

Baptiste Rabichon Pieces

Oct. 14th 2023 ...

Jan. 21th 2024

Opening
Friday

Oct. 13 oct.
6.00 pm

musée
Nicéphore
Niépce



Curated by:
Emmanuelle Vieillard,
musée Nicéphore Niépce
Scenography, installation:
musée Nicéphore Niépce

The museum would like to thank
all those who made this exhibition
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Galerie Reuter Bausch – Luxembourg,
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Villa Vauban, the city of
Luxemburg's Art Museum,
Private collection

Baptiste Rabichon's work [1987-]
is imbued with traces of
the present, shot through
with vestiges of childhood
phantasmagoria and references
to art history, cinema and
video games. He uses his skill
as a photographer to attest to
a lived experience, as if extracting
it from reality, constantly
oscillating between sampling
and interpreting.

Baptiste Rabichon's pieces
come from a range of sources
including photographs taken using
film, a smartphone, paintings
and drawings... He experiments
with and blends various processes
in his studio or in the lab, such
as traditional print photography,
projections on an enlarger,
photograms, digital photographs,
digital collages, etc. Consequently,
the pieces often feature layers
of different temporal zones,
like memory strata, sensory
reminiscences that collide with
the present. For the viewer,
values are inverted, perspectives
upturned, scale varies greatly
and the artist's fascination with
the infinitely huge is key. While
the worlds Baptiste Rabichon
creates are fictional, they speak
to the world in which we live
now, confronting us with
our compulsive, obsessional
relationship with images.

Rabichon himself speaks of
his "contradictory experiences
of the world, one filled with
stretches, instants, memories
and projections, the other
more immediate and primitive"
that seem to merge in his hands
in the darkness of the lab.

This exhibition introduces
some of this prolific artist's
most recent work.

20th century
[2020-2021]

As far back as palaeolithic times, humans have produced signs, using the walls of caves as their canvas, drawing lines, dots, abstract shapes, alongside human outlines and silhouettes in hand-to-hand combat with the rock face. In his series entitled 20th century (*XX^e siècle*), Baptiste Rabichon confronts us with this very human obsession with images.

Using photography, but without the intermediary of an actual camera, Rabichon produces a multitude of traces, in particular his own. He begins by hand-applying paint to a blown-glass plate, then projects the image onto photographic paper through an enlarger. The next, critical phase happens in the darkness of the laboratory, where Rabichon blends new imprints such as projected photograms of his own body, chemigrams of his arm, etc. onto the light-sensitive surface. Layers of different temporal zones, memory strata, intersect in the piece as Baptiste Rabichon creates a space in which to display these new “cave drawings”.

Manhattan Papers
[2021]

Using a process that involves printing dozens of colour negative photographs of New York, assembling them into small models and re-shooting them using positive colour film, then printing the final photograph on colour negative paper, Baptiste Rabichon obtains strange pictures, where positive and negative blend. This gives the oddest scenes where the decors (paper models) seem more “realistic” than the living people and objects that inhabit the space.

Through the prism of this friction, where image and reality appear to merge, Rabichon attempts to build new pictures of New York, the ultimate 20th century city. His work features as many familiar images of the city from film, photography, literature and music (with depictions that refer, to varying extents, to films like King Kong and Metropolis or to the work of American photographer Berenice Abbott for example) as it does of shots he actually took himself in New York (the decors are built entirely from photographs taken by Baptiste Rabichon himself). New York, a much-fantasised city, that is both real and its own image, comes with a vast history in terms of photography and we can see this as an attempt to create new work within that history using a new photographic technique (developed by Rabichon to make up for the disappearance of the famed Cibachrome photographic paper).

Lost Levels
[2020-2021]

Long before 3D characters interacted in virtual worlds with photo-realistic backdrops and landscapes, video games were made of pixels.

