

SUBMISSION, ADAPTATION, COMPROMISE

The performative *Baukunst* of Adrien Tirtiaux (°1980)

‘Paper architecture’ is among architects a familiar phenomenon, with absolutely some annoying features. It is after all architecture that got stuck at the level of a drawing, of a project (projections of spatial solutions in the future); conceptual architecture if you want. ‘Paper architecture’ and conceptual art have in common that they both attribute the same value to ideas as to real work. Only architects really want to build something and therefore they find their peace, although with some frustration, in the inspirational power and the theoretical creativity of paper architecture.

Both aspects resonate in the title “*Lieux de Papier*”, just like the ‘utopian’ dimension of and the power to sculpt space, matter and human activity with a secondary medium (like paper).

The work ‘*de passerelle en passerelle*’ of Jef Geys takes a central place in the exhibition “*Lieux de Papier*”. This original work on paper, the lay-out of an edition, includes the design as well as the making of (and the non-realisation) of the plans of Geys to build a passerelle in Le Magasin in Grenoble.

With this passerelle he not only wanted to create a breach in the hall and embed it more in the city (as a part of it), but he also wanted to put the ‘temporary’ exhibition space as such on display. The passerelle was never realized. You can read in the Edition Speciale – Le Magasin – Grenoble of the Kempens Informatieblad (Saturday 25th of February) about the whole process, from conception to the public debate, during which the passerelle was unwillingly buried.

By coincidence or a higher form a serendipity, Béatrice Josse, the new director of Le Magasin in Grenoble, engaged Adrien Tirtiaux in 2018. This institute, that became renowned for its enormous installation art in the eighties and nineties, went through an infrastructural and identity crisis. With his passerelleproject, Geys had already pointed to the precarious condition of the temporary exhibition space. Tirtiaux after being trained as engineer-architect tirtiaux studied at the department of Sculpture & Performance at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna." He seems not only to carry on the subversive art practice of Geys, in which he exposes the mechanisms of an institution, but he also, above all, continues his critical attitude towards architecture. Although Le Magasin had no budget for any operation on its infrastructure, but a limited one for exhibitions, Tirtiaux tried his luck:

“It was too early to start building a semi-permanent infrastructure, but we could initiate a process of transformation by dismantling and show the real need for a renovation/rehabilitation of the space “if we keep scratching the walls from the bottom... creating a horizontal line all around the space...”

With this no nonsenses strategy Tirtiaux has laid the foundation for his intervention ‘*LA QUETE DES HORIZONS*’.

In a similar way he had already transformed some institutional problems into a performative space in De Stroom at The Hague a few years earlier. In the context of the show Expanded Performance he translated the heavy cuts in the budget of the art center by the Dutch government into an installation that literally made ‘*The Great Cut*’ in the infrastructure of De Stroom. Not incisions like Gordon Matta-Clarck but a construction that simply drew a line through the building. In the period between 2012 and 2014 the people of De Stroom had no other option than to participate. They had to do the exercise of SUBMISSION, ADAPTATION, COMPROMISE whether they wanted it or not. Together with some sketches Tirtiaux introduced the words

‘submission/adaptation/compromise’ in order to illustrate how to function within the given adjustment of the space. By doing so he focused on the essence of architecture. With a subversiveness that resonates the one of Jef Geys, but with a constructive undertone as architect-engineers always believe in possibilities and the construction of the possible.

It looks like Tirtiaux, with the keywords SUBMISSION, ADAPTATION, COMPROMISE, has found the terminology to grasp the intersection between building and art.

In the exhibition ‘Lieux de Papier’ at Otty Park Tirtiaux gratefully puts the manhole cover to use.

He lifts it up and replaces it with *Little Square Depression*, an accessible in-situ sculpture, actually a little stair consisting of plates with a square opening which revolves and descends into a space with the shape of a vortex. It is painted in a vibrant cyanyellow. It doesn’t turn out to be a work on its own when you enter it, rather a short pass, a privileged point of view in order to look to the scale model in the exhibition space.

It’s an invitation that signals: “Look over there, a blue ellipse in a floating scale model.” And of course, a long and slow slope guides your view through a passage, and there, at the ceiling, in that scale model stripes of mirrors melt into an azure blue, stretched out circle. Where does that light come from? You have to reach it. Turn and turn around the scale model. And then you see inside the half opened scale model how the mirrors project the light of an industrial saw-tooth roof, colored by a blue coating, for meters through the space onto the mirror stripes. The magic of that projected light, and the way the mirror stripes merge together into one geometrical shape, is reminiscent of the sophisticated, prehistoric installations in which a delicate positioning of the menhirs capture the celestial position of the sun and the planets in one image, and they show above all the endless motion of the universe.

Adrien Tirtiaux named this scale model *Ciel de Bruxelles*. In fact with this model on a scale of 1:20 the exhibition ‘Lieux de Papier’ gives a preview of his permanent art intervention at the Recy-K building of Bruxelles-Properté. From the spring of 2012 onwards the public ramp/passage of Recy-K will be illuminated by The Sky of Brussels between Birminghamstreet and the road next to the canal Brussels-Charleroi. *Ciel de Bruxelles* takes up the central place in the exhibition at Otty Park. It serves as a beacon for the field of action of Adrien Tirtiaux, in between architecture and sculpture, in between a scenario and a performance, in between a drawing and the actual space.

All these disciplines seem to collide in the work *La Tour de Nirmrod était fait de mots* (2014), a set of drawings, based on Wikipedia and in different languages, describes the reconstruction of ‘Etemenanki’, a Babylonian ziggurat from the sixth century BC. Tirtiaux reconstructs the Tower of Babel in images and words by partly overlapping the different drawings. The Tower of Babel stands for the confusion of tongues. Tirtiaux uses this confusion to let ‘les mots et les choses’ clash.

All of a sudden the artist-architect looks very ideological. He not only makes the Yser Towers -and so the painful history of Flemish Nationalism- cast a shadow on the art center Ten Bogaerde in Koksijde and the sculptures of George Gard; he also transfers with his *Vlaamse Kanon*, 2020, in a puzzle of Dulle Griet, taken from a comic album of Suske en Wiske and therefore sharpens his profile of subversive artist. This ideological sensitivity is also part of the universe in which SUBMISSION, ADAPTATION, COMPROMISE are the passwords.

Koen Van Synghel, Brussels, January 2021, translated by Dirk Elst