time. Although I'd been thinking about this work for a while, I was only predisposed to commit to it after contracting malaria. As I was hallucinating, I was somehow dispossessed from my mind and body.

BA What do you make of having had this experience in a foreign place, and not in France? I'm curious to know whether or not you needed to be removed from home in order to have such an experience.

CR I've always felt removed from my own country, as if my mind is a foreign land. I've built a second language that has been hosting my imagination.

BA I think I know what you mean. I've always felt like a stranger everywhere. It's a very deep feeling of knowing one doesn't belong anywhere because one's identity is so closely connected with the culture of the place one grows up in. But the trick is that we're all in a way foreign to the earth. These are human experiences that I imagine almost everyone has thought: why was I born to these people and why are these my siblings? Why was I born in this city or this country? How similar am I to other people here? But then, if we really think about it, we're foreign to the earth and that somehow connects us all. It may sound simple or naive, but I was after something like this in my film: to connect different histories, landscapes, people – not to say "We are the world", but just "Here we are".

CR I totally agree with all of this. I believe there's a multiplayer locus linking different places, histories and momentums together. It could be a trajectory connecting real locations with imagined spaces, real instances to fictitious ones, memory to its spectre. When I look at your work, that's what I see.

BA And yours removes time from space. We're in a space where time is no longer a function.

CR A space where time could be reassessed.

BA You started with drawings and then you morphed them into animation for *In The Soldier's Head*, right? How did this decision come about? Had you worked in animation before?

CR I'd worked in animation for about ten years. When I draw I can choose whether it's a singular narrative or a film. *In the Soldier's Head* appeared as I drew a cave entitled *Shadows of Family Tree*. The cave buried a secret. We never found the site of the hospital where my father was sent during the war. The military administration never revealed its location. From the drawing came an urgent desire to exhume the journey of my father's troubled mind and an invitation to grieve for collectively colonised minds.

BA Do you feel as if this work speaks to a certain political environment in France today?

CR Yes, it was in response to today's political environment that I started interrogating French society's denial of its colonial history. I'm interested in the fragile terrain of dispossession. I want to animate what's uncomfortable, unnameable, unspoken, whether it's trauma, violence, colonisation or domination.

BA Do you question that in your work?

CR In my own and through others. When I joined the Columbia MFA I wanted to extend film further into the subconscious of collective agency through live action, performativity and social sculpture. In an echo of the Arab Spring uprising, I constructed *The Square*, a film/monument enacting the movements of civil union and revolt found in public squares. It's a reinvented narrative of existing locations. For example, the lost and violent territory of *In the Soldier's Head* is reinvented from my father's biography. This location exists, yet its real geographical placement is unknown.

BA We can only understand where we are, based on our understanding of being the most important beings on the planet. We can only understand the earth in relation to ourselves. Even if we say that there's a vast, empty landscape that exists where there are no humans, it's still a human conception. And archaeology, the unearthing of this history, is an affirmation of our own importance: to say "*We did this.*" When people speak like this – *we* built churches, and we made pots or jewelry – you think, "*We didn't do that. That was some other person in another space and time.*" A person of whom we have no true conception, and it's all in our imagination. It seems to serve

an affirmative purpose and is a desperate grasping at our own importance. And actually I think that in *In the Soldier's Head* you're using our connection to each other through trauma.

CR I think the connection I have in the film is in the form of trauma, fantasy, hallucination, dream and spectres. In early works, I borrowed those forms from the optical illusions of the pre-cinematic landscape. *In the Soldier's Head* is conceived as a deceptive apparatus to parody the hypocritical and violent machinery of the imperialist agenda. The trauma is channelled through the constant rapture and disruption of hallucinations and mirages. It's already a projection. It's both embedded in the earth and magnified as a projection, horizontal and vertical.



Christine Rebet, *In the Soldier's Head*, courtesy of the Artist and Bureau Gallery NY



Christine Rebet, *Llorando*, courtesy of the Artist and Bureau Gallery NY

BA We're much more comfortable knowing that another civilisation or nation could destroy us than thinking that we could be wiped out in the blink of an eye by a natural disaster. Palestinians were a people

before the occupation, but as far as the modern construction of “identity” is concerned, our identity is wrapped up in being oppressed by Israel. And that’s a terrible thing, but the real terror is knowing that something without logic could wipe us out and we wouldn’t be given a chance to write history books to explain why we ended up where we are.

