

# WEAPON: A SOLO EXHIBITION BY BENOÎT MAIRE

**WEAPON** is the first solo exhibition in a London institution by French artist Benoît Maire (b. 1978).

Arising from his interest in philosophy and conceptual art, but nonetheless immensely formal, his work reveals him as an artist who has inherited as much from surrealism and minimalism as from Marcel Broodthaers and Joseph Beuys. This aspect of his practice is the focus of the current exhibition curated by DRAF's director, Vincent Honoré, with assistant curator Nicoletta Lambertucci.

**BENOÎT'S WORK** often involves collage and assemblage, forcing structures, references and materials into paradoxical but productive relationships. The original sources, frequently borrowed from art history, are not crucial; what matters is to make cognitive structures collide and to find a wild and sensual rapport with theory and culture. Besides a discourse on theory as shape, Maire proposes a surprising relationship to freedom (of interpretation, at the very least) and thought as co-production.

**THIS EXHIBITION INTRODUCES** a large group of new works: photographs, sculptures and videos, produced for London. The entire exhibition can be read as a cohesive assemblage of autonomous works, in which art becomes a sort of aesthetic terrorism. The exhibition revolves around two main motifs: vision and measuring devices as weapons.

**WEAPONS ARE OBJECTS** the artist creates as measuring tools. Objects become weapons either through performative actions captured on video, or through assemblage. By this translation, the object gains a new meaning and function: it becomes a weapon and takes on violent associations. As the artist explains: 'I wear on my wrist a weapon that gives me time. In the bathroom, I stand on a weapon that says a weight. In my pocket, I have a multi-function weapon that gives me the next day's weather and today's price of gold and wakes me up when I need to. I have a weapon that destroys time, one that destroys my being, others that destroy the landscape, the market, and the dream.' The measuring device thus disrupts and perverts our relation to the world. The question posed in *Weapon* is, are we losing or destroying our existential relationship to the world through our constant calculations of it?

**DRAF**, a museum remodelled as a laboratory, becomes itself a place for measurement, where a mirror can double space and a series of sculptures frame and re-frame it.

**BENOÎT MAIRE** has presented works at the Luma Foundation, Arles; I.C.A., London; Magasin, Grenoble; Tate Modern, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. He has had solo exhibitions in numerous art centres in Europe. He is represented in London by Hollybush Gardens, in France by Cortex Athletico, and in Berlin by Croy Nielsen.

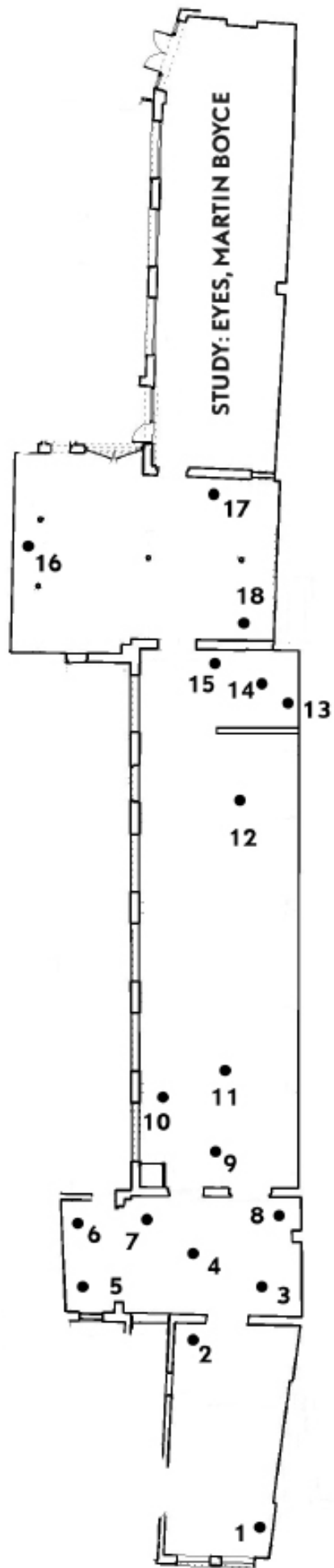
**WEAPON** was organized by DRAF, London, in collaboration with Fondazione Giuliani, Rome, and supported by Institut Français and Fluxus, with the participation of Chateau Citran and additional support from Cura Magazine and Mousse Magazine. Our media partner is Spike Magazine.



