

Marc Johnson

L'alchimiste

Par Carole Diop

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Sa carrière n'en est qu'à ses balbutiements, mais déjà Marc Johnson impressionne par son parcours.

Diplômé de l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris et de L'École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-Malaquais en 2012, il fut également lauréat du prestigieux Prix LVMH des jeunes créateurs. Ce jeune artiste de 27 ans à plusieurs cordes à son arc et la sculpture et les performances sont ses modes d'expression privilégiés. A la fois artiste, architecte et danseur, il sait mettre cette polyvalence à profit dans ses œuvres. Caractérisation de l'artiste et de son œuvre en six termes.

Alchimie : Phénomène qu'il crée, à partir

d'une formule dont lui seul a le secret, réunissant dans ses œuvres les domaines qu'il affectionne. Arts visuels, musique, danse, arts martiaux, architecture, littérature, anthropologie, histoire naturelle, biologie et mathématiques.

Inspiration : Influence qu'il puise dans ses voyages, ses lectures mais aussi dans l'œuvre d'artistes référents : Albrecht Dürer, le sud africain William Kentridge, le photographe Santu Mofokeng, Janet Cardiff & George Bures Miller et leurs installations sonores ou encore Anri Sala pour ne citer qu'eux.

Atlas (personnage de la mythologie grecque) : Désigne ici une impressionnante

construction réalisée au moyen de dix kilomètres de bambous attachés avec quinze kilomètres de chambres à air, œuvre avec laquelle le jeune artiste prenait possession de la cour vitrée des Beaux Arts en 2011.

Île : « L'île déserte Acte 1, Fondation » est le nom donné à la performance qui dialogue avec l'œuvre Atlas. Cette performance est un savant mélange de danse, musique, jeux de lumière et de poésie. Ce ballet fugace interprété par des danseurs du Conservatoire National de Danse de Paris lui a été inspiré par Gilles Deleuze. Il y répond à une question célèbre : "Qu'emporteriez-vous sur une île déserte et quels êtres y vivent ?" Rêve de fondation, de séparation et

de récréation ; car l'île déserte est avant tout comme l'écrit Deleuze: « Re-commencement. Elle est l'origine mais l'origine seconde. A partir d'elle tout recommence. L'île déserte est le minimum nécessaire à ce recommencement, le matériel survivant de la première origine, le noyau ou l'œuf irradiant qui doit suffire à tout re-produire [...] Une telle créature sur l'île déserte serait l'île déserte elle-même en tant qu'elle s' imagine et se réfléchit dans son mouvement premier. Conscience de la terre et de l'océan, telle est l'île déserte, prête à recommencer le monde. »

