

Marie-Claire Blais and Pascal Grandmaison, *La vie abstraite 1 : Le temps transformé / La vie abstraite 2 : Espace du silence*, Montréal, Galerie René Blouin

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Marie-Claire Blais and Pascal Grandmaison

La vie abstraite 2: Espace du silence, 2016.

Photos : © Pascal Grandmaison, courtesy of Galerie René Blouin

Marie-Claire Blais and Pascal Grandmaison

La vie abstraite 1: Le temps transformé / La vie abstraite 2: Espace du silence

Time moves both forwards and backwards in Marie-Claire Blais and Pascal Grandmaison's latest exhibition presented at Galerie René Blouin in Montréal's Old Port. *La vie abstraite 1 & 2* are two-channel video projections that span the space of three darkened rooms. As the films move between the abstract and the figurative, the viewer's sense of scale, both spatial and temporal, is distorted.

Espace du silence comprises four synchronized projections that run for thirty-five minute intervals. Standing within the gallery's first room, only two of the four projections are visible. On the screen, a crumpled piece of paper burns slowly in reverse. Tiny pieces of ash crawl up the peaks and valleys of the paper, finding their rightful place along the flamed edges; when the chronology is flipped, fire is regenerative. Seen from the second room, the panoramic effect of the four screens is fully appreciated. The two rooms present different points of view of the paper in the process of dissolution or renewal; depending on the screen, you are either moving forwards or backwards in time. As the paper restores its original shape, a blue and black grid emerges from the flames. This is an ode to Piet Mondrian's paintings, an abstraction of colour divided by geometric lines. Rosalind Krauss writes that "the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves." The incineration of the grid in Blais and Grandmaison's film invokes a dialogue between the abstract and the natural; between a fire that illuminates and one that extinguishes everything in its path.

La vie abstraite 1: Le temps transformé is comprised of two synchronized projections in the exhibition's third room. Here, a photograph floats over tall, dry grass, maneuvered by an invisible hand outside the frame. As the camera dives beneath the meadow we catch glimpses of the scene captured within the picture: a shining sun within a bright

blue sky streaked with altostratus clouds. The film pays homage to the work of painter Kazimir Malevich, founder of the Suprematist movement. Specifically, *Le temps transformé* recalls the Russian Futurist opera *Victory Over the Sun* (1913), written by Aleksei Kruchenykh, for which Malevich acted as a costume and set designer. In the opera, the sun is taken from the sky and locked in a concrete box, where it shines a new form of supranatural light. This feat stands as a rejection of the past in favour of "pure feeling" by means of technological supremacy. In *Le temps transformé*, Malevich's sun is confined within the parameters of a picture (notably printed on the underside of a Malevichian black square, a symbol of Suprematism). If the theme of *Victory Over the Sun* is to move beyond the natural order of things towards a super-rationality, then *Le temps transformé* reinstates the abstract within the natural order.

Justina Spencer

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