

15.01. – 02.04.2023

DANS CE LIEU DE DÉSÉQUILIBRE OCCULTE

Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc

As part of its series of solo shows, including, most recently, *24 heures à Hanoï* by Thu Van Tran (2019) and Kapwani Kiwanga's *Cima Cima* (2021), the Crédac is continuing to produce and promote contemporary artworks that combine autobiographical elements and the exploration of an ecological and decolonial vision. What these exhibitions have in common is that they are based on an understanding of the links among people, time periods and places, offering a poetic and personal reading of post-colonial thought.

“Let there be no mistake: it is to this zone of occult instability¹ where the people dwell that we must come, and it is there that our souls are crystallised and that our perceptions and our lives are transfused with light.” Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc, who manifests his political positions through a variety of complementary practices, above all as a visual artist as well as a writer and editor, chose this excerpt from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as the title of his exhibition at the Crédac.

He is the editor of the Culture series put out by the publishing house B42 founded in 2008 by Alexandre Dimos. In 2021 he launched Rôt-Bò-Krik publications together with Dominique Malaquais (1964-2021), an art historian, scholar and critic of contemporary African art; Sarah Frioux Salgas (1978), curator and chief archivist at the Musée du Quai Branly; and the translator Jean-Baptiste Naudy (1982), who worked with Salgas in overseeing the Déborder series at the Nouvelles Éditions Place. His aim in his publishing and translation work is to bring out key books about the question of hegemony. Abonnenc is a member of a generation of artists to whom we attach a special importance for their striving to impart meaning to reality through a nuanced and balanced mix of research, historical facts and fiction. He grapples with broader universal interrogations as part of a slow process of closure, healing the rupture produced by colonialism. Today, we believe, it's more important than ever to involve people in addressing this issue.

Claire Le Restif, Directrice du Crédac et commissaire de l'exposition

1 See next note explaining this choice of translation.

The title of Abonnenc's show at the Crédac, *Dans ce lieu de déséquilibre occulte* (In this zone of occult instability¹), is taken from *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) by the psychiatrist and essayist Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), a founder of anti-colonialist thought. The show features Abonnenc's recent works, sometimes made in collaboration with other artists, such as the sound piece composed with Thomas Tilly and a film with the choreographer and performer Betty Tchomanga. As always with Abonnenc, they combine autobiographical elements and real and fictional Caribbean narratives.

In the Crédac, visitors experience the sounds and voices of the Amazon rainforest and discover a rare text by the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris (1921-2018), whose conception of the instability of matter was central to his world outlook.

Thus visitors enter the same sound horizon as the artworks that temporarily occupy this space, and experience a multisensorial narrative that is simultaneously personal and historical, and whose political implications are expressed visually and poetically.

ROOM 1

Brought together for the first time in the Crédac's main gallery, *The Night Reader, for Wilson Harris* (1), (2) and (3) (, 2018) are comprised of three overturned sea turtle shells disfigured by the sword blows used to kill them and extract the bodies of these animals now on the verge of extinction. These pieces contain gallium, a metal that turns into a liquid in contact with skin or when exposed to direct sunlight. The changing of temperatures transforms them right before our eyes. A reference to the many faces of certain pre-Colombian gods such as Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca, and likewise the old-fashioned method of panning for gold, these three pieces are a concentration of the history of the Guyanas: the harvesting of an indigenous animal, a cosmological narrative that survived the conquest, and the history of the mining of this land's very entrails by those who dreamed of finding great wealth.

Such dreams of fortune were what drove Joseph Bernes, the gold panner who lived in the house later bought by the artist's mother in Wacapou in 1984 (a house she never lived in as civil war breaks out in 1986), a village located on the banks of the Maroni River in French Guyana. *The Forest, the river, the rain*, (19..-2018) is an ensemble of utilitarian objects that afforded Bernes some minimal comforts: the ability to keep warm, eat and travel on the river. The title of Abonnenc's found objects reconstitute the visual and aural landscape of the Amazonian village once occupied by a gold prospectors' settlement.

