

# PARTICLES

Ignasi Aballí  
Björn Dahlem  
Lieven De Boeck  
Hreinn Fridfinnsson  
Filip Gilissen  
Kris Martin  
Claudio Parmiggiani  
Paulo Ramírez Jonas  
Evariste Richer  
Fabrice Samyn  
Mungo Thomson  
Thu Van Tran  
Maarten Vanden Eynde

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“Matter appears to be the permanent medium for slow, minute, imperceptible changes. It appears self-evident that there is no structure that is unable to be, or that can avoid being, broken down one day into more delicate elements; that there is nothing that is infinitely divisible (...)” Roger Caillois 579

Devoting an exhibition to the theme of “particles” starts out from the idea that breaking the world down into something smaller may perhaps enable us to understand it better. This approach could be compared with picking out a detail in a painting in order to “comprehend” the painting better. By observing that part, might we be able to understand the entirety?

In a sense, fragmentation is the natural order of things. Everything will decompose one day; dissolution is inevitable. We should bear in mind the formula devised by the French chemist Lavoisier, who said in the 18th century: “Nothing gets lost, nothing is created, everything changes”. So, everything is constantly redistributed, and reconstitution occurs according to a system of complex physical and chemical laws.

As visitors enter the entrance hall and reception, **Mungo THOMSON** (USA, 1969) offers an unconventional vision of the universe. Glued onto several sections of the gallery wall, his wide work *Negative Space* is inspired by photographs taken by the Hubble space telescope (1-2). Thomson has carefully inverted the colours of the images. So the original colours switch to their opposite: for example: white becomes black and vice versa. Although the artist manipulates the source images, the sensations of the infinitely large remain intact which brings us face to face with immensity consisting of an infinite number of particles. When confronted with these fragmented views of the universe, one can but be amazed over and over again at the miracle of life which was able to grow in a hostile context. The conditions necessary for its appearance are so numerous, complex and improbable that it remains an unfathomable mystery.

## GROUND FLOOR

To understand the universe, observation of the heavens is inevitable. In the left-hand room, **Ignasi ABALLÍ** (Spain, 1958) is showing twenty photos with a predominance of blue (3). These concern twenty details of the sky which appeared in the Spanish press in 2011 and 2012. Any printed image is formed using a model known by the abbreviation CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and key black), which explains the title *Sky CMYK*. Aballí examines, on the one hand, the total loss of information due to excessive enlargement of the selected portion of sky, as well as the breakdown of the colour itself into identifiable particles, since we can discern the minuscule CMYK dots. Not without a touch of absurdity, Aballí links the irrelevance of an item of information to an unverifiable source (name of a country, date, name of the newspaper). The twenty skies refer to twenty different countries. A kind of abstract atlas, because no tangible item can be discerned, although in some of the pictures, transparency enables us to just make out the letters of the article that appeared on the reverse of the newspaper page.

In an echo to these observations of the skies, the *Eruptions* (4) of young female artist **Thu Van TRAN** (Vietnam, 1979) show the emergence of cloudy shapes emanating from the drawers of a filing cabinet. Tran depicts cloudy emanations that refer to the fiery outpourings consisting of gases, steam and ash which form during a volcanic eruption. The forces that can heat rocks to above their melting point, reduce them to ashes and propel them to dizzy heights are of an almost inconceivable intensity.

By showing them in an almost archive-like manner, Tran reminds us that the history of Man is eminently tied to the history of nature. We only have to think of the recent examples in Chile (2011) and Iceland (2010) to be reminded of the disruption caused worldwide.

Matter has various states, and in common parlance, when we refer to the smallest state of solid matter, we talk about dust, which has the particular feature of infiltrating everywhere, into every nook and cranny, and every space where air circulates. In the course of a process of reflection about the invisible over about fifteen years, **Ignasi ABALLÍ** has taken a keen interest in the concept of dust.

