



Emilien Simon

Forests and skies

CENTRALE
FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

box

Place Sainte-Catherine 44
1000 Brussels
www.centrale.brussels

Emilien Simon

Emilien Simon (born in Dinant, 1990) lives and works in Brussels. He has developed his artistic practice in the serigraphy workshop at the Arba-Esa before continuing and refining his research at the Kask in media art. He was recently the City of Brussels' laureate at the Prix Médiatine 2019.

<https://definitivementpeut-etre.tumblr.com/>

Conversation Between Emilien Simon & Tania Nasielski

(Audio recording [French] of the
26.10.20 – Spotify link: <https://open.spotify.com/episode/5BPdSkAcqQQfXGuxWzUdZS>)

T: Hello Emilien

E: Hello Tania

T: How are you?

E: As good as ever, better than the world.

T: Great, I'm happy to see you here today.

E: Me too, at last.

T: At last. We are here to talk about your project for CENTRALE.box which is due to open at the end of November. For this exhibition you were awarded the prize 'Ville de Bruxelles' as part of the 'Prix Médiatine'. Together, we dubbed it 'Forests and Skies'. 'Forests' because of the way your sound sculptures sometimes look like woodlands and 'Skies' for the skies displayed on the screens you exhibit.

You use different media: sound, image, video and installation. Would you mind telling us about your work process and how the medium is in a state of perpetual renewal?

E: What I find especially interesting in the title 'Forests and Skies' is that it refers to a landscape, which can be a format or a painting genre. Landscapes constitute a rather classical form of art. Everyone knows this paradigm, both in old paintings and on modern screens. But truth be told, looking at a canvas or at a smartphone are different things. And I believe that – with the installations in my work – I fit between these two things in a perspectivistic way. When you look at a screen, you witness a process quite

enigmatic and you don't understand the mechanisms at work. Except if you're a coder or work in IT. Personally, I tend to ask myself: 'How is it possible that I can see a picture on my phone?' On the other hand, when looking at a painting, most people wonder what it means, not how it was made.

With 'Forests and Skies', I want to offer a fully immersive experience that's not fully pictorial or digital. For that purpose I'll be using perceptible phenomena that can be found in nature, in heat, or in motion. For this exhibition, a CRT screen will show films. Then the images will be converted into sounds based on video frequency. The part I find most interesting in this process is that it gives a sense of depth to the landscape. Unlike a painting or a screen, the idea here will be to infuse a whole space with warmth, motion, movement-caused heat and visible sound frequencies. It's this perspectivism that gives substance to the installations and to the whole exhibition. The devices I'll be using for this are not especially intended for creating art, they mostly are stage equipment. But that doesn't mean that they are deprived of poetry and ontology. After all, 'overcoming the limitations of the medium', also means overcoming the usual meaning associated with its components. Through this process, new meanings appear. And on top of conveying a message, this contraption also creates a sense of interaction with the exhibition.

T: This new approach in the medium and its components stretch through the space and so through CENTRALE.box, creating an immersive installation. Personally, what I found particularly striking when I saw your work in progress in your studio was the poetry that came out of this assemblage of really simple

elements. The forest was brought to mind by an arrangement of rebars, a sculpture in the space. And the skies were made of abstract images displayed on the CRT screen, they were surrounded by a colourful halo that evoked a rainbow or an iridescent reflection. The very poetry of it seemed unaware. On the other hand, this setting requires a lot forethought. Realising that the work is actually not very technological or digital is quite interesting, it's nearly handiwork. You use one of those old CRT screens, and the sound comes from the transformation of the image. Which brings me to the corporality and physicality of your work, which is quite immersive. It's quite amazing and it makes us wonder how it was achieved. Would you mind telling us, or is it a secret recipe?

E: Actually, there is nothing mysterious about it. It's an assembly of old and new technologies. And what I find interesting is to find permeability in it. By doing so, one can discover unforeseen applications and exceed the nature of these mediums. I aim to demonstrate that there can be an interesting tension between a definite set of objects and the result they can produce. I try to adopt a strategy that would link the device's use and the result it'll have in my work. For instance, a lightbulb can create both heat and motion or – another example – a video on a CRT screen will produce sound based on a very simple mechanism. However, films belong to the digital medium, so we truly go from one story to the next and change point in time. Even though those are not technically supposed to interact. They create their own new language, leaving behind their very nature.

T: So the visitors of your exhibition in CENTRALE.box will truly be immersed in a

setting that combines sound sculptures and video screens.

E: In fact, it'll be a sculpture of sound and light. And then, it'll become some kind of heat and motion. I don't exactly know for now what form the exhibition will take, but I figure it'll be rather immersive and perception-based. By that I mean that the fluctuations in light from the film I made will directly stretch across the space. And then, there are all these objects that seem to be communicating themselves. Even though there is no telling whether they are physically connected. In any case, they are linked in their meaning, in their use or in their nature. Because I use light, heat, motion and sound. I examine how to create colour from motion or sound from light using contraptions that I make up as it goes. By the way, my use of CRT screens has nothing to do with nostalgia. There is no way to get the same physicality and vibration with a plasma or touch screen. Modern screens are similar to the rendition of a painting, it's only figuration whereas with my work it's less representational and more sensorial. In a way, my work gives the impression that you are walking through a painting rather than looking at it.

T: So we are part of the landscape.

E: Exactly.