

LE SHED

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE NORMANDIE

SITE GRESLAND

From May 5 to July 14, 2024

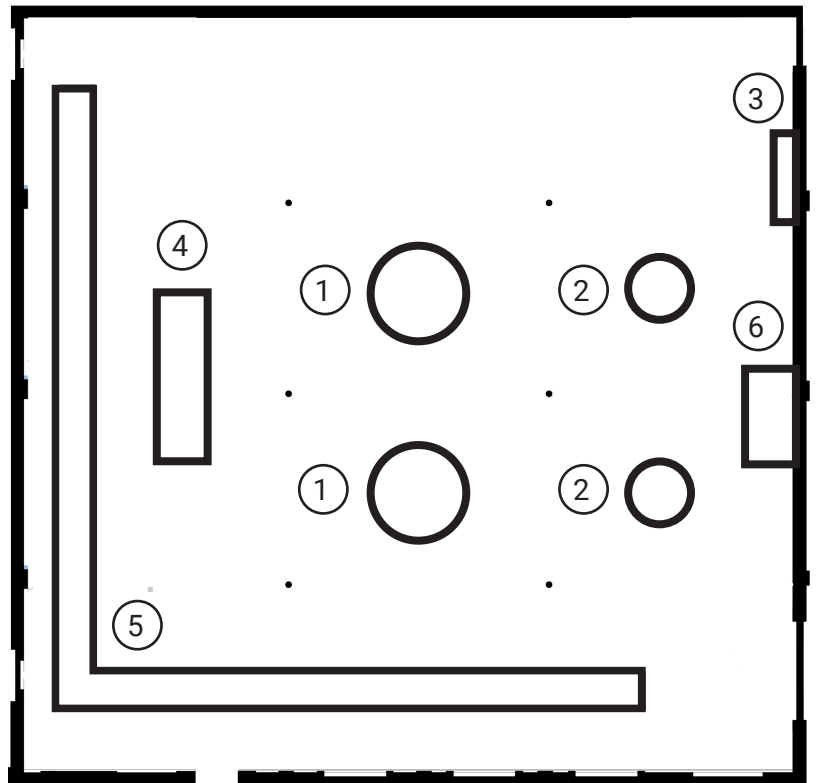
Free admission on Wednesday,
Saturday and Sunday

from 2 pm to 6 pm and on request

UNE AUTRE FIN DU MONDE EST POSSIBLE¹

THOMAS TEURLAI

- ① **Tower Farm, 2020**
Aeroponic² beets cultivation column, LED full spectrum lights, 15 gallon plastic barells (of Romanian dog food), water sprinklers, nutrient solution.
- ② **Bullroarer, 2016**
Two bullroarers³ weighted with sneakers activated by ceiling fans.
- ③ **Épileptoid #1, 2024**
Drawing engraved on glass floodlit with a LED strip.
- ④ **Vitriol, 2024**
Tree trunk plated with copper by electrolysis, suspended above a tank filled with a copper sulfate solution.
- ⑤ **220 Volts, 2024**
Copper and zinc 220 voltaic cells (batteries), manufactured on the model of the Volta battery⁴ soaked in salt water and bathed in a conductive copper sulfate solution, which fills the channels⁵ of the exhibition space.
- ⑥ **Court-circuit⁶, 2024**
Drip of fermented beet juice, distilled into a fuse box, alternately interrupting and restoring its power supply and the lighting of the exhibition space.



A big thank-you to Ortolano and
Félix Callier for their valuable help in the
building of this exhibition.

AS A PART OF THE FESTIVAL

 NORMANDIE
IMPRESSIONNISTE

In his exhibition at Le SHED, Thomas Teurlai presents 5 sculptures along with an *in situ* intervention, made of used metal supplies provided by Momo La Récup⁷. While these works match the conventional definition of sculpture – a three-dimensional form that can be walked around – these mechanical sculptures also embody the attributes allotted to machines⁸. Powered by electricity, they *produce an effect*: a motor-driven fan vibrates a bullroarer; the beetroot plants grow, nourished by a mist of enriched water delivered by a programmed pump; and a dripping mechanism intermittently reconnects the lighting to the electric circuit.