For *Untitled (Dust)* (5), the artist has collected a sizeable quantity of dust in the most hidden corners of the gallery, which he has patiently sieved over a plate measuring one metre square. On the one hand, he is showing us the location in an unconventional form, and on the other, is referring to the future inevitable decay of the building and in a more holistic manner, the notion of vanity (“from dust you are born, and to dust you shall return”).

He shows the imperceptible, the unwanted, the ignored, and elevates it to the status of work of art, by giving it an undeniable aesthetic quality. Doesn't this create the impression of looking at a grey pigment, of a remarkable consistency and purity: a sort of pigment of time? In this carpet of dust, one can also see a crystal-clear paradox if one considers that what is almost nothing, reduced to powder, reminds us of the essence of matter, its unalterable existence. One could go as far as to see the epiphany of matter and its disappearance in the same place. Presence of absence.

Aballí does not stop at an aesthetic vision, and also offers us logos in the form of definitions, categories and extracts concerning the colour grey, as dust gives this enigmatic grey dust a greater consistency.

Entitled *Blowing* (6), three small works on the wall show the dust that settled over a period of time on five sheets left by the artist in his studio. After a sufficiently long period to gather enough dust, Aballí blew on each sheet and then fixed the dust residue with varnish.

This combination of dust and breath (creative or destructive) is a fine reference to the monumental work of **Claudio PARMIGGIANI** (Italy, 1943) in the right-hand room (7). Fire is a reductive, disorganising power, and one of the consequences of his work is the creation of dust in a particular form: soot. Parmiggiani's works literally have the scent of fire. They embody the radicalism of the process. That process, *Delocazione*, developed forty years ago by the artist, consists of filling a space containing objects with smoke, and using the smoke and the soot as active agents in the creative process. The artist literally starts a fire in his studio; an action which discharges thick smoke, generating soot, ashes and combustion dust throughout the room. After having aired the room, Parmiggiani removes the objects (in this case, hundreds of butterflies), laid out on large wood panels. Wherever a butterfly was laid out, the smoke was unable to be deposited and therefore it is the silhouette of the butterfly that is revealed instead. By removing it, the artist provides us with a memory of the butterfly, an outline which becomes a light shadow. The work embodies a tension between spatial and temporal experience, creation and destruction, imprint and removal, shadow and light. By working with the tiniest particle (what is soot? carbon, mainly), Parmiggiani invokes nothingness to confront us with our own condition. As Georges Didi-Huberman puts it so magnificently in his "*Génie du non-lieu*", this type of *Delocazione* should be seen as "shadow sculptures".

## FIRST FLOOR

On reaching the first floor, the visitor sees *The winner takes it all / Trillion Volume* (8), an enigmatic work by **Filip GILISSEN** (Belgium, 1980). Placed on a base, twenty golden vinyl records are laid out on a turntable, and remind us of the old-style jukebox. Each record is filled with the lengthy minutes of a performance which took place in the crypt of the church of Saint-Jean de Montmartre in Paris, on 1st October 2011 on the occasion of the Nuits Blanches event. This installation/performance was given for the first time in 2010 for the Liverpool Biennial and is based on expectations of an event because, unwittingly, the 5000th visitor triggered an explosion of hundreds of thousands of golden spangles launched by cannons into the entire space. Having recorded the whole event in Paris, Gilissen is able to offer the audience a complete recording of the evening. For twelve hours, we hear the public entering and leaving the crypt, disappointed that there is "nothing to see", until the ecstatic moment of the explosion, which only lasts for a brief instant. Once this paroxystic moment has passed, others are curious and visit the location, and in turn are disappointed, but for a different reason. They realise that a magical moment has occurred, but that they just missed it. By giving visitors the possibility of listening to these fragmented moments, he puts them in the absurd but revealing position of being a witness of today's event-dominated society. By choosing to exhibit the work unprotected, the artist also allows the ambient dust to settle on the records and alter the rendition a little at a time.