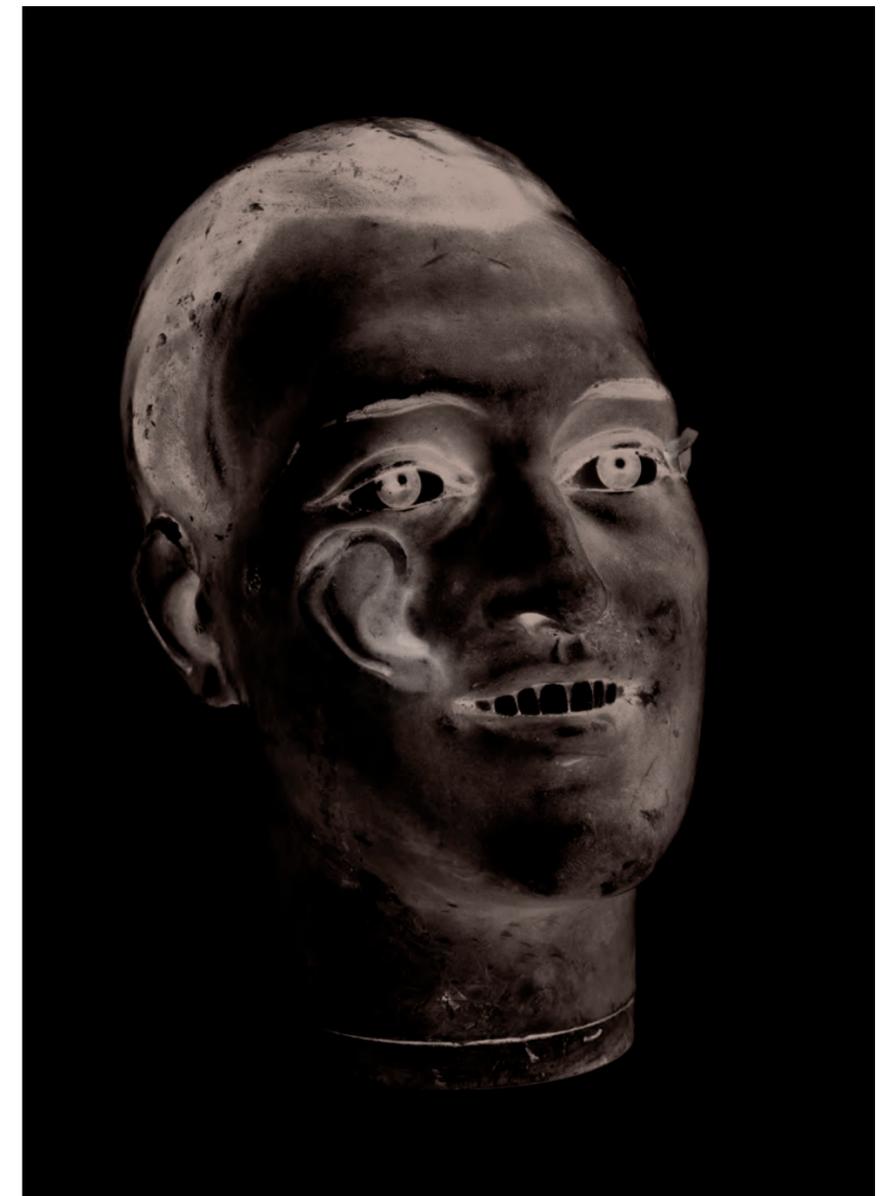
Surface de Boy : Inventée par Werner Boy en 1902, la surface de Boy présente une topologie régie par la géométrie différentielle qui trouve sa principale application physique dans la théorie de la Relativité où elle permet la modélisation d'une courbure de l'espace-temps. Cette figure génératrice a servi de base au diagramme créé pour l'acte 1 du ballet, et sera réinvestie dans l'acte 2 : L'île déserte /Acte 2/ Séparation en 2014, est un pavillon monumental en dialogue avec un court-métrage multimédia et numérique expérimental.

Expérimenter : Johnson s'empare des nouvelles technologies. Il a récemment produit une série d'artefacts à l'aide d'une imprimante 3D. L'artiste enchaîne les projets. Un livre, qui sera accompagné d'une exposition itinérante et un projet de film documentaire qui le mènera sur les traces des « Hommes

hyènes » au Nigéria, sont en cours de préparation. L'architecture n'est pas en reste puisqu'il travaille sur un projet d'aménagement d'espace public à Los Angeles. Mais ce dont, ce passionné d'histoire rêve par-dessus tout, c'est de créer

une performance au Louvre avec les œuvres du musée. Un rêve inaccessible ? L'avenir nous le dira.

Page de Gauche : « Tinnitus », Atelier Marc Johnson. 2013. Ci-dessus : Portrait de l'artiste en totem





Ci-dessus : Détail de « L'île déserte Acte 1, Fondation », Cour vitrée, Beaux-Arts de Paris, 2011.
Page de droite: ATLAS, Installation in-situ, 18m x 18 m x 16m, Cour vitrée, Beaux-Arts de Paris, 2011.



