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Meessen De Clercq

**FABRICE SAMYN**  
*Vanishing Point of View*

20 January – 3 March 2012

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Fabrice Samyn (b. 1981) takes over the entire building for his third exhibition at the gallery. Entitled *Vanishing Point of View*, this exhibition builds on the concepts of point of view and vanishing point to support the artist's propositions.

Like the title, which is a contraction of two key terms, all the work weaves links, fits in, continually interacts with itself, whether in a clear manner or sometimes more secretly.

We can start out from the observation that the adoption of geometric perspective by artists of the Italian Renaissance is one of the most critical contributions to the practice of art. Perspective consists of a resection of vanishing lines converging towards a vanishing point, and aims to describe any object from a point of view emanating from the subject and moving towards the object.

Upon entering, visitors can choose between the left-hand and right-hand rooms. Here, visitors are in the perfect position to view alternately two paintings that face each other, *Between Vanishing Points* (1). These are two landscapes that respond to each other. Two isolated details from two famous paintings on the same subject: *The Marriage of the Virgin* painted, on one side, by Perugino in 1500, and on the other, by his pupil Raphael in 1504.



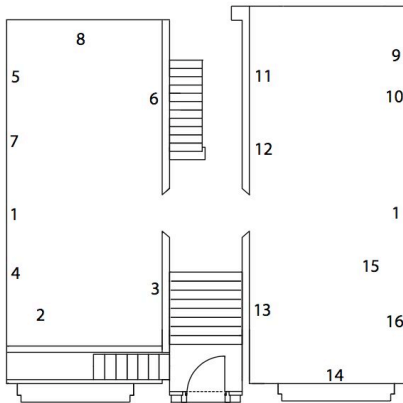
Fabrice Samyn has deliberately chosen to reproduce the space where the two masters placed their vanishing point (in other words, the central opening of the building shown in the background), where one feels the greatness of the outside world, where one can *breathe infinity*.

By placing the two works opposite each other, he stresses the need to choose a point of view. Either we look at the left-hand landscape or the one on the right. So here we are "caught" between two infinities.

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### **LEFT-HAND ROOM**

When we think about landscape, we also think about horizon. To examine and detail the features of the horizon, Man has invented many devices for observation.



With *Eclipse* (2) the telescope pointing outward, Fabrice Samyn invites the visitor to observe the world and its enlarged details. However, when putting their eye to it, "viewers" soon see that it is not the world that comes into view but the reflection of their own pupil. The infinitely large that we thought might be observable contracts into a microcosmic point. By incorporating a tiny mirror in the mechanism of the instrument, Fabrice Samyn gives this observation an introspective character. Immensity, whether indoor or outdoor, disappears from view just as the viewer wants to take it in.

For his work representing four glasses filled to different levels (3), Fabrice Samyn used the ancient technique of potassium bichromate, which allows the sun to be used as an active agent in the photographic process. Four glasses of water were placed on a fabric (covered previously with photosensitive material) in direct sunlight. The chemical reaction was interrupted by the artist at the precise moment when the fabric was about to catch fire due to the effect of the sunlight (accentuated by the magnifying effect). We can actually discern the brown mark of the nascent burning process. The image at risk from the very effect that is revealing it. Everything is there. Between destruction and revelation.

Like life, which is forever irremediably mortal, the image exhibited here is threatened by what generates it.

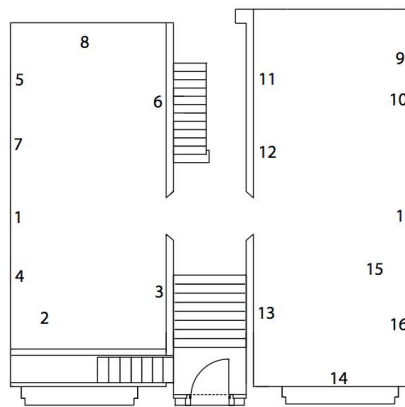
This antagonism between alteration and creation is reflected in many portraits painted by Fabrice Samyn. It can be seen through his striking self-portrait, full of fright, entitled *Is looking in the mirror always looking back* (5)? Turning around with a disturbing slowness, the artist seems to be asking questions of us as much as of himself. This work refers to animality, flesh, the body as a vehicle for energy and urges. Is the work of the painter not to strip the image bare to reach its centre, to track down the very core of being? Faced with the self-portrait, a triptych (6), consisting of details of glasses seen from different points of view, is revealed with finesse.

Fabrice Samyn strives to explore the technique of the Old Masters (sanguine) to better understand the medium and the world and the difficulty of reproducing it. For the drawing *Cochlea Christi* (7),

he took an interest in *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci and noticed, when seeking the vanishing point, that it was located in Christ's inner ear, in the exact location of the cochlea, the spiral cavity of the inner ear. The shape of the cochlea is spirally wound around itself, thus creating a perspective.