Baptiste Rabichon's *Lost Levels* brings them back as he takes a walk down memory lane to the games of his childhood, lifting fragments of images from the era of 8 and 16-bit consoles, using them to recreate visuals of new worlds. We follow the story as spectators, going from one level to the next through a strange gamescape made from digital collages. It is a demanding exercise. We can find ourselves having to examine a multitude of details to discover a new solar system, pass through an underwater labyrinth, and explore the various, crazy floors of a house. Which door, the four-poster bed, the octopus, The Grande Odalisque, the samurai armour or the phone booth will get us into the distortion zone that allows us to teleport from one level to another, known as the Warp Zone? Then, if our fingers are not too sore from banging on the buttons of the console, we might even get as far as the almost uninhabited, tentacular city, and come across the only tiny character in the whole piece. That would be the artist himself, embedded into the images.

"I began this series in a 15 m² studio during the first lockdown. I was so anxious about the pandemic and I spent days on end on my computer, completely lost in a virtual world. In the end, you start to think that the world is made up of 'information' and that you are nothing but a little piece of code in a huge mush of data."
You Win! Pixel heaven awaits!
Game Over

Blue Screen of Death
[2021-2022]

The “Blue Screen of Death” is the nickname given to the critical error screen on any computer run on Windows. Fatal Error means a completely blue screen. Since the eighties, the term is used to refer to any serious computer issue, a strange foreshadowing of the way screens were to invade our lives, and in particular the omnipresence of smartphones. The majority of people we meet are carrying one, they can be found on tables in restaurants, attached to car dashboards, in giant advertisements on the sides of buildings, on the deck when we’re cooking and even in our beds! Those little black rectangles are hard to escape... Hasn’t everyone, at some stage, felt a wave of panic at the sight of a tube carriage, packed to the rafters with passengers, mute and hypnotised by the blue glow of their devices?

In Blue Screen of Death, the very tool that produces the piece is the focus of its criticism. Baptiste Rabichon creates photographs that are exposed twice, once by the enlarger that prints the shadow of the objects obscuring its light and once by the phone that exposes itself through direct contact. He adds a strange intruder to the list of everyday objects: a smartphone that spills the contents of its screen onto photosensitive paper. The latest COVID data, a video of a flute-playing kitten, Candy Crush, Tinder, selfies, the flow of information from the screen interferes with and contaminates each piece, just like every moment of our lives.

Vues d’artiste
[2022]

At a time when James Webb’s telescope is bringing us pictures from space with an unprecedented level of definition, Baptiste Rabichon treats us to his own vision of the Cosmos. The piece is entitled “Artist’s Impression” as a tribute to the illustrations of objects, beings or phenomena that often feature alongside articles in popular science journals to represent things that cannot be photographed. He takes us on a journey through a fantasy world peppered with bizarre stars and landscapes, the result of a strange alchemy between drawing and the photographic process. Baptiste Rabichon draws spheres, dots, patches on little sheets of tracing paper... These transparent sketches are then placed on photo-sensitive paper in a dark room and exposed to the light.

Fiat lux – Let there be light!

Light creates dark as it passes through the tracing paper. An authentic, photographic black that encircles the drawing, transforming the spheres, dots and patches into planets, stars and galaxies.

Baptiste Rabichon makes these little worlds by blending drawings and photograms, while, at the same time watching them appear. A reminder that, in French, image is an anagram for *magie* (magic).

Verbatim
[2023]

Baptiste Rabichon enjoys the incongruous blend of the analogue and the digital. In Verbatim, he provides us with one of the most simple, but also one of the most unsettling iterations.

At first glance, the series consists of commonplace smartphone photographs, but as we get a little closer, we can see that the pieces are made up of thousands of little coloured dots. Not unlike offset printing or serigraphy, the effect, in fact, comes from the network of diodes that make up the screen of the very smartphone that has made the piece in question. An even closer look means we can spot irregularities as the phone was placed directly in the enlarger that imprints on a sheet of photo-sensitive paper, without bothering about fingerprints, dust or any other bits of dirt. The light of the screen goes through the lenses and exposes the paper to the image.

Verbatim was a matter of some urgency. The connection between these two photographic eras will soon no longer be possible as colour film photography will inevitably disappear. However, instead of the usual nostalgia associated with film, Rabichon's take focuses on the fragile nature of our digital vignettes. Digital photography is made from data that is decoded then transcribed into images by the software in our computers and phones – the title of the series Verbatim refers to this transcription. In a few decades, what will be left of the billions of pictures taken during the early 21st century?