BANG! BANG! To Darkness, Charlotte And Other Songs; The Body At Risk

Auteur Marc Johnson
Photos: © Tom Bisig, Basel

STEVE MCQUEEN AT SCHAULAGER



Steve McQueen (16 March - 1 September 2013) at Schaulager
This Page: Charlotte, 2004, installation view, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation,
Courtesy the Artist © Steve McQueen
Up opposite page: 7th november, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Photo at Marian Goodman
Gallery, New York, 2005, Courtesy the Artist / Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris, and Thomas
Dane Gallery, London, Photo: John Berens

Abstract : « BANG! BANG! to Darkness, Charlotte and other songs; the body at risk » is a subjective attempt to comprehend what happened in recent years in Contemporary Art especially in the form of video-art and performances. As a "textbook case", the text's origin describe fragments of the Steve McQueen retrospective at Schaulager, James Coleman exhibit at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Tino Seghal's "This Variation" constructed installation at Documenta (13) and Anri Sala's work at Serpentine gallery and Centre Pompidou.

A situation

Schaulager: a new building type? What is the point of a Schaulager, of a building in which art is stored but still accessible for the public to view? What ideas about art and the strategy of collecting are involved, and what is the best architectural and urban development concept for it?

HERZOG & DE MEURON

When we first encounter « Schaulager » there is this inevitable joy of fulfillment. A warm smell of mud. The kind of golem full of thoughts that has been anchored there to transform your soul. The geometry's façade draws a cavity that is calling you from afar. Two gigantic screens have been added to the polygon to reflect the presence of what's inside. The scratched earthly material used for the "skin" of the construction seems to protect this house of marvels. It appears as if a projection made out of earth from the immediate surrounding had been directly applied onto the wall. It gives a natural quality to the building that only Herzog & De Meuron would know how to achieve.

As soon as you pass the somehow guarded entrance made out of the same



earthly material as the warehouse, the distance between you and the building's monumentality is broken. You access a large and heavy glass door that you pull. You made it into the Schaulager.

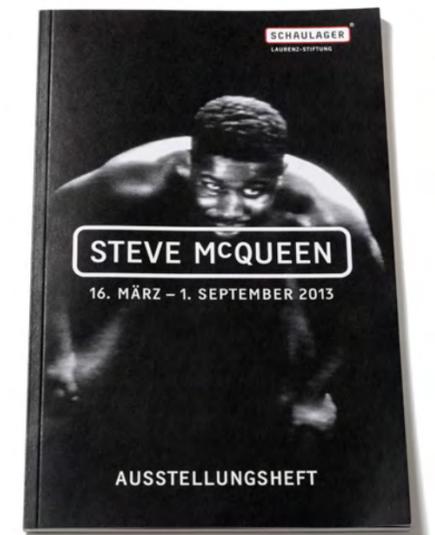
The lighting reveals itself and strengthens as we go along. A surprising perspective effect accelerates our perception of this sort of atrium rising through the full height of the building's interior. As we pursue our way to the ticket office a charming small yet furnished library teases from the top of its wooden furniture. A hostess is giving you a sticker, a booklet and a card with three entrances to the Steve McQueen's exhibit. A café is also there on the left, empty. Suddenly, my excitement encounters a thud : a remembrance of

things past strike the memory of a Marian Goodman show, seen in 2011. That was « Static ».

1 STATIC (2009)

35 mm colour film, transferred to HD digital format, sound, 7 minutes 3 seconds, continuous projection

The first work we encounter in the exhibition is « Static ». The room is large, dark yet the right side of the space opens to the corridor of the Schaulager. One/



Cover Exhibition Booklet Steve McQueen

third into the exhibition space, images are projected on a large screen of approx 2,5 meters in width. The work is a restless movement turned around like a question : the sound, the motion, the State ? *We hear the deafening racket of an invisible helicopter circling the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York harbour.* (p. 11. of the exhibition booklet)

At first it seems related to « Drumroll » : an experiment with the camera on the act of recording. This three-channel colour video projection and sound describes the artist through the streets of Midtown Manhattan. A machine tinkered rolls. An oil barrel, three cameras filming through openings left, right and front is witnessing at a lower level, the street and the artist walking. The experience of watching this work is disorienting as the projection documents the unstoppable rotation of this new type of camera.

