

Michel



Ritter

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Air Power = Peace Power 3.10.2021–29.01.2022

ACCESS TO THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE EXHIBITION



PROGRAMM
Transcription über Johannes Brahms' Lied:
„Mitternacht“ - „Wah' das wir scheiden
müssen, von Il. Nacht.“
Spezialnote für Konzertist.

MICHEL RITTER, *AIR POWER = PEACE POWER*

Kunsthalle Friart

03.10.2021 – 29.01.2022

Friart is highlighting the work of Swiss artist Michel Ritter (1949–2006), who was also the founder and, between 1990 and 2002, the first director of the art centre. The exhibition focuses on several series of collages on paper made by the artist in the late 1970s. It also presents installations, sculptures and films that give an insight into the artist's formal ingenuity aimed towards a critical view of the West.

Michel Ritter began making art at the same time whilst travelling around the world at a young age. The experiences he gathered on his travels influenced a practice that consisted in diverting the foundations of an excessive visual culture through the use of minimal expressive gestures. In a manner of poetic justice, the artist, through subtle gestures that alter the subjects depicted, takes the images out of the constant flow of current events and the particular form of amnesia that they impose. This anthropological take on the staging of everyday life is in dialogue with American art of the time, where the artist repeatedly spent longer periods.

The exhibition offers an overview of a practice that spans thirty years and marks the anachronistic rediscovery of a singular work. It has been organised in collaboration with the estate Succession Michel Ritter (Paris) and will be the subject of a first catalogue to be published in 2022.

The exhibition is the artist's most important to date. His work is currently managed by Dorota Dolega-Ritter, head of the Michel Ritter Estate (Paris).



Exhibition view, Michel Ritter, *Air Power = Peace Power*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris. Photo : Guillaume Pyhton

Introduction

The Michel Ritter exhibition *Air Power = Peace Power* marks the rediscovery of the oeuvre of an important figure in Swiss contemporary art. Michel Ritter was the founder and first director of Friart (1990 to 2002) and the exhibition has been organized to take place on the different levels of the Friart building in homage to his contribution to the art centre. It offers a window onto his artistic production, which, up until now, has been overshadowed by his curatorial work.

From the 1970s to 2000, from Fribourg to New York, Michel Ritter produced a body of work of great coherence that drew on several notable influences: a critical sensitivity with respect to Western viewpoints inspired by worldwide travel during his youth, the Swiss artists to whom he was close and the conceptual practices and pictorial and media strategies of the art of the 1970s. By means of minimal interventions, the appropriation of everyday images and the unusual combination of everyday objects, the artist offered an oblique perspective on the visually saturated environment of the end of the last century. So doing, he also contributed to the shift towards a new anthropological apprehension of visual culture, whereby images were considered as much through an architectural, as a social and intellectual lens.



Exhibition view, Michel Ritter, *Air Power = Peace Power*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. Photo : Guillaume Pyhton

Works on paper

Works on paper presented on the first floor, many of them showed for the first time, constitute the heart of the exhibition. They were composed with pencil, watercolours, perforations, wadding and sticky tape that alters, or even obstructs representations of the Western world. They are inhabited by a sensibility that is cinematic in its rhythms and relationship to montage. This poetic of appropriation short-circuits the apprehension of images in terms of their news and current events dimension.

The works reserve a significant place for emptiness, free space. The materials used give body to the air, to breath and put the accent on the ethereal, the gaseous state. This extreme state of matter symbolises the immaterial future of images, as well as the coming obsolescence that is the fate of each new image. This romantic derealisation places us face to face with a silent poetic justice that masks the militant dimension of a work activated by impotence in the face of the scandals of the present.



Michel Ritter, *Untitled*, ca. 1978. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris. Photo : Julie Folly



Michel Ritter, *Untitled*, undated. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris. Photo : Julie Folly

Installations

In the 1980s, Ritter's practice freed itself and moved towards more sculptural forms and installations, as can be seen in the later works and the films presented in the exhibition: our reflection distorted by bubbles of soap; the mountainous mentality of a Switzerland with enclosed horizons evoked in gas canisters plugged with the heads of chamois; the propulsion of a model plane on perforated barrel organ paper roll; plastic soldiers balanced on an inflatable cushion. These sculptural works play with a tension between visible and invisible matter that this tension gives form to: an incarnation of a pneumatic energy, of that which moves or agitates, of that which is transformed, affects and takes place.