On entering the left-hand room, visitors discover, on the wall facing the entrance, *Modèle Standard #1* by **Evariste RICHER** (France, 1969) which is a 1:1 reproduction of a sheet of particle board (9).

With this work, Richer emphasises the mimetism between the reproduced board and the original (in an allusion to Duchamp and his ready-made). We are also made to think of the infra-ordinary, because the artist is encouraging us to pay attention to the banal, the ordinary. The trivial takes on an enhanced quality, and we are surprised by taking a keen interest in detail and picking out a small item in the profusion of objects around us. The loss of reference points is accompanied by heightened attention, an analysis of every kind of the redistribution of particles.

We look at the external, complex structure of this mistreated, compressed, reduced material. A work as stable as a religious picture and which embodies all the strength that enabled it to exist. We are looking at “*mistreated matter which has found rest*” to paraphrase Caillois.

**Evariste RICHER** is also showing *You Burn* (10), a series of four photos developed from slides picked up from a shopkeeper in Jordan, probably the remnants of a set of pictures intended to be projected for children to show and name the colours: violet, yellow, orange and red. The artist has enlarged them while keeping the text on the reverse. The colour is shown, irradiating the viewer, and the monochrome backgrounds are deliberately left dusty and scratched, suggesting a starry sky or a cosmic view (particularly in the violet one). These works challenge the concepts of light, colour and technological issues (the Cibachrome technique disappeared, making way for the Ilfochrome shown here).

In counterpoint to this series, a photo by **Thu Van TRAN** documents an action carried out by the artist in 2001 in the Leba desert in Poland, and which consisted of allowing a kilo of pure white pigment to blow away in the wind (11). The particles of pigment mixed with grains of sand before becoming overwhelmed and disappearing completely. An absurd gesture in one sense, but also a fine idea of having a visible trace of a brief instant.

**Lieven DE BOECK** (Belgium, 1971) showed his *White Belgian Flag* by flying it outside the gallery for one year. The flag, in the official dimensions, is assembled in such a way that the monochrome white is of varying intensities (three layers of nylon to symbolise the black, one layer for the yellow and two layers for the red). After this landmark period of a year, De Boeck decided to exhibit the flag in the right-hand room (12). It is displayed as it now is: dirty, bearing the marks of the city, making it possible for us to appreciate the extent of pollution, a process that is difficult to perceive on a daily basis. The artist makes an invisible phenomenon visible. The fabric captures and traps the particles concentrated in the ambient air. The work is produced by the passage of time, without intervention by the artist. This work also opens up discussion about the quality of the air.

By deciding to frame the flag, De Boeck is showing it like a relic, an object from the past bearing the marks of the passage of time (the flag is tattered, with rust stains, etc.). Even if that is not really what he is saying, it is impossible not to think of the symbol that this conjures up of Belgium.

The façade of the gallery was also observed meticulously by **Fabrice SAMYN** (Belgium, 1981) who carried out a subtle erasure work in 2008 on the closed shutters of the building (13). Showing his interest in the relationship that Man has with time, the artist wanted to take action on the outer skin of the building before its restoration; he used an eraser to draw in the accumulated dust on the wooden blinds a series of pigeons landing or taking off. As an urban bird, the pigeon is the one to which nobody pays attention. The removal of matter is equivalent to revelation by erasure; a fine paradox. The ghostly aspect suggests the resurgence of the past, and sets the building again in its not too distant past. The fact of showing a photo of the façade inside the building itself is an interesting reversal.

Another type of particle is shown on the wall in a small diptych by **Thu Van TRAN** entitled *Dust Trail* (14), consisting of an archive photograph and a trail of orange paint applied from a spray can. Thu Van TRAN, who is of Vietnamese origin, brings back to life one of the most painful chapters in the Vietnam War, using the archive photo to remind us that between 1962 and 1971, the U.S. Army used defoliants and herbicides on a massive scale in rural areas of Vietnam to deprive the Viet-Cong of vegetation and food. Little by little, the information came out and proved the absolute horror that caused the death or mutilation of tens of thousands of Vietnamese. By placing a white page marked with a trail of orange alongside the photo, Tran is obviously referring to the name given to the most commonly-used herbicide, Agent Orange, but beyond that, she is marking the American action as shameful, symbolising its total infamy.

