

# SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

Cyprien Gaillard

*Where Nature Runs Riot*

02/05/2015 – 18/07/2015

At the core of Cyprien Gaillard's exhibition *Where Nature Runs Riot* is *Nightlife* (2015), a major new film shot at night over the past two years in Cleveland, Los Angeles and Berlin.

*Nightlife* begins with a shot of a rippling form that looks as if it were carved from the very light of the projection. As the camera pans to the right to reveal a pitted surface of greenish bronze, one of the most iconic sculptures of the twentieth century slowly fills the frame: Rodin's *The Thinker*. This particular cast, one of the few overseen by Rodin himself, is in the forecourt of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Dynamited in 1970, the sculpture's base was shredded and its bulk knocked to the ground, an act attributed to the anti-imperialist group 'Weather Underground' – one of their many attacks on public spaces across the US. After debating what to do with the sculpture, the museum decided to reinstall the work in its damaged state. As it slowly encircles the large sculpture, rising from its base and recording every detail, the camera seems to create a new, virtual mould of the work. Gaillard then recasts *The Thinker* as a projection, a new sculpture composed of light, forcefully underlining the sculptural texture of the 3D film. The three-dimensionality is further carved into the soundtrack, which Gaillard created with a 9-second sample from Alton Ellis's rocksteady classic *Blackman's Word*. First released on the Treasure Isle label in 1969, the song featured the refrain "I was born a loser". Rerecorded for the rival Coxsone label in 1971, the title was changed to *Black Man's Pride* and the refrain to "I was born a winner". Gaillard remixed both samples to give a spatial – or sculptural – feel to the music, a gesture that taps into the radical history of the genre. In the early 1970s, reggae and rocksteady tracks were often remixed using filters and basic effects such as reverb and delay, creating an overall sensation of echo. Called 'dub', this process created a disorientating experience of sound and a metaphoric space for freedom and change. *Nightlife* reconfigures two time-based mediums, music and film, into sculpture, creating a palpable illusion of space. But there is an important disjunction between audio and visual: dub effects can be achieved with analogue equipment, whereas the film was produced with highly advanced digital technology. Gaillard infuses *Nightlife* with anachronism: the soundtrack is a low-fidelity counterpart to the film's exceptionally high-tech visuals.

Next we see a few trees swaying as if they were dancing to the soundtrack. Nicknamed the Hollywood Juniper, this particular species of tree has been a motif for Gaillard since his *Geographical Analogies* (2005 – 2011) when he made a series of Polaroids of the evergreen. A native of East Asia and not the least bit 'Hollywood', this immigrant tree, with its expressive limbs, has taken the name of a place where it is a foreigner. The palm tree, de facto emblem of LA, is also a transplant that is now considered a water-consuming pest because of the city's acute drought problems, partially caused by the sheer number of non-native trees. As the film continues, we see different trees and plants in urban backdrops depicted in acts of undulating trance and ecstasy. *Nightlife* unfolds as a hallucinatory riot of urban botany.

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The setting shifts again, to the outskirts of Berlin, with the camera rising above a dark grove of trees into a night sky, where fireworks are bursting into life above the 1936 Olympic stadium. The event is the Pyronale, an international fireworks spectacle that takes place annually at this enduring site of fascist architecture. The camera enters the airspace of the fireworks, moving through the spurts of light and tendrils of smoke, forms that offer ghostly echoes of the trees. The film then returns to Cleveland for its coda. A huge tree, bare branches barely visible at first, is lit from behind with a helicopter searchlight shifting restlessly in the sky. This particular tree, a German oak, is laden with significance: during the 1936 Olympics, the German Olympic committee gave each gold medalist an oak sapling. American Jesse Owens won four gold medals, making a mockery of the Nazi ideology of racial supremacy. Owens planted one of his four saplings at Rhodes High School, where he trained, and where the oak grows to this day, the only one known to have survived.

Outside the *Nightlife* gallery there is a small sculpture, *Ammonite Dub* (2015). In the centre of a fossilised ammonite, cut in half to reveal the patterns within, the artist has inserted a turntable needle. The sculpture is encased in a double mirror, creating an illusion of infinitely receding space. Exhibited in the first-floor gallery, a sculpture consisting of two 7" records the artist used to create the soundtrack: *Reid/Coxsone (gold connectors)* (2015). At the centre of each vinyl the usual plastic 45 adapters have been replaced by two that have been cast in gilded bronze. The tripartite form of the adapter reminded Gaillard of a 'triskelion', a symbol used by an array of ancient cultures. The synthesis of contrasting ideas – the mundane and the esoteric, geological time and the whims of history – is a typical gesture of the artist, and finds expression in a new series of double-exposure Polaroids called *Sober City* (2015). The unifying element in each of the Polaroids is a large amethyst crystal in the Natural History Museum, New York. Gaillard exposes the delicate Polaroid film to this crystalline form before exposing it again to a nondescript urban setting (or vice versa), crystallising the landscape and condensing different geographical locations into a single object.

Cyprien Gaillard was born in Paris and lives and works in Berlin and New York. He has had solo exhibitions at a number of major institutions, including MoMA PS1, New York, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, KW Institute for Contemporary Art Kunst-Werke Berlin e.V., Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland.

Sprüth Magers Berlin is concurrently presenting the solo exhibition *The Symmetry Argument* by Marcel van Eeden. For more information and press enquiries, please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com). Opening Times of the Gallery: Tue – Sat, 11 am – 6 pm.

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