A land register that belonged to the artist's grandmother and motivated the purchase of this house — *Crique Ouacapou* (19..-2021) — maps a territory, the zone occupied by gold prospectors (in yellow), the river (in blue) and the forest (in green).

In the case of mercury (alluded to in this exhibition by gallium) and gold, the preciousness and magical appearance of these metals shift the exhibition narrative into the realm of alchemy and the kind of history that borders on legend. Thus, the two bright red monochromes — painted with tempura and cinnabar, a natural mercury sulfide that fuses with the painting's copper frame — suggest both the mercury contamination of land and rivers previously evoked, a poison indirectly responsible for the death of

1 Translation from the first English edition of *Les damnés de la terre*, (*The Wretched of the Earth*), Grove Weidenfeld, 1963. In the original French: "C'est dans ce lieu de déséquilibre occulte où se tient le peuple qu'il faut que nous nous portions car, n'en doutons point, c'est là que se givre son âme et s'illuminent sa perception et sa respiration..." Despite the strong criticism of this translation of "ce lieu de déséquilibre occulte" to which Fanon refers, we have decided to keep it as it is in order to retain the word "occult" which encompasses both the idea of a dark place and a certain idea of mystical spirituality. Further, as a doctor, Fanon knew the medical usage of the term 'occult' to mean disorders invisible to the naked eye or an x-ray.

thousands of people, and the blood shed to obtain this gold during the European conquest of the Americas. *Studies for the Ransom Chamber (Atahualpa)* (2021) refers to the capture and execution of the Inca emperor Atahualpa. Today there is a reconstitution of a small stone structure (El Cuarto del Rescate, The Ransom room) in Cajamarca, Peru, where Atahualpa is said to have been imprisoned by the Spanish Conquistadores who coveted the Inca's gold. Atahualpa is said to have promised that the room would be filled with gold in exchange for his freedom. The Spaniards reneged on the agreement and killed him anyway as part of smashing the Inca empire.

In the Womb of the Glass Ship (2022) features translucent moulted snakeskins in a tinplate box. An ensemble of abandoned, contorted and tightly packed skin, this piece references the unspeakable violence of the slave trade that forever shaped the bodies and lands which inherited this history, but it can also be read as a restorative metaphor. Despite the abominable conditions imposed in these ships, men and women often found a way to survive.

While formerly the other was contained and used as an item of personal property, in the case of "mules", people used to smuggle drugs, the body of the other is turned into a container. *Fossil & Psyche* (2018) feature an x-ray of carrying an impressive number of narcotic-filled capsules in their body in an attempt to smuggle illegal drugs into mainland France.

Morsels of flesh taken from the enemies' bones (2021) and *The Invaders anatomy resurrected and tuned to the music of painted silence* (2018) seem to allude to the image of "cannibals" and their rituals of vengeance as depicted by the colonisers. But these musical instruments whose title conjures up the bodies of enemies can also be understood as allusion to the kind of cannibalism put forward by the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) in his *Manifesto Antropófago*², who argued that instead of rejecting the other (either the "savage" or the "European") and accepting a false binary of cultures, we should ingest both, birthing a culture rooted in the earth and intrinsically multicultural. To blow into a necklace of flutes made from the bones of one's enemies means to bring them back to life, to restore a body and soul to those who once designated us as their antagonists.

ROOM 2 & 3

The sound installation *The music of living landscapes*, 2022 is the fruit of a collaboration between Abonnenc and Thomas Tilly, a sound artist and explorer of experimental music who has often partnered with teams of biologists and anthropologists.

For this piece, Abonnenc located and transcribed a text by Harris entitled *The Music of Living Landscapes* broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in 1996. It is read in this installation by successive and occasionally overlapping male and female voices, with sounds Tilly recorded in the Guyanese jungle in the background. An aural landscape comes to life through the cacophony of birdcalls, clamour of mammals and insects, and burbling of running water that fill these spaces.