With *La Pyramide du cadre* (8), Fabrice Samyn reminds us of the imperceptible towards which everything vanishes. A pyramid of rock crystal lying on one of its triangular sides is placed on a base. If you look closely, the eye takes it all in, and despite the milky fibres floating in the transparency of the crystal, we perceive clearly the edges that lead the eye to the deepest point, the vanishing point.

## **RIGHT-HAND ROOM**



To the left of the landscape, two paintings that seem abstract at first glance represent a fountain. The unrepresentable, in a way (9-10). How to paint the perpetual motion of a fountain?

In classical painting, the fountain symbolizes life, youth and love. It is also the sign of constant repetition, a variation on the infinite. The constant renewal of nature through the flow of water also suggests notions of purification of the body and eroticism. The gushing painted by Fabrice Samyn is a clear reference to ejaculation that enables fertilization and marks a timeless moment (isn't an orgasm sometimes described as "little death"?).

The flame also shows the impermanence of time. This work is part of a series of paintings of greatly enlarged details of firebrands held by Mary Magdalene in the famous paintings by Georges de la Tour (1593-1652). Fabrice Samyn has reproduced a flame and its reflection in a mirror painted by La Tour between 1625 and 1650 (11). Which is the flame being reflected, and which is the reflection?

The light is omnipresent; we see another manifestation of it in the dazzled eye of this little portrait in red-orange hues (12).

A beautiful paradox can be identified in relation to time in these paintings; drying time is very slow and takes up to two years while the subject is captured is a fleeting instant.

Instants are also treated in three reproductions on paper of *The Annunciation* painted by Fra Angelico in the fifteenth century (13). What fascinates Fabrice Samyn here is the concept of various timescales induced by the vanishing points expertly moved by Fra Angelico from one version to another. It represents the magic of the Annunciation at three different times of day: three phases coexist for a single action. By magnifying the vanishing lines into lines of light, he achieves an intersection of lines forming a point symbolizing the solar star: here, the vanishing point is clearly a metaphor of the sun.

On the wall above the large window, where clocks are often suspended, you can see, frozen on the wall, an ammonite mollusk fossil (14) dating back millions of years. It is not the least of the paradoxes to realise that ammonites are excellent chronological markers and geological landmarks, and their spiral structure suggests vertigo, both spatial and temporal, giving them that impression of infinity but also of perspective.

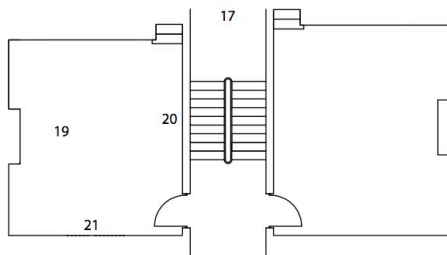
The reverence for nature is reflected in the work *Light as a feather* (15) even if it is an unexpected association of a parrot's feather and a bleached cattle bone. The rapprochement is an even greater contrast as it involves the air and the earth: the birth of light comes from a materiality rooted in a living thing.

Visitors will have noticed the constancy of the artist's relationship with light. He bases some of his work on an observation of the light from the darkness and vice versa.

Choosing as a working basis a view of the extermination camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, it builds on one of "reference images" of the twentieth century (16). The status of this picture allows the artist to ask the question of what constitutes an iconic image nowadays. This is the image that looks at us like an icon in the Byzantine tradition. This work is intended to be simple, sober and respectful. He reversed the perspective of the train tracks, erasing the original tracks and replacing them by others. This arrangement has the effect of broadening the field of view and giving an impression of opening eyes as well as opening arms. The idea is to incorporate the Event itself, however elusive it

may be through reason and ultimately to respect the memory of Man. The viewer is in a position where he or she is observed by the world, actually becoming the vanishing point: the point where everything disappears.

### **LANDING**



Before reaching the first floor, the visitor's attention is drawn to a chair placed in the corridor facing the window (17). There is a natural temptation to sit on it. On the back of the chair, on the inside, is written the title of the exhibition *Vanishing Point of View*. By sitting down, the visitor is positioning him or herself as a vanishing point (I'm potentially the vanishing point for someone else) and clearly determines his/her point of view (sitting on a chair to look out). We are not far from

the phrase of the Taoist philosopher Chuang Tzu: "I am close, the other person is far away" (cited by Lee U-Fan). The vision is not the same depending whether it's night or day. So on the evening of the vernissage, the window sends back the sitter's reflection, while during the daytime, the sitter's gaze may wander through the gardens, observing the constant movement of nature.