INSTITUT  
FRANÇAIS

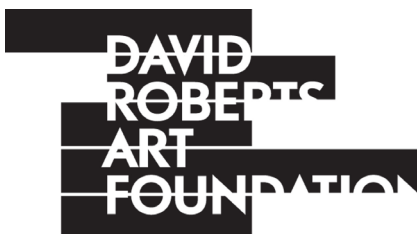
Media Partner

SPIKE



- 1. EYE OR THE WAR** is a 30-second looped video documenting Maire's performance for *A House of Leaves*, the inaugural exhibition at DRAF. The performance took place during the opening reception in September 2012 and was recorded on the artist's phone by his friend Maki Suzuki, a designer from the London-based collective *Abäke*, who has collaborated with Maire on numerous projects, including the video shown in Gallery 5. *Eye or the War* records the artist filling a hole in the exhibition space with a collection of objects and fragments from his home and studio - shells, mirrors, notes, photos, rulers, clothing, etc.- some of which will repeat as motifs in the sculptures and assemblages gathered here. By placing these personal objects into the wall (a structure designed to separate two rooms or two houses), the artist inhabits and inserts an element of difference into the exhibition space.
- 2. MATTHIAS 2** belongs to a series of photographs initiated in 2012 that address the relationship between vision, measurement, and the individual, an investigation at the core of this exhibition. The model is shown using magnifying lenses to measure his surroundings. Here, as with many of the works on display, what is being measured remains ambiguous: Is it the spectators themselves?
- 3. CONJUGAISON N° 4: 18 JANUARY 2013** is a sculptural interaction between layers of stones and images. The people represented in the photographs are the artist's neighbours in Paris. (Maire never uses professional sitters or actors.) The black dot on the edge of the vitrine indicates the point from where the spectator should look. The work is part of a series of similar works made of glass, stones, and photographs shown in various exhibitions, such as the one at Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York City, in 2012. The date in the title is when the work was started.
- 4.** Unlike traditional busts of thinkers and philosophers, Maire's **SOCRATES**, from 2013, is made of soap, not marble or bronze, and balances a green die in his head. Maire only recently started casting works in this soft, unstable material. (Soap is also mentioned in the video in Gallery 5). He modeled this head in clay from an ancient sculpture in the Louvre museum and then cast in soap. The philosopher's head is supported on an unpainted plinth that bears the traces of its former use. Produced in layers, the head appears stratified; the dice is a tool to measure, and possibly control, chance. Philosophy is a definitive mark of Maire's practice, conceptually and formally. In 2011, he published an artist's book documenting his ongoing research on the 'differend', a concept borrowed from French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998). This work-in-progress, *Esthétique des différends* (2008-; *The Aesthetic of Differends*), currently comprising eight 16-page sections, constitutes an art object in its own right, while doubling as a philosophical and artistic investigation into the key questions of postmodernity and the significance of the post-conceptual artwork.
- 5.** The title of this assemblage from 2012, **HERE, MEASUREMENT IS AT FAULT, HE SAYS**, is printed on a stone, a piece of quartz, and a shell. Questioning what can be measured and what cannot, the work remains ambivalent: what cannot be measured is probably art.
- 6.** This **UNTITLED** sculpture from 2012 is a solar clock composed of two elements that hang from the ceiling: a Perspex panel and a rigid wire made of silver and steel. Like other works by the artist, this sculpture introduces what Maire calls a 'hiatus', or tension; here between the unfinished, cheap appearance of the Perspex element and the precious aura of the metallic ones.
- 7. I.E. N° 1** is a video shown on a computer placed on a Perspex shelving unit designed by the artist and produced by Luma Foundation, Arles, where it was first exhibited. In the 14-minute video, Maire is seen measuring his surroundings with various tools; they are inventions made of found objects and materials, both natural and man-made. They are the "weapons" from which this exhibition derives its title. A weapon can be optical (as in *Matthias 2*), geometric, or metrical, its violence understood as a force imposed on, but alien to, a context.
- 8. MARIE** is a photograph from 2012 showing the artist's wife using her hand, a round glass object, and a stone to measure the distance between herself and the book in front of her. This book, *Discours, figure* (1971), is the second published by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. It was written in reaction to the seminars of radical psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, which Lyotard attended in the mid-60's. Lyotard begins with an opposition between 'discourse', related to structuralism and written text, and 'figure' (a visual image), related to phenomenology and seeing. He suggests that structured, abstract conceptual thought has dominated philosophy since Plato, denigrating sensual experience. Part of Lyotard's aim is to defend the importance of figural and sensual experience, such as seeing. He develops an idea of the figural as a disruptive force that works to interrupt established structures in the realms of both reading and seeing. Ultimately, the point is not to privilege the figural over the discursive, but to show how these elements must negotiate with each other.
- 9. UNTITLED** is an assemblage created in 2013. The shelving units, like those in Gallery 2, were produced by Luma Foundation. On them rests half a head cast in bronze and a single die. The head alludes to the Greek ideal of beauty, whereas the die is a tool for representing chance; both nature and chance are two notions beyond our full control. The head is in dialogue with the soap bust of Socrates, but its material - bronze as opposed to soap - and aesthetics - classical beauty as opposed to a more modern unfinished look - also contradict it. From certain angles, it appears to float in space, like the serigraphed tools and suspended weapons in this gallery and the mobile in Gallery 2.
- 10. 2 TOOLS** is the generic title for a series of large serigraphs begun in 2013, three of which are shown at DRAF. The two tools are a die and a primitive flint tool. The scale of these works, their repetition of iconography, their blank backgrounds, and the small differences created by varying the number and position of the tools in each of them echo the *Suspended Weapons* installation and create a frame around the entire gallery.