Before Harris moved to the UK, never again to return to his native land, he had studied astronomy and spent 17 years working as a surveyor in the Amazonian jungles whose secret language he gradually mastered. This ability to read landscapes like an open book, written in its own alphabet and bearing the traces of the trauma of conquest, distinguishes the entire body of his novels and theoretical writings.

Fish, rocks, streams and trees constitute a theatre of living memory communicated in a cosmic language that is clearly akin to a music that existed long before we learned to speak. What we hear, thanks to Abonnenc and Tilly, is the resonance of this music of life accompanied by the reflections of the Guyanese writer. Screened in the third room, the film *Laurène Loarano* (2007-2022) follows a night journey down a Guyanese river, imparting a visual dimension to this soundscape. Made with the artist's deceased sister after whom the film is named, it further emphasizes the idea of a fluid landscape by narratives of mourning both personal and more universal in scope, by violence and loss, and yet ceaselessly revived and renewed.

2 Oswald de Andrade, "Manifesto Atropofago", in *Revista de Antropofagia*, volume 1, 1929.

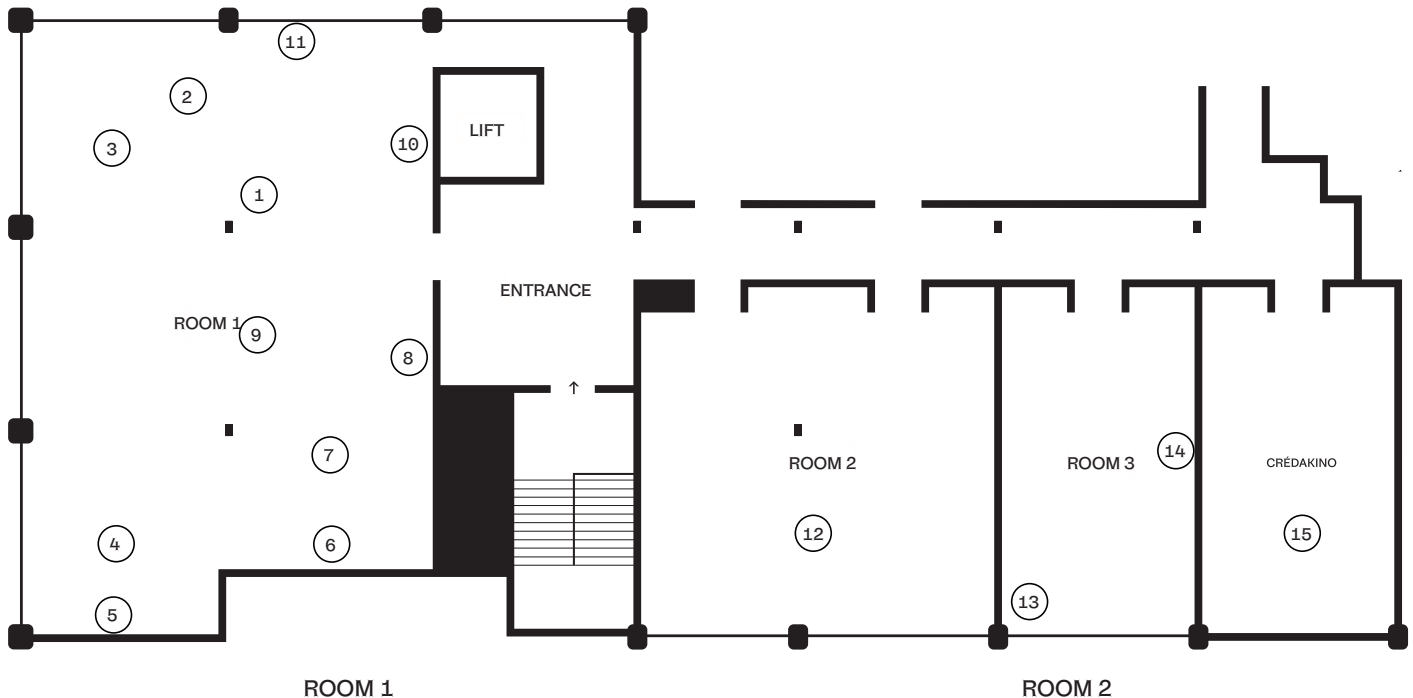
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Limbé, takes 1 and 2 (2021), a film made with the choreographer and performer Betty Tchomanga, is shown on two screens back-to-back. We see Tchomanga emerge from almost total darkness, moving in a spider-like fashion that could recall the figure of Anansi³. This dance she choreographed was inspired by the limbo, a powerful ritual dance that originated in Trinidad-and-Tobago, a kind of embodied memory of the extremely oppressive and dange-