CR The Middle East has been subject to so much destruction, war and pillage. For so many years, civilisations have built resistant traditions to survive erasure, disfiguration, colonisation. Some societies developed a belief in immutability through history, memory, public edifice. It’s so powerful. It’s because they knew that the world experiences this continuous destruction. What a terrible and horrifying fate!

BA Both in the drawing and animations, you create your own language. You make images that aren’t necessarily opaque or hard to read, but at the same time I feel like my brain is working, my eyes are actively reading both the still and moving drawings. The drawings feel like artefacts out of time, and for me, that’s very much about how we exist: in a perpetual cycle of positive and negative. The only way to survive is to forget, but forgetting means repeating the same mistakes over and over again. This is a central idea that I’m obsessed with in making my work.

CR I’m shocked to see that racism in France has become a normalised situation. Palestine is the same.

BA Yes, it’s not unique. There have been conflicts since there have been people.

CR What’s important is that we keep using our form of expression, that we sharpen our critical tools, making sure we’re still growing as part of a discursive, socio-poetic space, challenging consensus.

BA Our greatest resistance is to not martyr ourselves for our work, but to continue. In the art world, even when you have pieces that are intentionally violent or depressing, the ones that stand out for me are those with something else in them: a little bit of tooth, sarcasm, irony, or even just beauty that’s self-aware. It’s the straightforward lamenting that I’m not interested in at all. I like this about your work – that there’s this immediate pleasure, because your work is very beautiful, and that’s the first thing you see and *then* you’re brought into this other world, this other meaning. And that makes me question the experience of pleasure in an idea that’s not inherently pleasurable. For me, art doesn’t seem like the first line of resistance or activism, but it’s always felt very important because it involves more than just the first reaction. It reflects and reinvents. It may not feel as

if an artwork reaches the world beyond the museum walls, but I believe the entire process around the production of the work that brought it to the museum is as important as the final product.

CR How to address the tumult of the world? How to exorcise the memory of suffering souls? The aura of collective horror? I like to approach film as a collective monument where the after-image revives its own remnants in a poignant and eternal presence. I don’t know whether or not it’ll have an impact in the museum. I’m just thinking it’s important to come up with something that’s true, and then you’ll find out if it’s right.

BA Through how an audience engages with the work?

CR My works may be abstract and you might not understand the narrative, but I treat research and subject with passion, humour and candour. I drew my dad when he died, outlined the contour of his soul, and these delicate lines are still alive. I hope I can share this directness and awakens in my films.

BA Do you think of it as a collective experience? In my mind, the collective produces an awareness of oneself. A collective where everything is shared is a false idea, or can only be temporary because it relies too much on the individual to make it work. But collectives happen all over the place, without intentionality, and it’s when collectivity is hindered that we suffer. I think about art in the same way, I guess – in its interconnectedness with everything.

CR I like to think of it as a kinetic monument addressing a transforming contemporaneity. We have all sorts of live collective exchange.

BA The collective is also a way to affirm your position in the present.

CR Wherever you are, especially now, you have to learn how to survive through the present.

ARTFORUM

500 WORDS

Christine Rebet

06.08.15



View of "Christine Rebet: Paysage Fautif," 2015.

Christine Rebet is an artist who has worked across diverse media and with traditional animation for over ten years. Her debut solo gallery exhibition in New York, "Paysage Fautif," features drawings made in Haiti as well as a new hand-drawn film, all of which she discusses below. The show is on view at Bureau until June 14, 2015.

I'VE BEEN MAKING ANIMATIONS since 2002, when I received a grant to study with a team of DDR-era animators in Berlin. There, I learned how to animate in 35 mm, and I have stayed faithful to this traditional technique, even as I've watched the medium obsolesce. I decided to work with this "minor" form because of its roots in social critique. I find within its anarchic and satirical subtext a suitable grammar to share my vision.