- 11. UNTITLED**, an assemblage created on-site for this exhibition, consists of a secondhand plinth and a photograph of a weapon and a human hand, an appendage that could be regarded as a tool or weapon.
- 12. SUSPENDED WEAPONS** is an installation produced in London, composed of three metal, minimalist structures, which serve as supports for secondhand and custom-made marble tabletops. The coloured shapes of the tabletops – white oval, green squares, red circle – were chosen for their reference to the Baroque. Frames of different sizes and different types of wood are arranged on the tabletops, creating a play of perspective. Other materials complete the composition, moving the eye across varied surfaces, from marble to metal, clay to glass, shell to resin. The objects that appear to levitate in the middle of the frames are weapons, measuring instruments created by the artist and activated by his models and him in the two videos on display.
- 13. I.E. RAYOGRAMS** is a new series of works created specially for this exhibition. The codes and texts reproduced in these framed photograms are manipulated by the female character in the video in Gallery 4.
- 14.** This **UNTITLED** assemblage, a lambda print of a hand mounted on a wooden panel and placed on a secondhand plinth, was produced by the artist for this space. The hand is a recurring motif in the exhibition. *Untitled* echoes a black glove created by Man Ray in 1968 entitled *Le Gant Perdu (The Lost Glove)*, 1967-68, not only because it is a rayogramme of a hand, but also because Ray's work was displayed at DRAF (in Gallery 4) six months ago for the exhibition *A House of Leaves*.
- 15.** The photograph, **STALACTITE**, 2012, can be linked to the mirror in the following room, as it shows the interior of a cave, and time materialized by the accumulation of stalactites.
- 16. I.E. N° 4** was originally filmed in October 2012 as a music video for the pop band *Principles of Geometry*. Featuring Mathieu Carmona and Marie Corbin, the model in the photograph in Gallery 2, it was re-edited in March 2013, with additional sequences and a new soundtrack. The video questions how one can possess an image belonging to someone else and, furthermore, how possession of this image becomes a *mise-en-abîme* as a weapon. The 'hiatus' or tension between low-tech and high-tech and between object and subject, as well as the different temporalities of the narrative, symbolize the relationship between the female and male characters. Presented at the terminus of the exhibition, this work – with the model manipulating notes and objects encountered in the other galleries – at once resolves and complexifies the spectator's journey.
- 17. THE CAVE**, from 2013, refers to the allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, the movement from ignorance to knowledge. The mirror doubles the space, reflecting what lies behind the spectator into the final gallery, thus unifying the exhibition. As the last optical device in the exhibition, the mirror also reflects iconographically back to the start, to the lenses in Gallery 1.
- 18. EYE OR THE WAR** is an intervention by Benoît Maire. A peep hole with a diameter of 6.5 cm was made in the gallery wall and filled by the artist with objects during the opening event of *A House of Leaves*, the inaugural exhibition in the new DRAF space. The video of the happening is displayed in Gallery 1.



Symes Mews NW1 7JE London  
 Tel: 44(0)20 7383 3004  
 Opening Times: Thu-Sat 12pm-6pm,  
 Tue-Wed by appointment  
[www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com](http://www.davidrobertsartfoundation.com)

The David Roberts Art Foundation Limited is a registered charity in England and Wales (No.1119738) and a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (No. 6051439) at 4th Floor Adam House, 1 Fitzroy Square London, W1T 5HE. It is proudly supported by the Edinburgh House Estates group of companies.