In the centre of the room, a sculpture in progress by **Maarten Vanden Eynde** (Belgium, 1977) brings together five globes which immediately refer to the snowstorms sold in souvenir shops around the world. As visitors get closer, they see that the snow has been replaced by miniscule particles made of plastic, which are floating in the liquid. Since 2008, Vanden Eynde has been taking an interest in the phenomenon of plastic waste that is stagnating in the major ocean currents. Since then, the artist has criss-crossed the oceans of the globe,

and accompanied international scientists to collect plastic waste that he uses in various works. Currently, he is showing his impressive Plastic Reef as part of *Manifesta* in Genk, in the province of Limburg (April-September 2012). The situation has reached a point that it has been estimated that the plastic floating in our oceans covers a surface equivalent to that of the USA. His expeditions are described and illustrated on his site [www.plasticreef.com](http://www.plasticreef.com). The plastic is mainly located in the five major ocean gyres (North and South Atlantic, North and South Pacific, Indian Ocean). The artist's intention is to show five "snowglobes" containing plastic from each current. Only the Indian Ocean is still missing (which will necessitate an expedition in the near future), which explains the empty snowglobe.

On entering the office/library, visitors discover the series *Heaven on Earth* (16), consisting of three photos, by **Kris MARTIN** (Belgium, 1972). The artist situates this work in the contemplation of the language of silence. By photographing the floor of his studio in San Francisco, he is making an explicit reference to the celestial which is everywhere, once our eyes "accept to receive it". He describes the mysterious interpenetration that exists between the ground and the sky, between the sky and the ground. Martin encourages us to rid ourselves of the encumbrance of the rational, go beyond the conventions and habitual limits of the ground, enclosed space. He shows us a world without limits within the limited world of Man.

The fragile construction shown under Plexiglas is by **Björn DAHLEM** (Germany, 1974) whose work focuses mainly on energy, physical phenomena and various scientific models. In these works carried out with simple materials, Dahlem assembles wood, lamps, electrical systems and various objects he has found. *Partikel (Charm)* is a small-sized work which is a kind of metaphorical representation of particle physics (17). Although he is the son of a physicist, Dahlem does not claim any scientific accuracy for his work. His work is positioned rather in the sphere of abstract mental constructs that refer to the complexity of our universe and the constitution of all things within it.

In the centre of the room, *1968 Scale Model* (18), an evolving sculpture by Paul **RAMIREZ JONAS** (USA, 1965) describes, not without humour, the orbits of the best-known heavenly bodies in our solar system. Taking 1968 as his reference year, the artist dreamed up a system based on the position of the planets depending on the month in which the work is exhibited, in this case April. Nine fruits and vegetables of varying sizes but round in shape symbolise the planets that move around a luminous central axis, a candle that is replaced each day. As to the fruits, they are not changed at all during the period of the exhibition, which will inevitably lead them to rot and decompose.

**Claudio PARMIGGIANI** also reminds us of the inevitability of our condition, with his work representing a human skull (19) produced with the technique described above, using fire, smoke and soot.

Leaving the first floor and going down the stairs, visitors will notice the idiomatic phrase. *It takes two to tango* (20) placed subtly by **Hreinn FRIDFINNSSON** (Iceland, 1943) which is a quirky allusion to two small crystals, virtually imperceptible, on display in the gallery. These crystal pearls are positioned in two places very far away from each other. One is glued (onto the wall) in the stairwell, the other in the welcome office. Fridfinnsson highlights the fact that a single particle is less interesting than the observation of the interaction between two particles.