Baptiste Rabichon takes all of these fleeting photographs, shots of the studio, selfies, portraits of his partner, visual notes, and turns them into works of art using his film enlarger. The result borders on the traditional.

Mother's Rooms
[2022]

Since the advent of the automatic cameras and even more so since the introduction of digital photography, we seem to have forgotten that photography used to be all about inversion. To begin with, the picture that formed in the chamber was geometrically opposite: left was right and up was down. Using this spatial slide, Baptiste Rabichon looks to blur the relationship between the real space and the imaginary one.

When daydreaming as a child, he would lie on his bed the wrong way up, staring at the ceiling, his gaze upside down. By thwarting the contraries, an alternative dimension develops to mirror the original world, outside of space and time. Reminiscing about these dreamy moments with his mother, he went back to the origins of photography, to the point of view, and the traditional view camera.

He perched on a stepladder to place his camera level with the ceiling, recording the most intimate and familial of places. The lights are as if anchored to the ground with the bulbs floating like balloons as he retains the inversion of the original image. All of the elements that make up the spaces contravene the codes of what we know.

As we observe these images, we are placed at the intersection of memory and imagination, and are reminded that "we were all children once".

Pieces
[2023]

Each part of *Pieces* is different from the others, but together, they clearly form a whole. Not unlike a mathematician who creates impossible figures, Baptiste Rabichon is always looking into the notion of complex, fictional spaces, in which a protagonist looks for a pathway through. Here, he treats us to the first, chess-themed extract that shares the same title as the full exhibition.

He juxtaposes multiple shots, computer graphics and photograms, creating an astonishing presentation of the game's symbolism for the onlooker. Black/White, Colour/Monochrome, Positive/Negative, Film/Digital, Small/Big, Masculine/Feminine, all the dualities, the complementary and inseparable couples that underpin the whole are here.

Can this precise and very real rendering of the "noblest of games" be seen as a metaphor for love, like in the best chivalric romance novels?