Around 2008, I decided to stop making animations—the process was too obsessive, too troubling—in order to concentrate on themes of collectivity through performance, sculpture, and film. When I returned to France from New York in 2012, I began to recognize how little France has processed its collective traumatic history, especially when it comes to its colonial past. My father served in the Algerian war and, like many in his generation, he was destroyed by it. At one point during the war, he got typhoid and ended up suffering from hallucinations in a remote hospital. I began to think about inventing machinery to rehearse the hallucinating mind—an organic machine, influenced both by Francis Picabia's erotic machines and by the imagery of colonized nature, a machine simultaneously repairing and destroying itself. The cerebral freedom of hallucinations, it occurred to me, is a mirage, as deceptive as military deployment in the service of an imperial agenda.

The drawings in this show were made while I was in Haiti early this year. As it happened, I came down with tropical fever. Experiencing my own hallucinations while I was sick finally readied me to return to animation. After shooting all the drawings (about eight hundred, a number that is actually quite low for animations), I filmed them while submerging them in water, so that the images expanded and eventually dissolved. This secondary process both destroys the mirage of the animation and sets the images free. The animated film that resulted from this process is titled *In the Soldier's Head*, 2015, and it is a meditation on directing cerebral fluids through orgasmic forms. The title of this New York show, "Paysage Fautif"—a nod to Marcel Duchamp's semen on a piece of black satin—had been in my head for a while, but its significance was certainly reformulated by the animation.

Beyond these erotics, it was clear to me that I wanted to talk about mental disruption as a figure for the collective experience of colonization, and that I wanted to carry this out through the disruption of the animation itself. In short, my aim was to make a *non-animation*, something that interrupted the continuous cycle of images through a secondary process. The final moments of the animation return to the beginning of civilization, or the beginning of *animation*, in the cave, but the image is fleeting, ungraspable. After all, you can't really get a hold of a mind in crisis.

— As told to *Joanna Fiduccia*

this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

6/5/2015

Review by Taylor Le Melle

Christine Rebet's hand-drawn animation film unfolds like an ominous lucid dream. With underlying suggestions of trauma, 'In the Soldier's Head' (2015) depicts proto-plants, hybrid mechanical structures, and incomplete architectures dancing across an empty landscape. A façade made of tiered colonnades springs erect out of the ground plane, and collapses just as easily. A miniature palm tree twirls like a pinwheel toy as it dangles from an unidentifiable machine-plant. An irregular heartbeat thumps along, providing a soundtrack to the spinning, sputtering, and twitching imagery.

Rebet's practice regularly combines the use of drawing, film, sculpture, and performance to present 'intensely personal perspective[s] on historical traumas, reinterpreted through the land, bodies, and minds that are subject to them'.^[1]

'Paysage Fautif' is the New York-based French artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery. The show's name is taken from Marcel Duchamp's 'Faulty Landscape' (1946), and presents biophysical analogues for delusions and anxieties caused by these aforementioned traumas. Based on her experiences while she temporarily lived in Haiti, alongside the film are also sixteen ink-on-paper drawings.

The film and its accompanying drawings, such as 'Llorando II' (2013), appear as conflated examples of bodily dysfunction and natural disaster. Built by the mind's delusions, these anthropomorphic figures and their surrounding architectures are both weirded through their entanglement with each other. While watching the film, I couldn't help but recall a time when my own subconscious spawned a string of hallucinatory dreams, a side effect of an anti-malaria medication I was taking during a long trip in a tropical country many years ago. Despite preventative modern interventions, however, Rebet seems to suggest that death and disaster are inevitable. The animation concludes as the organic architectures bleed to death, multicolour water spots (or bodily fluids, as in Duchamp's 'Landscape') seep outwards from within as each figure melts into a final muddy pit of ochre-coloured sickness.

Although the exhibition is inspired by Rebet's time spent in post-earthquake Haiti and also her father's recollection of his episodes of delirium while he was stationed in the Algerian desert as a young soldier, one should not use this biographical information to slide into a reading of those places, rather, the emphasis should be on the connection between historical and bodily trauma. The previously noted preventative modern interventions could easily be medicine, machine, or mercantilism, all signs of 'progress' but all inextricably linked to violent colonial histories (Haiti and Algeria share, for example, successful rebellions against oppressive French colonial rule). Ultimately, all imperialist ventures harbour the possibility of catastrophic ends, whether political or natural.