## VIDEOBOX

At the rear of the gallery, in the videobox, **Mungo THOMSON**, with his film *The Varieties of Experience* (21), refers explicitly to the film by Nam June Paik *Zen for TV*, dating from 1963 which projected a blank image for an hour. Although there was no image, tiny items were discernible on the white screen: the accumulated dust and scratches on the film and the projector lens. THOMSON, in a tribute or iconoclasm, inverted the colours of Paik's film. White has become black and vice versa, as if he was turned a glove inside out, to show its hidden, unknown, inner side. Leaving scope for any interpretation (emptying the image from a Zen perspective and destruction of the narrative structure of the filmed image), Thomson extends Paik's intention of showing the miniscule and breaks the narrative space. We are almost the witnesses of a zen story that could be called the "miraculous story of a particle".

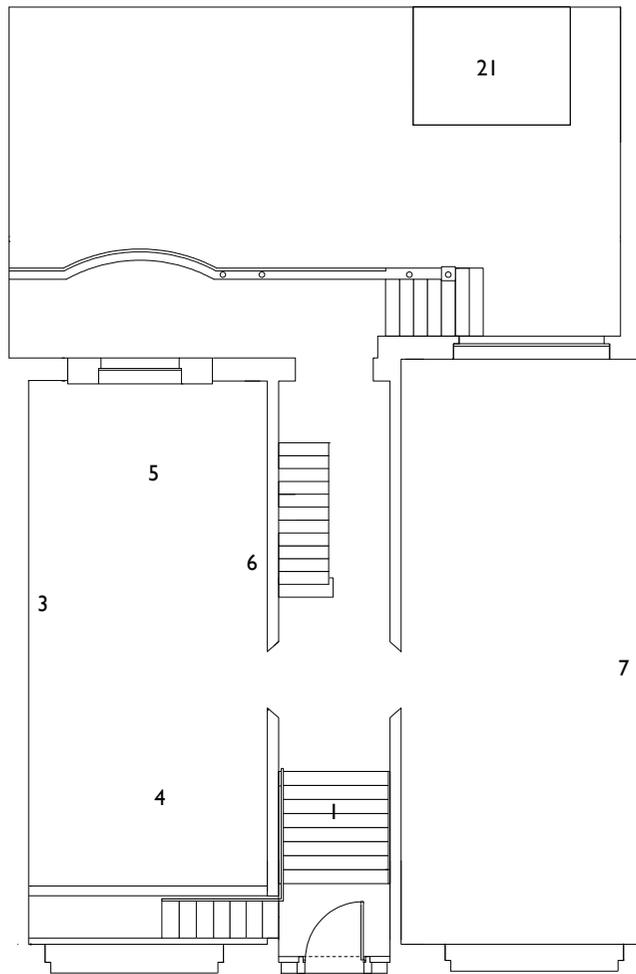
Once again, the paradox present here is "what is disturbing is revealing"; dust sensitises the film in a manner of speaking. The more the film is projected, the more dust will "happily disrupt" the initial monochrome of the projected image.

## **WUNDERKAMMER**

Visitors will complete their visit in the Wunderkammer, in the basement of the gallery (22). The physical world is subject to categorisation, division and subdivision to strive for maximum understanding of what surrounds us. Although in the presence of a clear colour separation, the work by **Claudio PARMIGGIANI**, *A,e,i,o,u* is projected in a more metaphysical plane. The colours seem unreal, such is their intensity; these are pure pigments, extracted directly from nature. Their “physicality” is undeniable; the power of the colours is almost sanctified here. We are looking at the birth of painting with pure light. On the other hand, this work underscores a feeling of disintegration and disappearance. The energy expressed in this work required that it be displayed alone, without another work to complement it, although it does call to mind the famous poem *Vowels* by Arthur Rimbaud.

