

1 *César: Donald*, 2019



2 *César: Vladimir*, 2019

Jocelyn Robert *Conjonctures*

Presented at EXPRESSION, Centre d'exposition de Saint-Hyacinthe
from August 17 to October 27, 2019

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Premises

Jocelyn Robert's exhibition *Conjonctures* doesn't assume any innate connections between things, places and beings, perceptible or otherwise, nor does it presuppose their ability to remember the past, or any sort of prophetic truth their ways of knowing might imply. What is important here is no longer the specific meaning of each photograph, video or sound piece, but rather the idea that our experience of them alludes to an invisible mass of things somewhere out of the frame, things that structure our relationship with reality, things whose meaning is always in flux.

Base materials for a culture of exchange

Installed beneath a central lighting source, photographs from two bodies of work developed between 2014 and 2019 delineate the contours and emergence of a first site of meaning. Two composite portraits, *César: Vladimir* and *César: Donald*, surround the main entrance of the space. Over an initial photograph of the Roman emperor's bust, Robert has layered echoes from Google searches for the word *César*: photos of contemporary politicians, including Donald Trump, and someone vaguely resembling Vladimir Putin. These ambiguous portrayals remind us how the reconstruction of historical reality unearths fragments that are always subject to permanent renegotiation in our memory, itself informed by the digital channels through which contemporary knowledge flows.



3 *Automoiré* #6, #1b, #7, 2018

The three photos making up the series *Automoirés* contain this same indexical depth, a depth that belongs to itself alone, and not to memory or history, be it personal or public. A single image was the starting-point for the series: a portrait of the artist himself, submitted to a reverse Google image search. Translucent fragments of iconic works from art history overlay the initial portrait. Alternately produced by Robert or determined by an image-recognition algorithm, these images communicate among themselves, in spite of their widely varying time periods. Indeed, they evoke the fundamental elements of our visual culture: standardized frontal portraiture, use of chiaroscuro, and “materials that are not quite materials, but that nevertheless create something, like so many invisible workers labouring away in service of the culture of exchange”.¹

Throughout the exhibition space, these materials take on forms that are sometimes indeed material, but other times immaterial as well. I’m thinking particularly of the

out-of-phase melody in *Mon père et moi*, an installation consisting of an overturned 19th-century piano in the middle of the gallery space. Cellphone motors stroke the strings of this instrument that had belonged to Robert’s father, sporadically emitting sounds that are digitally processed and partially retransmitted via speakers grouped around the installation. The rhythm slows, the tempo breaks up, punctuated by long pauses. This impression of an immaterial silence possessing its own density fascinates me in many ways. I have a feeling that artworks gather meaning outside of themselves, so to speak, in the whirlwind of realities, realities that alternately criss-cross, erupt and eventually vanish, passing into inexistence.