rous positions slaves were forced to assume in the hold of slave ships. This piece could be considered a pendant to *In the Womb of the Glass Ship* (room 1). It reminds us that to survive, men, women and children violently torn from their homeland had to bend and fold themselves up to occupy the least possible space without smothering. The limbo bears testament to an embodied historical narrative and the possibility of survival in this “zone of occult instability.” Thus this space also becomes the zone where the people dwell, seeking their emancipation from a painful past by means of a “recovery through the creative affirmation of colonial trauma and its existential deviations⁴.”

3 Anansi, also called Ananse and sometimes Anancy in English, is a key character in West African and Caribbean folklore, described as a spider, a man, or a combination of both. A trickster, he is known for his skill and cleverness with words. Anansi tales are among the most common in West Africa. They come from an exclusively oral tradition.

4 In Paget Henry, *Calliban's Reason, Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy*, Routledge, 2000.



- 1 *The Night Reader, for Wilson Harris (1)*, 2018
Turtle shell (*Chelonia mydas*), gallium.
Collection of Musée d'art contemporain de la Haute-Vienne – Château de Rochechouart.
- 2 *The Night Reader, for Wilson Harris (2)*, 2018
Turtle shell (*Chelonia mydas*), gallium.
Private collection.
- 3 *The Night Reader, for Wilson Harris (3)*, 2018
Turtle shell (*Chelonia mydas*), gallium.*
- 4 *The Forest, the river, the rain*, 19..-2018
Mooring buoy, coffee pot, candlestick, cast iron dishes, gas stove.*
- 5 *Studies for the Ransom Chamber (Atahualpa) (6)*, 2021
Oil tempera, cinnabar on copper frame.*
- 6 *Crique Ouacapou*, 2021.
Personal archive.*
- 7 *In the Womb of the Glass Ship*, 2022
Python molts, tin can.*
- 8 *Morsels of flesh taken from the enemies' bones*, 2021
Necklace of bone flutes, reproduction of a Kuna shamanic necklace (Panama, interior of San Blas).
Flute maker : Jean-Daniel Talma, Elbock workshop.
- 9 *The Invaders' anatomy resurrected and tuned to the music of painted silence*, 2018
Organ flutes, snake molts. Part of the façade of the holy chapel of the castle of the Dukes of Savoy.*
- 10 *Studies for the Ransom Chamber (Atahualpa) (2)*, 2021
Oil tempera, cinnabar on copper frame*
- 11 *Fossil & Psyche*, 2018
A4 print, black and white, Plexiglass.*

- 12 In collaboration with Thomas Tilly, *The music of living landscapes (a revisitiation, V2)*, 2022. Sound installation for six speakers, 34 min 10 sec. Archival documents, field recordings, electronics*.