Sputtering out of control, the scenes in the film are apocalyptic, but nonetheless imagine an uncertain, if not optimistic, future. If anyone ever was to animate W.B. Yeats' 'The Second Coming', it might look like this.^[2]

The final frames of the quick-paced film depict an amorphous set of shapes and colour, and perhaps this is a clean slate, one that '[injects] the scene with vigor and potential'.^[3]

[1] Press Release, Christine Rebet 'Paysage Fautif'

[2] Yeat's poem begins, 'Turning and turning in the widening gyre...' and ends with an impending birth, 'slouching towards Bethlehem to be born?' In my interpretation, Yeats is ambivalent as to whether this 'rough beast' is Savior or Legion, so to speak.

[3] Press Release, Christine Rebet 'Paysage Fautif'



Title : Christine Rebet, Paysage Fautif, Installation View at Bureau, 2015

Website : <http://www.bureau-inc.com/>

Credit : Courtesy the artist and Bureau Inc, New York



Christine Rebet, 2013, Llorando II, (In the Soldier's Head), Ink on paper, 11.6 x 15.5 inches

Christine Rebet

Artiste, vit et travaille à New York et Paris,
www.bureau-inc.com

Drawing, a piece of pleasure? A chess move.

Who's at the drawer's table? The spectre of thoughts.

Is there room for taste? Aesthetics.

Why flowers, fruits and objects? To be composed, animated, contextualized.

The ultimate still life? Yeti's feet if you happen to find one.

Drawing on tablecloths? Sketching a manifesto.

The cherry on top on the drawing? A title.

P. 115 : *Dame sur canapé*, 36 x 48 cm.

P. 116 : *Histoires sexuelles*, 30 x 40 cm.

P. 117 : *Hang it there*, 36 x 48 cm.

Tous les dessins : encre et aquarelle sur papier, 2013. Courtesy de l'artiste et Bureau, New York.



HISTOIRES SEXUELLES

'Christine Rebet "Melting Sun" at AlbumArte, Rome,' *Mousse*, October 2014

MOUSSE

Christine Rebet "Meltingsun" at AlbumArte, Rome

October 14~2014



AlbumArte is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition in Italy of Christine Rebet, “Meltingsun”, curated by Maria Rosa Sossai and Francesco Urbano Ragazzi.

After a long process of exchange and research conducted at a distance, the artist and the curators are finally meeting in the project space for contemporary art of AlbumArte in Rome in order to give birth to “Meltingsun”: a blazing but totally artificial sun that comes alive in the drawings and sculptures of the French artist who currently lives and works in Paris and New York.

The exhibition presents the artist’s studio as it would appear if it were a *maison de luxe*, with a totally anomalous production line consisting of sketches, casts and metal machines, in which the traces of a rather unlikely collection of jewels can be seen. Here the structures of the body proliferate and re-emerge, transfigured and stripped of their sensational shine. A regal set of jewellery created by Mellerio dits Meller—the oldest family of jewellers in Europe—now loses its veneer of vanity and is transformed into voodoo amulets, chains, medals, shields and armour. Alongside the radical reinterpretation of royal dress codes, “Meltingsun” further explores the language of the privileged elite by appropriating its most typical gestures and expressions. As with the prototypes and models of a fashion collection, the titles of Rebet’s works resonate in the spaces of AlbumArte with attractively gracious irony, evoking fantasies that are by turns exotic, colonial, industrial and military, while artfully combining fashion with the imitation of nature: *Symphony of a satin chiffoneur*, *Heaven infused*, *Blue Maidens*, *Duchess on Tortoise Escape*, *Duet Solomite*, *Steamline crusaders*, *Wasteland*, *Nap in Hamada*, *Nécessaire pour Héritière*.

The exhibition “Meltingsun” is the crowning point of a process of research that started with Duplex, a project by Francesco Urbano Ragazzi and AlbumArte, which developed during the curatorial duo’s period of residency at the Cité des Arts in Paris, in February. During the first part of their residency, promoted by the Direction des Affaires Culturelles de la Ville de Paris, the two curators began an investigation into the art scene of Paris, in collaboration with various important figures who are particularly active in the contemporary art scene in the city.