As many of his pieces that appear detached at first glance, naive, easy even, there

is a rare focus. As far as 1944, Merce Cunningham's piece untitled *Root of an Unfocus** was concerned with fear many works presented at Schaulager were pointing at the finitude of the human being and recorded actions to struggle against it.

**The dance was concerned with fear. It began in conscious awareness of something outside the individual, and after its passage in time ended in the person crawling out of light. The time structure allowed for this in a way that I felt more conventional structures, i.e. theme & variation, ABA would not. It was in 3 large sections, each section according to its tempo structured in lengths of 8 – 10 – 6 beats.*

The time structure was a square root one so Section I was 8 x 8 in length, Section, II 10 x 10, Section III 6 x 6. The dance was 5' long (1,1/2' – 2,1/2' – 1').

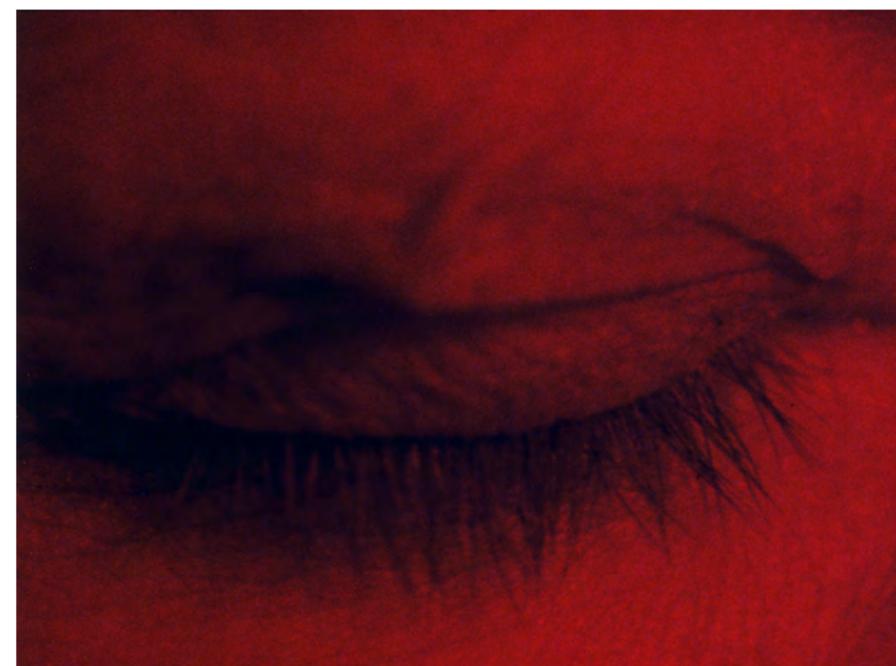
**Merce Cunningham, Changes: notes on choreography, Something Else Press, New York, 1968.*



The red numbers before work titles are referring to the exhibition booklet as it was ordered in Schaulager : **1** Static (2009), **2** Bear (1993), **3** Five easy pieces (1995), **4** Just above my head (1996), **5** Pursuit (2005), **6** Deadpan (1997), **7** Current (1999), **8** Giardini (2009), **9** Mees, after evening dip, new year's day, 2002 (2005), **10** Charlotte (2004), **11** Exodus (1992/1997), **12** Once upon a time (2002), **13** Prey (1999), **14** Drumroll (1998), **15** Barrage (1998), **16** Running thunder (2007), **17** Illuminer (2001), **18** 7th Nov. (2001), **19** Queen and country (2007-2009), **20** Unexploded (2007), **21** Gravesend (2007), **22** Girls, Tricky (2001), **23** Western deep (2002), **24** End credits (2012), **25** More (2001).