The title of the exhibition *Air Power = Peace Power* is taken from a slogan for an American Air Force recruitment campaign; a panel that the artist brought back in his suitcase from one of his stays in the US. This appropriation and the inversion of meaning it produces once inserted into this artistic context remind us how criticism of the domination of space is also, always, a poetic art in Michel Ritter's work.



Michel Ritter, *Untitled*, ca. 1990, Installation view *Air Power = Peace Power*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. Courtesy of Olivier Suter. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris.
Photo : Guillaume Pyhton

Films

The exhibition also presents an overview of the filmic work of the artist in a black box created for the occasion.

In his films, Michel Ritter works on the perceived reality of images framed by the camera lense and alters it with visual and auditory interventions: Symbols are related to everyday objects, spaces infused with smoke, movement and sound. In this conceptual approach, the image is taken out of its representative state as information bearer and given its own identity, outside of its fast circulation in both media and communication.

The artist's films are inspired by conceptual cinema, and early video art strategies. They are often part of larger environments conceived by the artist. His animation films redistribute and document part of his assemblage and sculptural work.



Michel Ritter, *Untitled*, 2'9", Fri-Art 81, Installation view *Air Power = Peace Power*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris. Photo Guillaume Python



Michel Ritter, *Animated movies, Untitled*, 6'26", unknown date, Installation view *Air Power = Peace Power*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris. Photo Guillaume Python

Watch the films of Michel Ritter



Michel Ritter, *Lumières*, 1982, 2'25". © Succession Michel Ritter, Paris

Biography

Michel Ritter was a Swiss artist and curator born in 1949 in Fribourg and died on 2 May 2007 in Paris.

In 1969, he undertook various travels around the globe over a period of 4 years to India, Nepal, Mexico, Australia and South America. Back in Fribourg in 1974, he founded the RB Gallery with his friend, the artist Bruno Baeriswyl, where he exhibited his own work in 1976 and 1978. He made several trips to New York where he became familiar with contemporary art and became the first occupant of the artist's studio of the Canton of Fribourg in New York in 1979. In 1980, he had a solo exhibition at the independent art venue Franklin Furnace in New York. In 1987, he participated in the Furkart 87 exhibition at Furkapass. In 1993, he exhibited at the Espace d'Art Contemporain in Lausanne.

Michel Ritter was the founder and director of Friart between 1990 and 2002, where he organised important solo exhibitions and worked with artists such as David Hammons, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Renée Green, Shirin Neshat, Thomas Hirschhorn, Christian Marclay, Jimmie Durham, Bernd & Hilla Becher, Julia Scher, Mark Dion, Valentin Carron and Steven Parrino, among others. He was also director of the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris between 2002 and 2007 and was recipient of the Meret Oppenheim Prize by the Federal Office of Culture to leading figures in Swiss contemporary art in 2005.



Portrait of Michel Ritter, undated. Photo : Jean-Luc Cramatte

PARALLEL TO THE EXHIBITION

Ceylan Öztrük, *Matter of non*

Kunsthalle Friart

03.10.2021 – 29.1.2022

Friart presents an important exhibition by the Swiss-based Turkish artist Ceylan Öztrük. At the base of Öztrük's work is a fundamental reflection on the very possibility of sculpture, which is never assumed to be self-evident. In *Matter of non*, the artist deals with the poetic expression of matter's in/determinate origin. The show presents itself as a series of spatial aphorisms (about the relationship between existence and death) that simultaneously fulfill and relieve each other. Inspired by quantum physics as much as by psychoanalysis, *Matter of non* is an attempt to integrate matter into its non/existent matrix. In this address, the body — a central referent in the history of sculpture normally divided between language and flesh — must yield to the vertigo of the inhuman.

The exhibition is accompanied by a prose text written by Ceylan Öztrük, which collects clues in a narrative space of its own. Finding its diffracted way through language and matter, spacing, as an idea and a practice, works allegorically.



Exhibition view, Ceylan Oztruk, *Matter of non*, Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg, 2021. Courtesy of Kunsthalle Friart Fribourg

**Access to the documentation of the exhibition of
Ceylan Öztrük, *Matter of non***

FRIART AGENDA

18.12.2021, 16:00 - 20:00 (FR/DE)

Michel Ritter Special Day

Guided tour of the exhibition and screening of Michel Ritter's films presented by Nicolas Brulhart

8.01.2022, 19:00 - 22:00

Friar

Nocturne and visit of the exhibitions

Opening hours

Wednesday to Friday: 12am - 6pm

Saturday and Sunday: 1pm - 6pm

Monday and Tuesday: by appointment (info@fri-art.ch)

Art education

info@fri-art.ch

Complete program

www.fri-art.ch

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Friart is sponsored by:

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