



Harold Ancart

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by Martha Kirszenbaum
1/3

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HAROLD ANCART “Sous les palmiers, la plage” at La Chaussette, Brussels by Martha Kirszenbaum



installation view “Sous les palmiers, la plage”

There is an imperceptible breath of mystery floating in the air over Brussels’s La Chaussette, where New York-based Belgian artist Harold Ancart presents his first European solo exhibition “Sous les palmiers, la plage”.

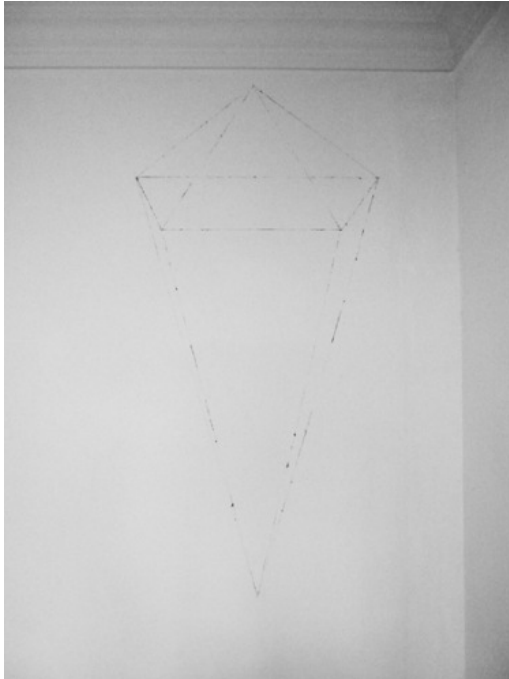
The first element that catches the viewer’s eye in this exhibition is the chrome-mirrored floor, which deepens the white walled setting, reflecting every object therein with a blurred and pale replica: an immaterial floating diamond and a few elements directly taken from popular culture of leisure and tourism —a healthy yet abandoned palm-tree, and a large poster-size reproduction of a paradisiacal beach.

The installation is all about contrasts and superimpositions: the harshness of the trashed walls and the silver floor opposes the supposed lightness of a palm-tree and a beach while the physicality of the tree versus the immateriality of the diamond installed right above the vegetation is no less oppositional. Harold Ancart seems to be maliciously juggling with symbols in reverse, playing with utopian images and disavowing certain rules. Even the title is an act of defiance towards conventions: “Sous les pavés, la plage” was a famous motto from May ’68 in Paris, whereas “Sous les palmiers, la plage” appears as a tautological, again mirrored expression.



Harold Ancart

2/3



installation view "Sous les palmiers, la plage"

Ancart's most captivating piece in the show is a large esoteric diamond made of pieces of strings floating above the palm-tree. It is rising to the heavens while the tree seems to be rooted in the soil. By way of a subtle trick, akin to those used by magicians to delude their audience, the artist blackened parts of the strings with soot-like thick matter while leaving its extremities transparent, that which gives the diamond a floating aspect of a moving planet. If the work evokes Fred Sanback's yarn pieces, Ancart's compositions do not intend to geometrically divide the space, but rather to punctuate and structure it with levitating pieces of material.



installation view "Sous les palmiers, la plage"



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3/3



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Oscillating between a fascination for dirtiness, residue and destruction, and a visual attraction for minimalism, the artist has thrown handfuls of charcoal on some of the gallery's walls. The projected black powder disintegrates as if a fire had eroded the white cube, but remains aligned parallel to the ceiling. This in-situ intervention is a spatial mark and a sign of absence. Ancart's works do not actually function as objects, but as elements determining a situation. Burning and dust are materials and techniques he often uses, particularly in his large double-sided drawings that also express the organic aspect of the artist's body of works. Another burnt vision in the exhibition is indeed the beach poster, a random postcard found on the internet that Ancart has altered with a flame made of raphia strings dunked in turpentine and touches of soot.

Whether he digs the matter or physically attacks the space, Harold Ancart's practice heavily suggests expressionist gestures such as projecting, throwing, pulling and burning. The results of these actions can be interpreted as traces or evidences of an elliptical presence, transforming minimalist aesthetics into calls for chance and hazardous actions, mysterious apparitions and the magic of a given situation.



installation view "Sous les palmiers, la plage"