1.
Baptiste Rabichon
20th century [01]
2020
photogram
© Baptiste Rabichon



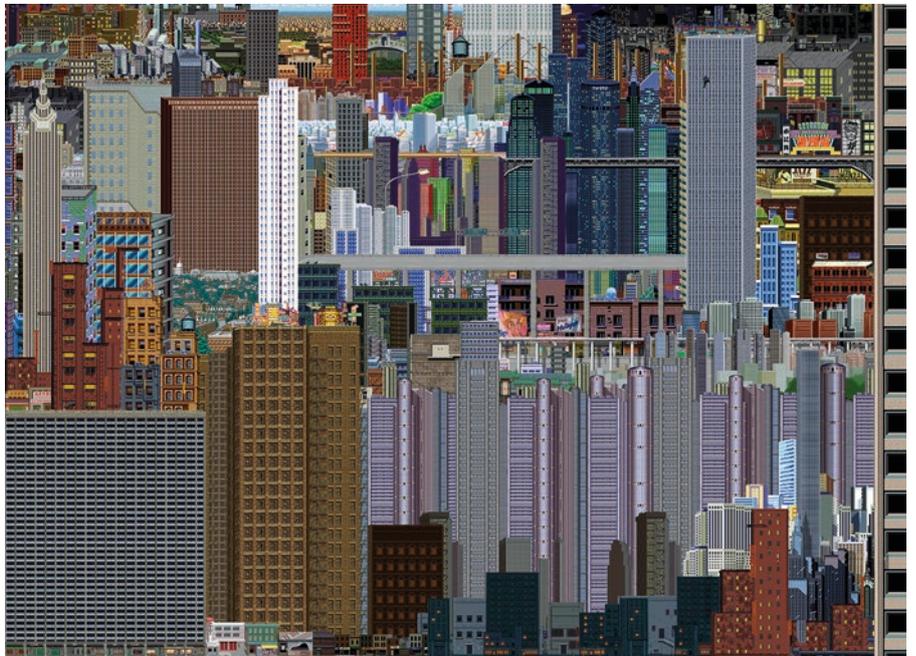
1

2.
Baptiste Rabichon
Manhattan Papers [02]
2021
C-print,
ed.1/3
© Baptiste Rabichon

3.
Baptiste Rabichon
Lost Levels,
#5 Sprawling City
2020-2021
Inkjet print
© Baptiste Rabichon

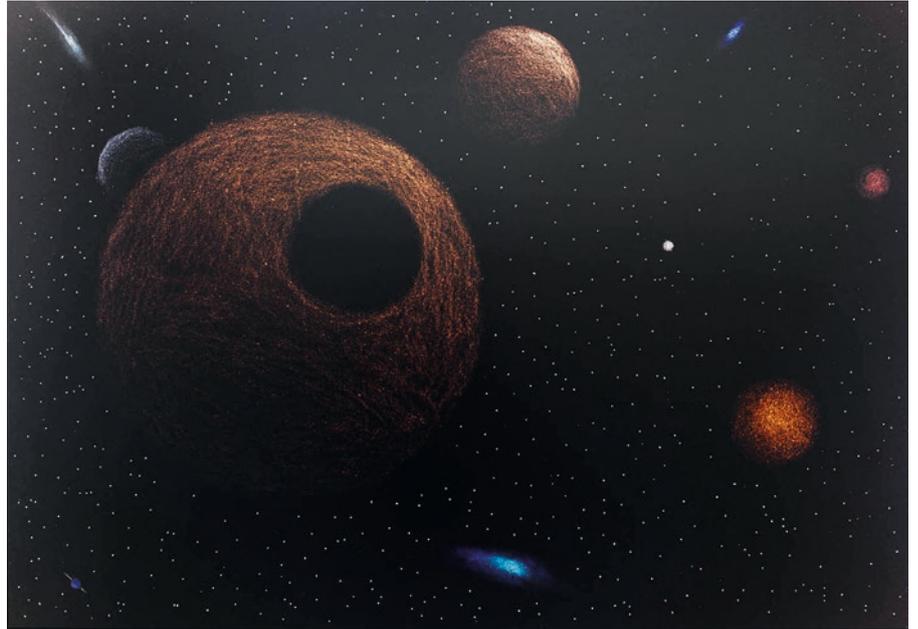


2



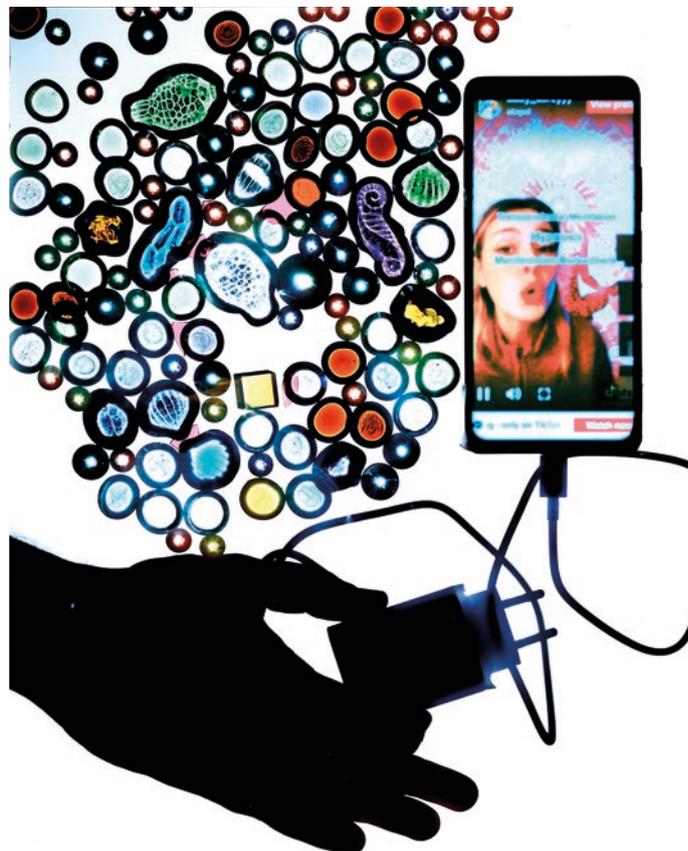
3

4.
Baptiste Rabichon
Artist's Impression II
2022
C-Print
Courtesy Galerie Paris-B, Paris