2 BEAR (1993)

16 mm black-and-white film, transferred to video, no sound, 10 minutes 35 secondes, continuous projection
 Bear, 16 mm black-and-white film from 1993 bears no sound. A specific projection room has been designed by the artist for his early films at Schaulager. *It is seven meters long, four meters wide and three meters high.* (p.20 of the exhibition catalogue). We see two nude men engaged into an ambivalent brotherhood fight oscillating between attack and reconciliation. A strange smile lights up my face while watching this work. The viewer remains standing by or passing by this architecturally constructed free standing projection. The viewer evolves on a free plan. Close-ups explore the faces



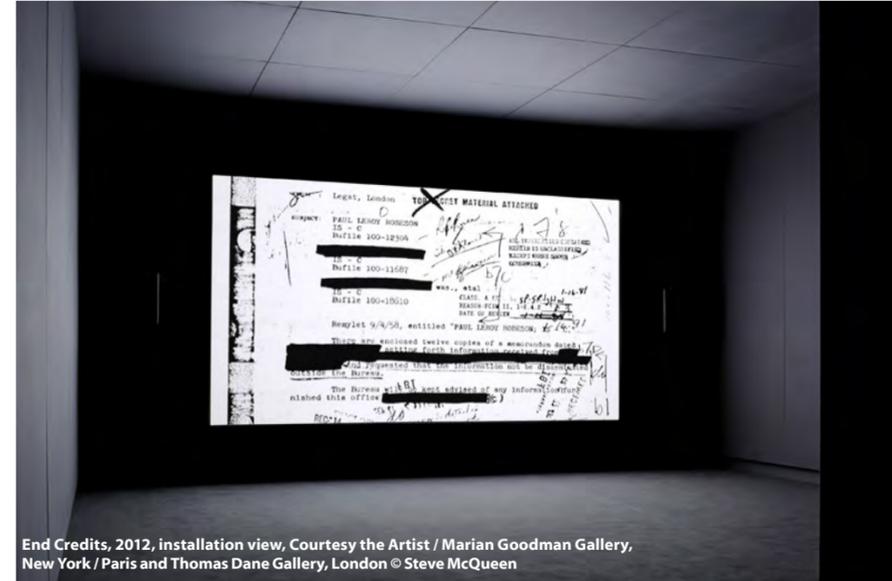
Steve McQueen, Charlotte, 2004, film stills, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Courtesy the Artist © Steve McQueen

and body of the artist and his opponent. Smiles, laughters, scoffs, provocations, gestures, hugs, the body, enlightenments, breath mist, sweat are the primary elements of that 10 minutes 35 seconds, continuous projection.

Side Note: For the sake of the exhibition as well as out of respect for the artist's work, the article will skip some of the works mentioned above. To keep some of the mystery intact, or perhaps to create a gargantuesque envy to discover his work, rediscover it or experience his future shows. For whom frustrated by that trashy cut you will be able to see his new feature film « *Twelve Years A Slave* » starring : Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender, Benedict Cumberbatch, Paul Dano, Garret Dillahunt, Paul Giamatti, Scoot McNairy, Lupita Nyong'o, Adepero Oduye, Sarah Paulson, Brad Pitt, Michael Kenneth Williams, Alfre Woodard soon on the big screen ! From september 5th – 15th 2013 at [tiff](#). The Toronto International Film Festival.

18 7TH NOV. (2001)

Single 35 mm slide, sound, 23 minutes
7th NOV. was the most emotionally engaging piece presented at Schaulager. A single 35 mm slide projection, sound and a bench. For about 23 minutes we hear a monologue from Marcus, the artist's cousin, who has changed his life forever. *On the date that gives the film its name, he was attempting to put the safety on a gun and inadvertently loaded a bullet which went off and fatally injured his brother.* (p.23 of the exhibition booklet). Marcus speaks rapidly and vividly as in a trance. The tone of his voice is somehow weak and he seems to be sobbing. The presence and permanence of the slide projection makes



End Credits, 2012, installation view, Courtesy the Artist / Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris and Thomas Dane Gallery, London © Steve McQueen

you focus on the voice as your vision starts to merge with the image. I was personally seating at the back of the space, behind the bench, alone. It was my second day of visit at Schaulager. Around 8 hours had passed since I first engaged with Steve McQueen's work. This piece was somehow biographical and personally engaging, as I realize that anyone, including me, could have been in Marcus's position.