In this exhibit at Le SHED, and more broadly throughout Thomas' work, electricity is more than just energy converted into motion. It is the material itself in *220 Volts*, a set of 220 batteries set in the ducts framing the exhibition space – where, historically, electricity may have ran to power the braiding machines for candlewicks manufactured in the building. It also manifests in *Vitriol*, created through electrolysis, in a bath the same indigo blue colour as the dye used in Rouen's spinning mills. I wonder if it wouldn't be Thomas Teurlai's primary material: an electricity-sculptor as one would say a stone-cutter.

Nevertheless, to refer to craftsmanship might be misleading: Thomas did not learn his techniques from traditional means. Instead, he prefers to scour YouTube, absorbing tutorials where people like him share their knowledge on subjects like copper plating and hydroponics. It's actually on the Internet that he learned about the "Bagdad Battery": over 2000-year-old ceramic pots, found in the 1930s in Iraq, containing pieces of copper, zinc and traces of a conductive liquid. Some archaeologists saw this as evidence of the Mesopotamians' knowledge of electrolysis, possibly used by counterfeiters to plate silver onto base metals. The hypothesis gained traction in a US science-fiction magazine, was then popularized in European museums and later amplified by conspiracy theories about ancient electrical mastery passed down by aliens... Today, we are a little less sure: the vases may have also been used to store scrolls or to plug wineskins...

Regardless, the Bagdad Battery story highlights the speculative⁹ nature of science and the enduring fascination with electricity, which retains a magical aura. Let's remember that even some engineers

considered themselves as magicians: Nikola Tesla's shows are well known but less so is Thomas Edison's attempt to create a "machine to speak with the dead", parallel to his phonograph research (after all, he was nicknamed the "The Wizard of Menlo Park"). It's amusing to think that he could have used a mere bullroarer: this instrument, with traces and fossils dating back to the Palaeolithic, is still used by Aboriginal people to communicate with the dead. Reactivated at Le SHED, it hums above our heads, opening channels to other potential time frames.

Thomas Teurlai seems to invite us to reconcile art with technology, poetry with science, rationality with mysticism – concepts that historically coexisted without the antagonism introduced by modernity. In his series *Epileptoid*, he reinterprets alchemists' drawings. From phenomena they observed and experimented with, they had established a knowledge crossing science, technique and magic, that they documented in a pictorial language known as "the language of the birds": a poetic code, cryptic enough to elude religious censorship.

Reflecting on the artworks' aura and its disappearance in the age of reproduction, as observed by Walter Benjamin, I wonder if Thomas Teurlai isn't offering us, paradoxically, a way to re-enchant the world through machines. Ultimately, his sculptures breathe, sigh and hum generating a multi-layered-time-experience, where intersect/coexist Palaeolithic men, a grieving Edison, a martyred Giordano Bruno and we, the living, as in the laminated moiré of *Tower Farm's* silvering mirror veils rustling in the wind.

Julie Faitot,
mai 2024

(translation : Anne-Sarah Sanchez,
proofreading : Julie Faitot)

1. Another End of the World is possible.

2. Form of off-soil cultivation provided by vertical structures, through permanent vaporisation of nutritive solutions.

3. Ritual wind instrument from Oceania, South America and Sub-Saharan Africa, from the family of aerophones using the friction of ambient air to create sound.

4. First functioning battery, invented by Alessandro Volta approx. 1800

5. Conduit that can be used for the runoff of water, or the passage of wiring, channel/cable trunking.

6. Short circuit

7. Recycling company reclaiming used metal based in Normandy and in Picardy – let them be thanked here!

8. Defined as a "complex object capable of transforming a form of energy into another and/or using this transformation to produce a new given effect, to act upon the object at work according to a given objective".

9. In the field of philosophy, speculation refers to the act of questioning the consequences of a hypothesis as if it were true, without necessarily considering it as such in the first place