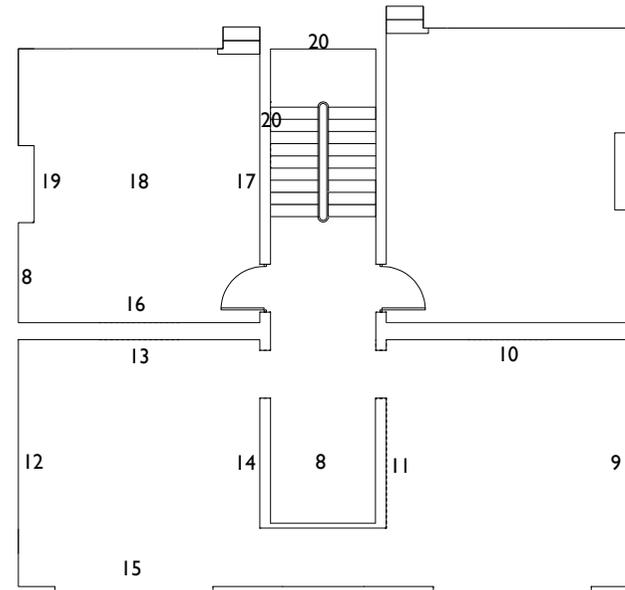
As the exhibition progresses, visitors will have sensed that the ultimate state, being pulverised and scattered, is inevitable and even essential in the continuation of life.

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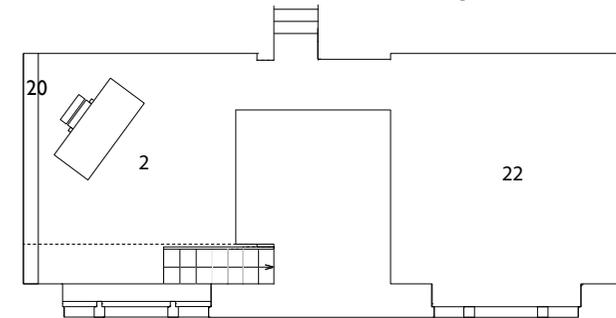
- 1 Mungo THOMSON, *Negative space (STScI-PRC2006-03a)*, 2012
- 3 Ignasi ABALLI, *Sky CMYK*, 2012
- 4 Thu Van TRAN, *Eruptions*, 2011
- 5 Ignasi ABALLI, *Untitled (Dust)*, 2011
- 6 Ignasi ABALLI, *Dust Drawings*, 2010-2012
- 7 Claudio PARMIGGIANI, *Senza titolo*, 2011
- 21 Mungo THOMSON, *The Varieties of Experience*, 2008

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- 8 Filip GILISSEN, *The winner takes it all/Trillion Volume*, 2011-2012
- 9 Evariste RICHER, *Modèle Standard #1*, 2012
- 10 Evariste RICHER, *You Burn*, 2012
- 11 Thu Van TRAN, *Leba*, 2001
- 12 Lieven DE BOECK, *White Belgian Flag*, 2011-2012
- 13 Fabrice SAMYN, *Untitled (Meessen De Clercq gallery, Rue de l'Abbaye, Bruxelles)*, 2008
- 14 Thu Van TRAN, *Dust Trail*, 2011
- 15 Maarten VANDEN EYNDE, *1000 Miles Away From Home*, 2010 - Ongoing
- 16 Kris MARTIN, *Heaven on Earth*, 2011
- 17 Björn DAHLEM, *Partikel (Charm)*, 2012
- 18 Paul RAMIREZ JONAS, *1968, Scale Model*, 2000
- 19 Claudio PARMIGGIANI, *Senza titolo*, 2008
- 20 Hreinn FRIDFINNSSON, *It takes two to tango*, 2012

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- 2 Mungo THOMSON, *Negative Space (STScI-PRC2006-10a)*, 2012
- 20 Hreinn FRIDFINNSSON, *It takes two to tango*, 2012
- 22 Claudio PARMIGGIANI, *A,e,i,o,u*, 1968-2012