ROOM 3

- 13 *La musique des paysages vivants*, 2022.
HD video, 34 min 10 sec.
Translation: Antoinette Jattiot.
Intertitles: Hodei Berasategui.
- 14 *Laurène Loarano*, 2007-2022. HI 8, variable duration.*

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- 15 *Limbé (take 1 & 2)*, 2021. Film 16mm HD transfer, 10 min (each).
Choreography and interpretation: Betty Tchomanga.
Images: Victor Zébo. Production: Grande Halle de la Villette - Rôt-Bò-Krik.*

*All works exhibited, unless otherwise indicated, are courtesy of the artist(s).

EVENTS

■ Saturday 11 Feb. ■ 3:30pm ■ 45 min **PERFORMANCE**
Mascarades: performance by Betty Tchomanga (choreographer and performer).

■ Saturday 11 Feb. ■ 5:30pm ■ 45 min **CONCERT**
By Thomas Tilly, sound artist. The concert is followed by a discussion.

■ Sunday 12 Feb. ■ 4:00pm **SCREENING**
Tropisme équateur: Victor Zébo (director of photography, cinematographer and programmer) proposes a video program (duration 50 min) with films by Andres Dávila, Guillermo Moncayo, Regina Parra, and Ana Vaz.

The screening is followed by a presentation and discussion with Victor Zébo and Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc.

■ Saturday 18 March ■ 3:00 - 4:30pm **DISCUSSION**
With Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc, Alexandre Dimos (co-founder of the studio deValence and founder of the publishing house B42) and Claire Le Restif, on the publishing work that the artist carries out with the editions B42 and Rôt-Bô-Krik.

■ Saturday 18 March ■ 5:00 - 6:30pm **WORKSHOP**
"Reflexivities and reflections from the title of the exhibition"
Elvan Zabunyan (art historian, professor at the University of Rennes 2 and art critic) starts from the title of Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc's solo exhibition, extracted from Frantz Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre* (1961) in order to propose a reflection in dialogue with the works presented. The tilt of time, the space of spirituality, the imaginary, light and breathing will be evoked as means to think history, art, philosophy and politics.

Free events and free admission.
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BUREAU DES PUBLICS

■ Sunday 22 Jan. ■ 4:00pm **VISITE DU DIMANCHE**
Guided tour of the exhibition. Free admission.

■ Sunday 29 Jan.* ■ 3:00 - 5:00pm **ATELIER-GOÛTER**
Kids and adults discover the exhibition together. Then, as they enjoy a snack, the families participate in a workshop that, sensitively and playfully, extends the visit. The workshop is conceived for kids from 6 to 12 but it's nevertheless open to all!

■ Thursday 9 Feb.* ■ 12:00 - 2:00pm **CRÉDACANTINE**
Guided tour of the exhibition by the artist and the Crédac team, followed by lunch. Participation 7 € / members 4 €.

■ 22, 23 et 24 Feb.* ■ 3:00 - 5:00pm **ATELIER-VACANCES**
Creative workshops designed for children from 6 to 12 years old during school vacations.

■ Thursday 16 March* ■ 4:00 - 5:00pm **ART-THÉ**
Guided tour of the exhibition, followed by a time of exchange around the resources of the media library of Ivry. Tea and pastries are offered.

■ Sunday 19 March* ■ 3:00 - 5:00pm **ATELIER-GOÛTER**
Kids and adults discover the exhibition together. Then, as they enjoy a snack, the families participate in a workshop that, sensitively and playfully, extends the visit. The workshop is conceived for kids from 6 to 12 but it's nevertheless open to all!

■ Sunday 26 March ■ 4:00pm **VISITE DU DIMANCHE**
Guided tour of the exhibition. Free admission.

* Events are free unless otherwise indicated. Reservations required:
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UPCOMING

■ 21.04 - 02.07.2023 **EXHIBITIONS**
Solo shows by Éric Baudart, Nefeli Papadimouli and a tribute to Renée Gailhoustet.
Opening: Thursday 20 April 2023, 5:00 - 9:00pm

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D'INTÉRÊT NATIONAL Member of the
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