Siegfried Kracauer in his classical « Theory of film : the redemption of physical reality » is referring to NANOOK, PAISAN and POTESKIN [...] which are deeply steeped in camera-life. But in defining them as art, it must always be kept in mind that even the most creative film maker is much less independent of nature in the raw than the painter or poet; that his creativity manifest itself in letting nature in and penetrating it.*

*Siegfried Kracauer, « Theory of film : the redemption of physical reality », Princeton university press, 1997, p.46.

That is perhaps why I felt that all the work presented seemed so profoundly anchored in Steve McQueen's belief, that it became crucial for me. Crucial to understand what was happening there on July 10th 2013 in Basel. How did it relate to me? or anyone else? How come each one of these pieces had the power to be sealed into someone's

life?

21 GRAVESEND (2007)

35 mm colour film, transferred to HD digital format, sound, 17 minutes 58 seconds
Gravesend, 35 mm colour film begins in a highly sophisticated, robotically manufactured laboratory. Exchanges of materials from one recipient to the other, then blindness arises. The screen : yellow-flakes-melting. A melting liquified material has been transformed and transported to a shallow plate, then the rocks. The sound of hitting rocks takes you out of that mechanically cold choreographed scene. An anonymous black squatting character hits the rocks, somehow, gem. Close-ups are examining the hands of the worker and the way he extracts the goods-gem from the rocky-mud. Then a factory and a scene where the harvested material is transformed into powder through mechanical process. The sound is very present and bleak as if you were crushing glass from your own mouth.

The booklet reports : *The film Gravesend uses a documentary approach to focus on the mining of coltan*, employed in the manufacture of cell phones, laptops and other high-tech apparatus. The film cuts between two sites : a technological, highly automated*

industrial plant in the West where the precious metal is processed for the final production of microelectronic parts, and the central Congo, where miners use simple shovels or their bare hands to extract, wash and collect the ore on leaves. In the Congo, the dirt and clumps of ore are barely distinguishable, while in

conflict of the militia in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where decades of civil war have cost several million human lives. *Coltan (short for columbite–tantalite and known industrially as tantalite) is a dull black metallic ore from which the elements niobium (formerly “columbium”)

24 END CREDITS (2012)

Sequence of digitally scanned files, sound, continuous projection
One of the most recent installations in the exhibition is dedicated to the African-American singer, actor and activist Paul Robeson (1898-1976). The thousands and



Static, 2009, installation view, Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, Courtesy the Artist © Steve McQueen

the industrialized West, the metal is weighed in minute milligrams and cast in antiseptic surroundings. The realism of the film images is intercut with a black-and-white animation of the Congo River. Its sinuous shape conjures associations with networking and the flow of communications, underscored by murmuring resembling thousands of voices in the cell phone network. In the meanwhile, coltan, traded at an extremely high price, represents one of the key financial factors in the armed

and tantalum are extracted. The niobium-dominant mineral in coltan is columbite, and the tantalum-dominant mineral is tantalite. Tantalum from coltan is used to manufacture tantalum capacitors, used in electronic products. Coltan mining has been cited as a key source of financing serious conflicts such as the Ituri conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

thousands of pages in the file dutifully compiled by the FBI during years of surveillance in the McCarthy era pass by in a screening that takes almost six hours. The once heavily censored, now publicly accessible documents are read by male and female voices. The visual and acoustic material soon shifts out of kilter, essentially revealing the extent of this disembodied surveillance system. Instead of making a feature film, McQueen chose to pay tribute to the civil