Actualizing invisibility

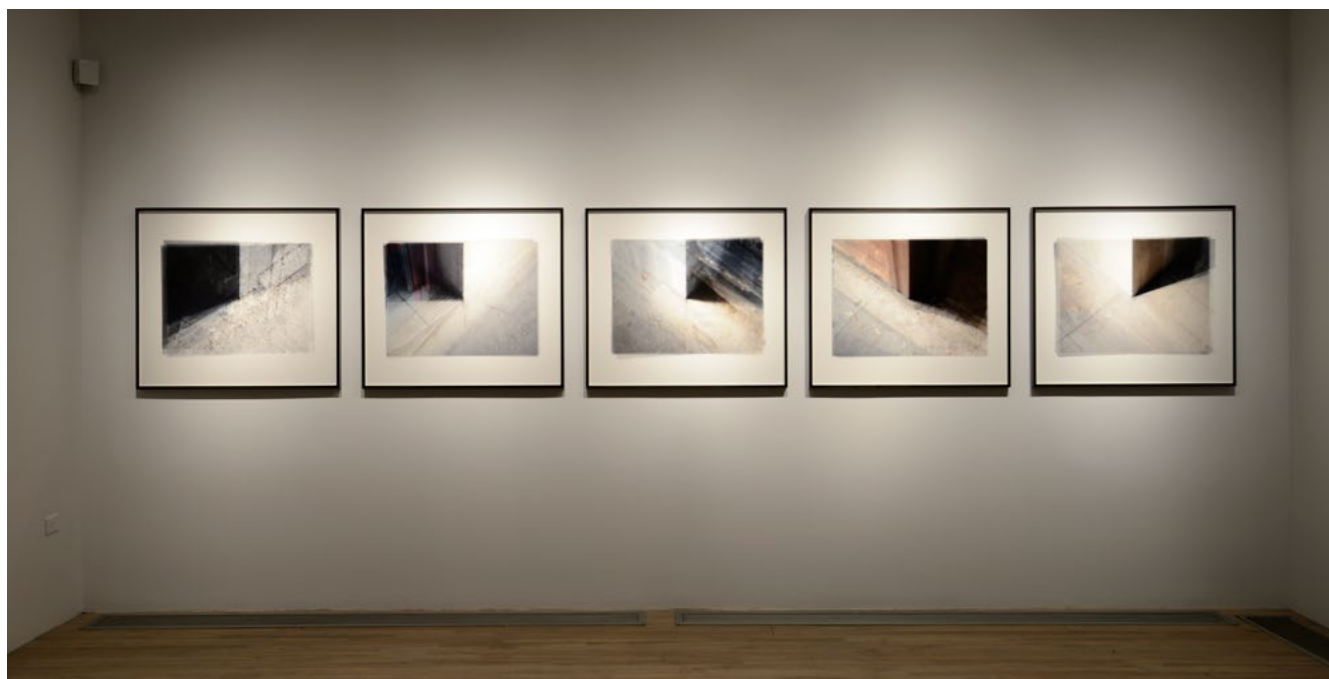
The realities made manifest by the exhibition’s centrepiece are amplified as we contemplate the moiré patterns on the buildings depicted in the series *Rue LaFayette* and *Moabit*, works constructed from photographs taken



4 *Mon père et moi*, 2019

during artist residencies in Paris and Berlin. On a single photographic plane, different images of the same part of a building reveal the various timeframes and atmospheric variations that modify our perception of architectural space over the span of a day. Between the gossamer layers of these photos lies our shared ability to “give up on meaning”²—essential for Robert—, an ability that allows “the unrepresentable”³ to emerge, for time to eternally return, and for the site itself come into being, with all its existential depth and openness to possibilities outside the image, possibilities of invisibility.

Other liminal apparitions fleetingly erupt on the shimmering horizon depicted in the video work *Bélugas*. Animals, credit lines, and indistinct anthropomorphic silhouettes make up the source images, taken from Google searches for the word *béluga*. These colossal yet fragile creatures present us with the uncertainty of their existence, one that mirrors our own precarity as humans. From this ontological juxtaposition, a lack of clear definition arises, a lack also harnessed in *L'ordre de choses*, a photographic work dating from 2009, the starting point of which was an image of a commonplace object taken from a mass-distribution advertising flyer. Devoid of apparent outlines,



5 Rue La Fayette #1 à #5, 2018

this indistinct depiction highlights the limitations of our powers of recognition. In this sense, the things, places and beings represented and alluded to in the exhibition somehow avoid the ultimate moment where they all are

ostensibly supposed to come together. In so doing, these works incite us to fill in their many speculative gaps, gaps that baffle us and bring to the fore the question of our own perplexing situations, our own conjunctures.

¹ Anne Cauquelin, *Fréquenter les Incorporels : contribution à une théorie de l'art contemporain*, PUF, "Lignes d'art" collection, 2006, p.90

² The idea of giving up on meaning, and, more specifically, the meaning behind these images made up of layered moiré, was discussed by Robert in a conference titled *Compte rendu d'une année de recherche*, given at Université Laval in 2016.

³ The *unrepresentable* is an idea Anne Cauquelin discusses in her book *Fréquenter les incorporels : contribution à une théorie de l'art contemporain*, *op. cit.* This idea draws inspiration from the philosophy of the Stoics, and their theory on incorporeal things.

Crédits

1 © Jocelyn Robert, *César : Donald*, 2019, print ink, 33 x 42 po

2 © Jocelyn Robert, *César : Vladimir*, 2019, print ink, 33 x 42 po

3 © Jocelyn Robert, *Automoiré #6, #1b et #7*, 2018, print ink, 33 x 42 po. Photo: Daniel Roussel

4 © Jocelyn Robert, *Mon père et moi*, 2019, general view of the installation. Photo: Daniel Roussel

5 © Jocelyn Robert, *Rue La Fayette #1 à #5*, 2018, print ink, 36 x 32 po. Photo: Daniel Roussel