### **FIRST FLOOR**

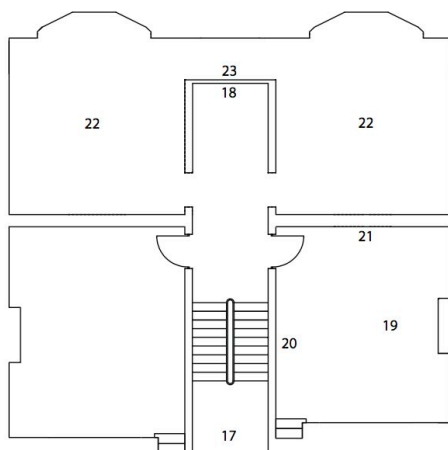
Arriving on the first floor, visitors are confronted with a large ladder standing the wrong way round (18). Originally used in orchards, the familiar object takes on a new meaning, offering an unexpected perspective.

The entire history of religious art is full of scenes where man has a ladder. Symbolising spiritual, intellectual and moral elevation, it enables the lost contact between Man and the divine, between heaven and earth, to be restored. So it is the instrument for a journey of initiation that allows Man to rise and incorporate the celestial in himself.

### **RIGHT-HAND OFFICE**

In the right-hand room, the special project carried out by the artist with the assistance of the Post Office and Impact (19) is detailed in a separate sheet (see attached sheet).

### **LEFT AND RIGHT-HAND ROOMS**

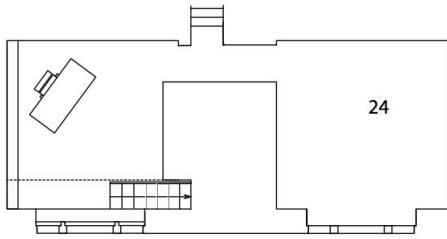


Both main rooms on the first floor are occupied by photos constituting the *All Saints* series (22). During 2011, the artist recorded hundreds of names carved by strangers in public places, on benches, trees, in the street. Once he had covered them in gold leaf, the first names were photographed and 365 of them were selected by the artist to produce a universal calendar. The places where these names were discovered and photographed are primarily places of rest or observation. Public places, at any rate. Places where people want to record their presence, be part of it, express themselves, exist. Fabrice Samyn likes the idea of elevating wanderers to the status of saints.

The only rules applied to the way they are hung is according to the months (so we see 12 groups of 28 to

31 photos). This was an opportunity for Fabrice Samyn to question the deepest intimacy and public spaces, by opening up many possible interpretations, including a reflection about the privatisation of public open spaces, the introduction of the marvellous into everyday life, multiculturalism (alongside typically Western names, there is a flourish of names that typically sound Arab, Turkish or Anglo-Saxon, etc.), the relationship with delinquency, expression and communication of feelings in the city.

## WUNDERKAMMER



The Wunderkammer houses an installation that initially appears simple, but which turns out to be complex, and takes time to observe. Keen to question our contemporaneity by re-questioning the practices of past centuries, Fabrice Samyn uses old paintings in some of his works, painted by artists in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. For *The Dimension of the Mirror (24)*, he based it on a painting at the turn of those centuries by the Dutch artist Maerten Pietersz. Deym (1566/67-1624), who represents the painter himself, viewed from behind, in the process of painting a portrait of a woman (his wife?) sitting piously opposite him. The painter turns around as if we had interrupted the stillness of the pose and the model looks at us shyly. The painting was probably painted in two stages: a first stage, when he painted himself and his wife (using a mirror) and a second stage, when he painted the easel (which could not be painted when the large painting here was standing on the easel).

This work is hung in the Wunderkammer, so that the visitor does not immediately see the view of the work, but a first glance is drawn to an easel identical to the one painted by Deym, placed in the centre of the room. Fabrice Samyn completes the resemblance by installing a mirror of the same size as the painting on Deym's easel. This mirror is installed so that a person entering the room only notices the reflection of part of the painting, specifically the painter and the painted portrait. Neither the model nor the edge of the scene are apparent.

Starting out from the principle that the vanishing point, in general, invites the gaze to look at the painting, Fabrice Samyn tries to create the opposite movement, bringing out the work itself, pushing it outside itself, through the effect of the mirror.

Several openings are made in the density, in the thickness of the painting, we could even say, through this game of mirrors. Deym sees the outside world, our world, as a mirror, as a reflective surface. Deym looks at himself in us, to paint himself. The major role in this work is played by the viewer. It is the viewer who completes the triangulation and allows the work to express itself fully. To sum up, we could say that Fabrice Samyn's installation is an allegory for painting.

By installing a mirror in this exchange of glances, Fabrice Samyn creates an additional difficulty in interpreting the work, rather as in a dream where we can see ourselves dreaming. What we can see is a reflection. The painting is already a reflection of reality. The painting in the painting is a reflection of a reflection. So we are facing a reflection of a reflection of a reflection ... not to mention that left and right are reversed.

With this elaborate work, we see that Fabrice Samyn considers the world in its relativity and reciprocity, by questioning the notion of point of view and causing *mises en abîme* which again pose the question of the vanishing point.

In addition, by surreptitiously inviting us to stand between Deym's canvas and easel so as to see the work properly, Fabrice Samyn puts us back in the position of the start of the exhibition, in an empty space, having to choose between one vision or another...