



Wednesday, 6 August 2014 by Esther Anatolitis

ARRÊT SUR IMAGES: ERIC HATTAN AND SEVERIN KUHN

Since 2009, R&Art has presented a summertime work which offers an artist the rare opportunity to take the entire alpine village of Vercorin as starting point, inspiration and canvas. This extraordinary undertaking is led by director Jean Maurice Varone with his partner, Marie-Françoise Perruchoud-Massy, and has featured the work of maverick site transformers Felice Varini, Lang/Baumann, Riccardo Blumer and Les Frères Chapuisat. This year, Eric Hattan and Severin Kuhn have added new layers to this complex project by presenting video works within disused and abandoned buildings across the iconic Vercorin housing scheme – for the first time, casting the viewer across a network spanning the village’s familiar and unfamiliar spaces.

Meaning “freeze frame” in French, the title suggests a rest, the reframing of a single moment or viewpoint, the random outcome of a technical malfunction, a pause in transmission, or conversely, the selection of a privileged perspective. Hattan and Kuhn have captured an array of moving images that present the movements and energies, the reflection and repose, the light and sound of the village’s Swiss context. These are shown using projectors, chunky old televisions or contemporary screens, and then installed for personal discovery in twelve of Vercorin’s unused or abandoned buildings.

“C’est les choses qui sont très ordinaire, très simple, qu’on ne voit pas,” says Jean Maurice. “C’est pas forcément les choses spectaculaires, c’est les choses subtiles. Douze ambiances différentes.”

Eschewing spectacle, these subtle images offer moving freeze frames for quiet introspection. Among images of land, water, sky, built form and its inhabitants, the artists’ recurring interests emerge as themes throughout the work. There is frequently the juxtaposition of flows: the busy entrance to the nearby Sierre railway station, and a beehive; the fast-moving Rhône, and the freeway that skirts Sierre; the erratic viewpoint from a little boat in the river (which then unexpectedly, joyfully, tips over, showing instead the underwater view), alongside the fixed linear view downward from the telecabine (not a ski lift but a principal form of commuter transport between Vercorin and Sierre). (I take the telecabine one day and am simultaneously unnerved and delighted by its almost vertical drop – a reminder of the extremes of this extruded glacial form.)

One space shows a series of tvs arranged so as to line up their perspectives neatly, and then to disorient the viewer by showing us roundabout journey after roundabout journey with the camera focused on the sculpture in the middle – a rare 360 degree view of an artwork which was designed to be viewed in movement, but in practice is rarely ever appreciated except on approach.

Another space inadvertently offers a view into the unconscious. Committed as they were to introducing only a minimum of objects and leaving each space as it was found, Hattan and Kuhn present one space which re-composes each found object as one densely textured wall, with the tv becoming just another such object with each image it shows. That the building is owned by the village psychiatrist only adds to its density, with each object’s relation to its cramped neighbour offering rich insights – or misleading half-truths. (Incidentally, the psychiatrist is now committed to leaving the objects in this new configuration; he too has delighted in the new set of meanings they present.)

In a village of only 500, each building is a known quantity. And to the unfamiliar eye, each building is a sculptural work itself, made many hundreds of years ago in wood, with many homes proudly bearing a hand-lettered inscription announcing the owners’ joy at having constructed a new home among such good people. In the winter landscape, their contrast against the quiet white is striking; in summer, their place among the alpine greens looks

perfectly natural and humanistic; year-round, their architecture is legally protected.

These dark pitch-roofed structures, regularly formed and ever-darkening with age, are scattered across a small area which is roughly oval in shape, offering Blumer a clear path for his *Progettare il limite* (2011). There is no open square, but there are a couple of open intersections, offering Lang/Baumann a point of origin for *Street Painting 5* (2010). To destroy a house in the name of art would be difficult, but rickety abandoned ones exist, such as the one reinterpreted as a base for a wooden experiment in structure and form by Les Frères Chapisat for their *La résidence secondaire* (2012). And given the vertiginous topography of the region, multiple viewpoints on their entire village are possible, which was the starting point for the stunning work that launched the series, Varini's *Cercle et suite d'éclats* (2009).

Hattan and Kuhn take advantage of all of these physical attributes and more in ordering their library of objects into Vercorin's former homes and storage spaces. *Arrêt sur Images* succeeds magnificently in charging these protected buildings with new value, and importantly, it charges each inhabitant to reevaluate their town, often stepping for the very first time into buildings long abandoned. Locals and visitors are distributed across Vercorin like Lang/Baumann's colours or Blumer's illuminated ribbon, becoming themselves the moving objects in the village's freeze frame, and distributing ever new perspectives and meanings.

Eric Hattan with Severin Kuhn

Arrêt sur Images

The fifth edition of the R&Art whole-of-town artworks

Vercorin, 20 July to 7 September 2014

Thursdays to Sundays 3:00pm-8:00pm

Vercorin is accessible by road or by train and telecabine via Sierre.

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