In the future, the cultural projects that will animate the AlbumArte space, in addition to those promoted by the association in various other venues, will involve artists who are able to extend their artistic practices beyond the scope of the visual arts alone. Motivated by the firm belief that it is essential to solicit the active participation of the public AlbumArte will host a range of dynamic and original projects, promoting the residencies of artists as well as dynamic interactions between artists, curators, associations, collectors, museums and other national and international institutions.

[at AlbumArte, Rome](#)

until 15 February 2014



ARTFORUM

APRIL 2007 INTERNATIONAL

Christine Rebet GALERIE KAMEL MENNOUR

In 1911 the Dreamland fairground on Coney Island was completely destroyed by fire, a tragedy foreshadowed by the fear-inducing entertainment that had been the amusement park's top draw: *Fighting the Flames*, a terrifying show in which hundreds of performers staged the elaborate rescue of more than a dozen people from the top of a burning six-story building. In her exhibition "Tiger Escape," French artist Christine Rebet (who lives and works in New York) has returned the surreal details of this seaside nightmare to the status of spectacle in twenty-three colored ink drawings, a sound installation, and a five-and-a-half-minute 16-mm film.

Rebet's background in stage design and choreography perhaps explains her attraction to carnival theatrics and informs the imaginative interpretation of the Dreamland disaster in her drawings. Composing her drawings in landscape format on thick 10 x 7-inch sheets of paper, Rebet leaves the majority of each page white and unmarked, allowing only glimpses of an unfolding drama in spots of dribbled ink and clumsy smudges. Ignoring the specifics of individual physiognomies, like details that slip away in dreams, Rebet renders (in rare flashes of vivid remembrance) the striking red feather plumes of *Pain Brush Cardinal* (all works 2006) and the billowing blue bonnets in *I Sold You Mermaids*. Her bright, flat, collagelike aesthetic evokes Peter Blake's '70s illustrations for Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. And just like Alice's passage to the other side of the mirror, each of Rebet's drawings provides entry into a fantastical world.

With the animated film *Tell Me About Your Dreams*, Rebet attempts to spark her narrative, linking a series of images in a jittery recollection of the Dreamland saga. Two survivors of the Coney Island blaze—a girl with a modern bob and a figure that is half tiger, half man (and dressed in black trousers)—revisit the trauma in their new roles

as patient and therapist. As electronic music builds to a frenzy and towering bookshelves wobble ominously, the tiger leers over his patient, stretched on a chaise longue, until the screen bleeds orange and bursts into flames. Making a strong visual link to Salvador Dalí's iconic painting of a tiger leaping across a supine female, *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate, One Second Before Awakening*, 1944, Rebet explicitly

declares her affinity for the Surrealists and the theater of the unconscious. In Rebet's work, as in Dalí's, we discover the paradox that the creature, although in motion, is eternally stopped in its tracks.

In her use of sound, Rebet continues to subvert the impetus toward the authentic through the carnivalesque. Her re-creation of *Fighting the Flames*, a small sculpture of a fireman circling the top of a tiny plinth, as in a music box, follows the beat of a horse's gallop—actually a repeated loop from the *Tell Me About Your Dreams* sound track. But like the tiger's roar in that film's final scene, this is not a recording of sounds made by a real animal but rather of an amusement-park approximation. It is the endless repetition of our own imaginations.

—Lillian Davies



Christine Rebet,
Tell Me About Your Dreams, 2006. Ink on
paper, 12 1/2 x 9 1/2".

« Guided dreams on the Drawings of Christine Rebet »

« If dreams are a translation of waking life, equally waking life is a translation of dreams. »

André Breton

German psychologist Erich From once wrote that dreams are similar to a foreign language. We are often unable to understand any of their signs, but as with another language, we can learn to understand and interpret their meanings. In previous centuries, dreams were associated with the world of the supernatural and with religious convictions.

