

# Philosophy meets Art meets Writing: Benoît Maire at the CAPC

**French Waves**

Special Guests Aug 15, 2018

**Benoît Maire talks to TLmag about his major solo exhibition, *Thèbes*, currently on show at the CAPC, Bordeaux, and the thinking and process behind his work**

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Benoît Maire entitled *Thèbes*. The exhibition, curated by Alice Motard, brings together over 80 pieces in three new series entitled *Cloud Paintings*, *War Newspapers* and *Castles*, which include paintings, sculptures, films, furniture and everyday objects. The works, in typical Maire style, straddle the boundaries between art and philosophy as he explores the concept of *differend*—a French word which describes two people opposed by a conflict that cannot be resolved as there is no language to express the problem between them.

*Thèbes* is accompanied by the first signature monograph of Maire, designed by the London-based studio Åbäke. It covers nearly 15 years of Maire's multi-media works and thinking with contributions by other artists, designers and philosophers.

Benoît Maire chats with TLmag about his practice and the exhibition:

**TLmag: You work across many disciplines—philosophy, art making and writing—do they all inform each other?**

Benoît Maire: Yes, I think so, but it's difficult to know how this plays out. I guess some ideas can be "translated" into different mediums. When I'm writing a film or a text I deal with similar ideas. But, in a film, it will be more allegorical and less didactic. I mean, in a film an idea can be there, but it does not need to be explained as it would need to be in a philosophical text.

**Can you explain your process of working on a project?**

I work a lot with "life experiences", I really use what happens in life. Things people say give me ideas. I read books also, I'm reading Italo Calvino at this very moment. I look at art. It gives me desire. The desire to answer in the same medium to other painters (whether they are dead, or they are my "colleagues").

**What are some recurring questions that you find yourself asking when working?**

There was the idea of the repetition in 2008. Then I was working on tables in 2010. Measuring tools happened in 2012 (although, I call weapons, as they destroy our relationship to nature while we are constantly measuring it). Then I got onto the idea of waste in 2014, then causality and origin, more recently.

**With almost 80 works in the exhibition, was it difficult to weave a narrative between them or do they sit on their own?**

The linking narrative is the question of the origin of all the elements humankind creates or is surrounded by. I wanted to question mankind's relationship to objects. This created the narrative of the project and, as like in an old tragic play, there is also the creation of a particular space-time.

Space is defined in my show by *Cloud Paintings*. This is a special place and space. The relation to time is defined by the war news-papers that are hung very low in the show as if the written-history is addressing kids.

**The CAPC exhibition blurb states that your exhibition “aims to tackle the ambient sense of disquiet and danger menacing a society weighed down by perpetual self-questioning”. Can you expand on this? Why are these themes important at this current moment in time?**

I wanted to question our relation to “war ” but with a distance. I don’t like to refer too directly to our society by using shocking images or sentences taken from here and there. I like to question the substance of how we live but from another angle. Also, I guess some of the trouble we actually face derives from the world resolution conflict of 1945, amongst other things.

**I find the *War Newspapers* series really fascinating, it seems to me that you become a commentator of the past in a very subtle but pointed way by displaying newspapers from WWII and then circling one word on each them, creating a new story. How did you choose which word to circle? What inspired this piece?**

This project questions our relationship to society. I used old newspapers, but I didn’t just take them on the wall as ready-made documents. I insisted on reading each of them to penetrate another way of expressing history (the language of them is a bit different to language now). I found that there was a continuity between problems that humanity lived with 80 years ago and the problems of today. So, to emphasize this idea of “reading”, I circled just one word that describes a general concept I found in that particular paper which I also find particularly relevant for today.

**What was the process of making the monograph of the past 15 years of your work like?**

I worked with Alice Motard and Romaric Favre to make decisions about it. I wanted something classical, so we decided that it would be two essays and an interview, then images. I also decided to ask the author Magali Nachtergaele to rework a beautiful text she had previously published in a magazine. I invited Mieke Bal, a Dutch cultural theorist whose work I admire a lot, to write about my paintings. Rahma Kazam is an art historian and critic who is really into contemporary philosophy so I decided to do the interview with her.

I also asked Vincent Honoré, a curator with whom I work a lot, to organize a visual essay. He gave a shape and a path, to my 15 years of work...

*Thèbes will be on display at CAPC until September 2. It will then travel to Bristol to be shown at Spike Island from October 5 to December 16.*



All images: Exposition Benoît Maire, Thèbes, CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, 8 mars-16 septembre 2018.





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