rights activist in the form of end credits, literally bringing to light the devastating nature of this politically motivated discrimination, marginalization and persecution. A successful movie star in the 1930s, Robeson became increasingly committed to political and social issues. His championship of the rights of workers and blacks, a trip to the soviet Union and public appearances both at home and abroad not only made Robeson one of the most celebrated figures in the African-American movement; he was also perceived as a serious threat to the paranoid anti-communist, conservative politics of the Cold War. (p.30 of the exhibition booklet)
Steve McQueen was the commissioned official UK war artist (Iraq) by the Imperial War Museum's Art Commissions Committee in 2003. End Credits (2012) is a good start to fully appreciate the political engaging mind of Steve McQueen. Illuminer (2001), Queen and Country (2007-2009) are directly referring to war. Queen and Country in a form of a commemorative Oak cabinet and the latter as a daily life document recording war oriented TV news. The Steve McQueen retrospective at Schaulager reveals the uncompromisingly line of engagement of the artist. He is continuously experimenting on the camera at work, the political, form of Governance (Static, Hunger, End Credits), darkness, the body at risk, pace and time travelling. As you set off to encounter his work, be prepared to be transformed in the process. Not only transformed as a citizen but most likely as a father, a brother, a mother, a sister or a cousin.

An act of necromancy

« I will never find the way to say how I love American close-ups. Point blank. A head suddenly appears on screen and drama, now face to face, seems to address me personally and swells with an extraordinary intensity. I am hypnotized. Now the tragedy is anatomical. »
Jean Epstein, Magnification and other Writings, *The MIT Press, October*, Vol. 3, 1977, trad. Stuart Liebman, p.9.
« Jamais je ne pourrais dire combien j'aime les gros plans américains. Nets. Brusquement l'écran étale un visage et le drame, en tête à tête, me tutoie et s'enfle à des intensités imprévues. Hypnose. Maintenant la tragédie est anatomique. »
Jean Epstein, *Bonjour Cinéma*, 1921 & *Écrits sur le cinéma*, éd Pierre Leprohon, Paris, Seghers, 1974, t.I, p.93.
Since every casual glance is an act of necromancy, each face that we love a mirror of the past*, how does Steve McQueen, by recording physical reality and constructing his own lands, achieve such wonders?
* Proust, *The Guermantes Way*.
On what earths lies its vitality?
What eras could have been erecting such consciousness?
On what grounds does his work produces the body at risk?
« Body » is to be heard both as the entire physical structure of an organism (the artist's body and the camera), a group of individuals regarded as an entity (the viewers) and the sound box of an instrument (the dark room) that Steve McQueen is taking as primary elements for the metamorphosis of our being.

The light realm full of whispers

Darkness. A totem that some artists from the Marian Goodman gallery seem to challenge since the 2000s: James Coleman, Steve McQueen, Anri Sala and Tino Sehgal. James Coleman, who participated to every Documenta since 1987 (except Documenta 13) made a remarkable and refined exhibition at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, (25 april – 27 august, 2012). Curated by Manuel Borja-Villel, director of the museum since 2008, this tremendous show divided into four different spaces of the museum was a landmark in the history of art and motion images of the recent years. *Playback of a Daydream*, 1974, *Clara and Dario*, 1975, *Box (ahhreturnabout)*, 1977, *Seeing for Oneself*, 1987-88, *Retake with Evidence*, 2007 were shown among other historical works. A great catalogue, « James Coleman » was published as well. [...] *Two and half billion seconds. Hard to believe so few. From funeral to funeral. Funerals of ... he all but said of loved ones. Thirty thousand nights. Hard to believe so few. Born dead out of night. [...] Nothing to be heard anywhere. Room once full of sounds. Faints sounds. [...] Night after night the same. Birth. Then slow fade up of a faint form. Out of dark. A window. Looking west [...] Ditch. Bubbling black mud. Coffin out of frame. Whose? Fade. Gone. [...] Alone gone.*
Samuel Beckett, *A piece of monologue, The Complete Dramatic Works*, ed Faber and Faber, 2006, p 426-429.
Few steps (7-9) into a corridor, voices

and darkness. Some sixth sense is telling you to stop. You hear voices. Recorded? Perhaps! You eventually move a few steps further then you realize that you have been encapsulated into a performance: "This variations" by Tino Sehgal at dOCUMENTA (13). Your eyes are becoming accustomed to the Dark. You passed. You are into it. We've all been swallowed up by the darkness. Joy? Serendipity? Womb? Let go? Mojo? "The income derived from producing things of slight consequence is of great consequence," someone is speaking. "No" from elsewhere in the room. "The income derived from things of little consequence is of great consequence", again. Suddenly they all move, urban, youth. After an hour I sort of cultivate a friendship with one of the performers. She looks at me? One of the performers is high, is threatening me, challenging my body. Are we inside a cave?

