

VENUS

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MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ: FRENCH BASHING

June 2 – August 4, 2017

VENUS

980 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10075

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: VENUS PRESENTS FIRST U.S. EXHIBITION WITH ICONOCLASTIC FRENCH NOVELIST AND ARTIST MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ



(New York, NY) – Beginning June 2, 2017, VENUS is pleased to present *French Bashing*, an exhibition of photographs, photomontages and related work by best-selling French novelist Michel Houellebecq, one of Europe’s most controversial cultural figures. Comprising two distinct environments conceived specifically by Houellebecq for VENUS, the show is his first in the United States. It will remain on view through August 4th.

Although Michel Houellebecq (b. 1958, La Réunion, France) has taken pictures for decades, he began exhibiting these images only a few years ago. Houellebecq’s photography is intimately linked to his writing practice, and he often composes scenes in his books while looking at a photograph he shot. At the invitation of Jean de Loisy, the President of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, Houellebecq conceived and mounted his first exhibition in 2016 – an

ambitious multipart presentation called *Rester Vivant (To Stay Alive)*, foregrounding his photography against a dense multimedia narrative that unfolded through a sequence of galleries. For *French Bashing* at VENUS, Houellebecq has re-conceptualized and tailored two portions of *Rester Vivant*, completely transforming the gallery’s New York space with darkened walls, engineered lighting, floor coverings, and immersive soundscapes composed in collaboration with Raphaël Sohier.

French Bashing provides two visions of Western Europe as expressed by Michel Houellebecq. On view in the first room at VENUS is a set of photographs that variously depict train stations, tollbooths, apartment buildings, and movie theaters. Hung on darkly painted walls and individually lit with framing projectors, these images assemble a dystopian vision of France familiar from Houellebecq’s novels. Bleakly desaturated, the photographs capture the atmosphere of what Houellebecq calls “peri-urban” zones: despondent suburban areas surrounding larger cities where homes are valued according to their proximity to arteries of public transportation. Houellebecq superimposes lines from his novels and poetry onto some of these photographs. The first image visitors encounter in the exhibition bears the sentence, “It’s time to place your bets,” a quotation from Houellebecq’s poem “The Memory of the Sea;” the right panel of a large triptych bears a phrase from Houellebecq’s 2015 novel, *Submission*: “I had no more reason to kill myself than most of these people did.” In concert with Sohier’s ambient soundtrack, these enigmatic and provocative bits of language contribute to an ominous feeling throughout the space. Houellebecq’s point is driven home by the image of a crumbling concrete sign of the word “EUROPE,” suggesting a vision of a continent on the verge of decomposition.

In the next room, Houellebecq has produced an environment of a distinctly different nature. Here the floor is covered with garish laminated placemats advertising such tourist destinations as St. Tropez and Port-la-Nouvelle. Hung on bright white walls with fluorescent lighting, a group of photographs converge around visions of tourism. Heavily saturated images depict kitschy tour buses, coastal views, and beachside condos in France and Spain. One of these offers an aerial view of a Leader Price discount store that appears wedged into the side of a mountain. Like the images in the first room, the scenes Houellebecq shows here are eerily uninhabited. But in this well-lit space, elements of the natural world seem to encroach upon disused manmade structures. A brighter soundtrack, also composed by Sohier, fills the space with the sounds of vacation towns: children playing, people laughing, and the audio evidence of merriment in the distance.

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ABOUT MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ

Michel Houellebecq's reputation as one of France's most provocative cultural figures has grown over the course of his nearly three-decade career, through a series of novels that address subjects as varied as Islam, sexual tourism, and contemporary art. Widely discussed and often hotly contested, Houellebecq is also one of France's most critically acclaimed novelists. In 2010, his book about the contemporary art world, *La carte et le territoire (The Map and the Territory)*, was awarded the Prix Goncourt, France's highest literary honor. In 2015, Houellebecq published *Soumission (Submission)*, a novel about the democratic election of a Muslim president who unexpectedly decides to govern the French state according to strict Islamic law. In a macabre turn of events, Houellebecq's novel was published on the same day as the tragic Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris; in a dark coincidence, that week's issue of the magazine featured a cartoon of Houellebecq on the cover, alongside the caption "The Predictions of Wizard Houellebecq." Houellebecq's production, however, has never been limited to writing, and in 2016, he mounted a widely discussed and extremely well attended exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo called *Rester Vivant (To Stay Alive)*, which featured a sweeping multimedia installation of Houellebecq's photography, filmmaking, and writing.

ABOUT VENUS

Founded in 2012 by Adam Lindemann and with spaces in Manhattan and Los Angeles, VENUS is dedicated to curated exhibitions both historic and contemporary, which cast a unique and often iconoclastic view on the work of established artists, or artists whose works have been somewhat overlooked. The gallery continues to collaborate with prominent artists, foundations, estates, and galleries.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at info@venusovermanhattan.com

For all press inquiries related to the exhibition, please email press@venusovermanhattan.com