

galerie michèle chomette

24 rue Beaubourg 75003 Paris

FRANCOIS MECHAIN

The String 1980-2010

Solo exhibition : 5 November – 18 December 2010 (except 10 & 11/11)

Opening (to be attended by the artist): Thursday 4 November, 5:00 – 9:00 pm

For the 30th annual Mois de la Photo in Paris, entitled "Paris Collects", the Michèle Chomette gallery, which is around the same age, and is attached, as ever, to its mission as trail-blazer, underground explorer and prospector, is taking a look both backwards and forwards, with an exhibition, *The String*, by François Méchain, the first of its leading artists to have had work acquired by Paris-Audiovisuel, which is now the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (MEP).

A taut string stretches out between the 1984 triptych *The Sea* and the 2009-2010 *Walls* – between sculpture, with an injunction to photographic existence, and photography, treated as sculpture of the world. Across continents, from one drilling down, one raising up to another, this string vibrates with the history of places, that of people, that of forms, in an arc like a bow tensed by the source idea of each project, and the body that has put it into practice, whether in the heart of nature or abutted to a city.

Méchain is bound hand and foot to the earth – the one that nourishes the living, receives the dead, and gives artists their best lessons in scale and humility; the one from which he has long and exclusively drawn his raw materials, both mineral and vegetable, for sculptures integrated into locations like ephemeral landscaping acts, before being returned to nature, once immortalised by photography (for whose perspective he produces them) in a transformed artistic status.

For some years, however, he has been enlarging his field of sense and purpose, as well as his range of materials, with in situ installations that denote a more critical, more political form of art, which has now become explicit beyond the frame of reference of consciousness that could already be glimpsed in those previous works of his which suggested, let us say, an ecological orientation.

The string bends the bow, and arrows are shot with a steady hand, a sure aim, whatever the fault, the flaw, the ineptitude targeted by Méchain, whether planetary, national or just human, and whether they belong to history or vitiate the present. This is a resolute artist who takes a stand in appropriated places with simple systems that can be interpreted by anyone.

The act, the formal presence, always involves sculpture, though the constituents are now different, and generally commonplace (containers, knife blades, chairs, ladders). The discourse is more radical, more monolithic, sometimes less poetic; but it is of a piece, as a block of sense that strikes home and makes reflection mandatory. It has gone from attitude to questioning, then on to positioning.

So where might photography situate itself, in all this? Whereas it provoked, innervated and catalysed Méchain's in situ work between 1980 and 2005, the fact is that, though still indispensable, it has recently become something like a change of space and an organ for the visual transmission of more numerous perceptions, and thus apprehensions, through exhibitions and books.

In the context of the linkages and interacting impulses that constitute the Mois de la Photo, 2010, I felt I might usefully draw attention to an artist whose path has on several occasions crossed that of the MEP in an ongoing spirit of reciprocal recognition.

Michèle Chomette

Wednesday to Saturday 2pm – 8pm and by appointment tel 33 (0)1 42 78 05 62 fax 33 (0)1 42 72 62 05
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