Anri Sala has also made his statement regarding motion images and the playfulness of the darkroom. In his [Serpentine gallery](#) show (1 October – 20 November 2011) curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, most of the works presented were playing in echo with a live performance as their starting point. A perforated pattern was carved through walls covering the windows, and creating openings to the outside that allowed the sounds of the park and the gallery into the dialogue. In the [Centre Pompidou](#), Paris, for his monographic exhibition, curated by Christine Macel, (3 mai 2012 – 6 août 2012) Anri Sala created a specific disposal for his work. Most of the exhibition at the « Galerie sud » is available to the passers-by as it is in the ground floor. However for this show, the

windows were covered. The largest facade of the « Galerie sud » was left open only for the viewers inside of the gallery space. A thin layer of darkness (visible light filtering through window films) was applied. In conclusion, it seems that those artists are fundamentally reconfiguring time based art by using darkness, storytelling, live performance, voice, and the body as their primary material. Moreover, the position of the viewer is reset and leads him to engage more with the work as he moves on free plans. Richard Schechner was defining performance in 1973 in the Drama Review *as a ritualized behavior conditioned/permeated by play*. Drama, script, theatre, and performance were redefined and those artists are pushing the boundaries to a new level. Even more astonishing as we remember that Steve McQueen, Anri Sala and Tino Sehgal are so called "artists in their mid-career" in between 44 years old and 37 years old. They have at least 3-4 decades of full institutional support as well as galleries worldwide. The icing on the cake will be the opening of the Kramlich Residence and Media Collection in Oakville, California, USA. One of the most important private collections of media art featuring Steve McQueen, Jeff Wall, Matthew Barney, Reinhard Mucha, Charles Atlas, Dara Birnbaum, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol, Keith Tyson, Jeff Koons, Ryan Trecartin, Nam June Paik, Doug Aitken, Bill Viola, Joan Jonas, Yves Klein and much more.

"The Steve McQueen retrospective at Schaulager reveals the uncompromisingly line of engagement of the artist."



Bear, 1993, installation view, Courtesy the Artist / Marian Goodman Gallery, New York / Paris and Thomas Dane Gallery, London © Steve McQueen

Steve McQueen was born in London in 1969; he lives and works in Amsterdam and London. From 1989 to 1990, Steve McQueen studied at the Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, and from 1990 to 1993 at Goldsmiths College, London. He continued his studies from 1993 to 1994 at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. In 1999, he was guest artist of the DAAD Artists-in-Residence programme in Berlin. Steve McQueen has received many grants and awards for his work as an artist, including the ICA Futures Award (1996) and the Turner Prize (1999). In 2009 he represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale. In parallel with his artistic work, Steve McQueen has been making feature films, for which he has won numerous awards. In 2008 he was awarded the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival for his film *Hunger*, and in 2011 his film *Shame* was granted the FIPRESCI Prize for Best Film at the Venice International Film Festival. In 2003 Steve McQueen was commissioned official UK war artist (Iraq) by the Imperial War Museum's Art Commissions Committee. Already an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE, 2002), Steve McQueen was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the 2011 New Year Honours for services to the visual arts.

Exhibition Catalogue

Steve McQueen. Works – Catalogue raisonné

Accompanying the exhibition at Schaulager, Basel, the richly illustrated catalogue presents a comprehensive survey of work created by Steve McQueen between 1992 and 2012 and attests to the scope and intensity of his career to date.

The catalogue comprises essays by Cameron Bailey, artistic director of Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF), Okwui Enwezor, director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich, James Rondeau, curator of contemporary art at The Art Institute of Chicago, art theorists Georges Didi-Huberman, from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, and Jean Fisher, and a conversation between Steve McQueen and Adrian Searle, art critic for the British newspaper *The Guardian*. Furthermore the publication includes a comprehensive exhibition history and bibliography.