© Baptiste Rabichon



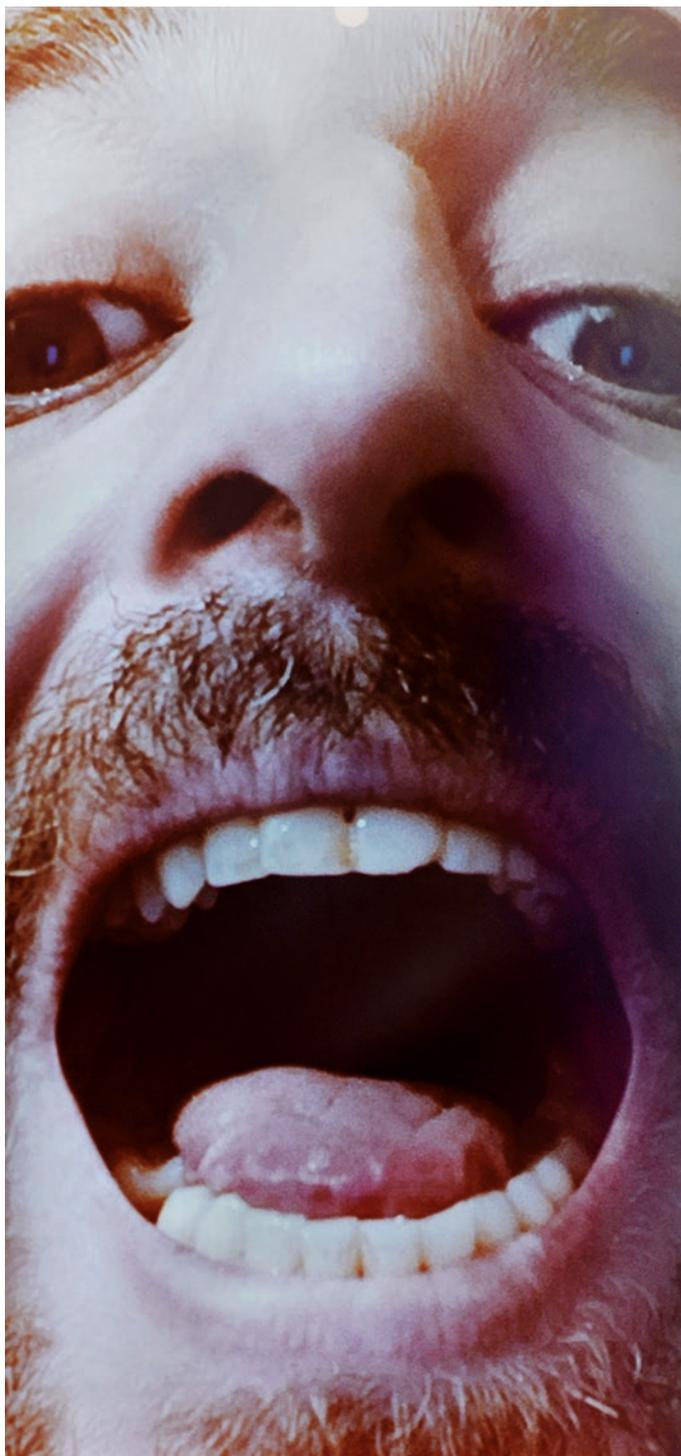
4

5.
Baptiste Rabichon
Blue Screen of Death [026]
2022
Photogram,
ed. 1/1
© Baptiste Rabichon



5

6.
Baptiste Rabichon
Verbatim 005
2022
C-Print
© Baptiste Rabichon



7.
Baptiste Rabichon
Mother's Rooms, 10
2022
C-Print,
ed.1/3
Courtesy Galerie Binome, Paris
© Baptiste Rabichon



7

8.
Baptiste Rabichon
Piece #1 [Da8#]
2023
photogram
© Baptiste Rabichon



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