Dreams were described as visits from the gods and demons, or in the case of the ancient Greek philosophers, dreams were understood to be inspirations coming from a divine force to foretell the future. Since reflections by Sigmund Freud— on the matter in his famous book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, written more than a hundred years ago, we know that dreams have little to do with the supernatural or with enlightenment of a divine origin. They have a direct relation to the experiences and desires of daily life. However, dreams do not continue the so-called waking life, but rather seem to be a mechanism that removes us from our daily anxieties to give us relief from them. Today most scientists believe that dreaming is no more than a neural house cleaning, an editing of information in the storage area of the brain. Many books and essays have been written about dreams, their causes and triggers, and their connection with the conscious and subconscious levels of the senses. But what precisely is it that dreams are telling us? All that is necessary in order to understand a dream is to learn a special psychological technique to interpret it. Once we are able to comprehend its symbols and allusions, we can in fact see that every dream has a “psychological structure, full of significance, and one which may be assigned to a specific place in the psychic activities of the waking state”, as Freud specified. And yet we are not in control of our dreams, they are a subconscious affair coming from the depths of our minds. Generally we speak of having a dream, and never of making a dream, even though everything that comes to mind during the state of dreaming has no source other than ourselves, our experiences and desires. We are the ones that put the images together. Despite this, we feel exposed without protection when dreams bring to light lost and remote memories of an unsettling and repressed nature, many that at first glance would seem to have no significant meaning.

The drawings of French artist Christine Rebet, made between 1999 and 2003, are similarly as cryptic as dreams, appearing to be a language of their own, full of symbols, metaphors and subconscious references. We realize at once that we need a specific method in order to read these drawings, such as those depicting scenes ambiguously entitled *Soul Hunter*, or *Split Mind*, amongst many others. The drawings are distinctly connected to memories from the artist's childhood and to particular dreams that she had as a young girl, the time when she first started sketching. As Rebet said: “We witness an adult mind going back to the mind of a child. Re-living his fears and his confusions.” It is a child with archetypal fears of losing his parents, of finding himself in an extremely embarrassing situation, or of discovering the paralyzing thought of death. Dreams can, with an amazing force of reproduction, recall distant and fully forgotten experiences from our earliest years, but Rebet's drawings go further. The dread of physical and emotional tension emerges from every one of her drawings. It is evident that their powerful expressive impact draws on other sources beyond Rebet's own purely autobiographical anxieties. They are connected to fairy tales, comic books, ghost stories, horror movies, popular culture at large, and most of all, by the contradictory impulses of life itself. The drawings contain a playful and emphatic beauty when reporting on the dangers and complex depths of the human condition. They are unrefined and appear occasionally unfinished, as if to mirror the fragmented nature of our existence.

Rebet grew up in Lyon, a city she describes as a surreal and fearsome place, a place intensely marked by memories of her conflicts with the bourgeois surroundings of her childhood. She initially studied painting at the Academy in Venice and moved on to work with theatre in the mid-1990s when she studied stage design in London at St Martin's School of Art and Design. This is where her drawing activity encountered theatre. Rebet's images bring together a cast of fantasy creatures that she sends on to her own mental stage. Here, they perform pieces that tell a story, through states of mind that are themselves reduced to temporary gestures, exposing views of the artist's inner life. In her drawings, we

encounter the little demons and goblins that so often chase us in our dreams. Devilish looking children, and surreal characters signifying our most feared anxieties, haunted depictions of alienation, trauma and despair. The characters appear with highly disfigured bodies and heads, their arms, legs or faces out of proportion or not existent at all, making them look like deformed and grotesque creatures from our most nightmarish dreams. Here, particularly, the series Split Mind, with their distorted adolescent boys and girls, reminds us of tales of horror and dismay. Yet many of the sketches also possess a humorous and cartoonish aspect that emerges through the titles and their relation to continuously fearsome and uncanny images, such as 2 Rabbits in Trouble, or How to Upset a DJ. The uncanny atmosphere of Rebet's drawings is what makes them hugely fascinating. One knows in an instant that one has encountered a different universe with its own set of rules, located in a dusty zone somewhere between the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is an alternative fantasy- world, a self-contained system that depicts momentary visions, like short flashes from haunted memories. We experience fragmented and broken narratives, short and unfinished stories, as if glancing into an abyss of ragged reminiscences.

In Rebet's drawings, with the truthful openness of dreams, we encounter a taste for the eerie and the mysterious, for uncovered virtue and our own emotional depths. We see an idealistic vision of life on a level not pretend and unreal but internal and authentic. Life, like dreams, is torn by our minds' most secret motions, forming us by the simplest and barest means.

Jens Hoffmann In Christine Rebet, « Game over », Catalogue, Ed. A Huge Book, 2003