

# THE SOUND OF CLOUDS

Opening on Thursday May 04

6 to 9 pm

Emmanuel Rivière

May 04 - June 03 2017

**MAËLLE GALLERY**

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With *Le Bruit des nuages/The Sound of Clouds*, Emmanuel Rivière captures one of the most extraordinary forms of the 'Baker test' blast in 25 July 1946. Bruce Conner used it in 1976 and his film called *Crossroads* included part of the recordings produced during the underwater nuclear bomb testing that took place in the Bikini Atoll, several months after bombs exploded in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These images and the event were broadcast in the media and on the radio, amassing many images intended to demonstrate the American strike force at the start of the Cold War, joining the documentation of the Berlin Olympic Games by Leni Riefensthal, and contemporary Soviet films on the list of the most efficient use of film for political propaganda. Extraordinary means were deployed to produce, with the help of 700 cameras, a maximum of photographs and recordings, points of view and shots, making these explosions one of the most photographed events in history.

Crowns of thorns surged from the mushroom cloud and these fearsome and quasi-Christian rings were as equally menacing and fascinating with their spikes. Emmanuel Rivière, making use of the shape of the impression that he also applied to ethnographic objects and African masks, materialises this ephemeral sculpture that existed only for the space of a few seconds. This account of the temporal fragment and unprecedented violence is exactly what appeals the most: the destruction of all life in a fraction of a second by the nuclear weapon imposes a morbid and hypnotic fascination on the viewer further developed by photography and then sculpture.

Beyond the inexhaustible symbolism of the circle – from renaissance to completeness – the persistence of the form and work of art but also the relationship between the idea and its incarnation, *Le Bruit des nuages* seems to measure itself against *Smoke Rings (Model for Underground Tunnels)*, 1979, by Bruce Nauman, comprised of two white plaster rings of which the clouds of smoke, crudely pinned to the ground remain prisoners of their materiality. In a fascinating counterpoint Emmanuel Rivière's work defies this paradox of matter, as he gives real autonomy to the impression technique as a sculptor. A photograph of the bomb explosion has been translated into a modelled (subsequently destroyed) form of which only the mould remains, moulded in negative.

The impression offers viewers the feeling of power – even in an illusory way – to stop time, to pause on an image so as to take stock of the gravity of what could be debased into entertainment. This principle seems to recall the gaps left in the lava and dust by the bodies of the inhabitants of Pompeii and Herculaneum from which the silhouettes emerged almost two millennia later. Like the wrath of Vesuvius, this nuclear power can produce an energy of which the violence is beyond understanding. Emmanuel Rivière's sculptures are not necessarily a plea against weapons or a condemnation of the systematic destruction of the environment tortured by human technology. The confrontation with the images by Bruce Conner, who campaigned to have these images declassified and broadcast, invites this interpretation but seems beyond that, to want to test the impact of the forms of representation on the ability of the spirit to consider this outrageousness.

Matthieu Lelièvre, April 11 2017

