



REBELS

MARTINE FEIPEL & JEAN BECHAMEIL

Exhibition from 11 May until 25 June 2022

Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery is pleased to present the first exhibition of the duo Feipel&Bechameil at its new space in Dubai.

Written essay by Clément Minighetti, curator at Mudam, the contemporary art museum of Luxembourg:

For their first exhibition in the new space of the Zidoun-Bossuyt gallery in Dubai, the artist duo Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil have installed a set of works which allow us to understand the progress of their work in recent years. A selected work that unravels the thread of a reflection based on careful observation of our contemporary era, in the light of the history of modernity.

The reflection of the artists focuses on the rise of industrialization and the profound social upheavals that accompanied it. Their works evoke this heritage, just as they borrow part of their formal vocabulary from the modernist movements, cubism and constructivism among others, but knowing how to divert them. How has technical progress influenced our lifestyles, directed our social aspirations? What future is taking shape for our societies which, long deluded by the omnipotence of technology, see the moment of a definitive break with our natural environment approaching? All these questions run through the works of artists whose critical spirit avoids the pitfall of Manichean thinking, which would hide the complexity of our relationship to technology. Sometimes stamped with a gentle melancholy, their works do not forget to rehabilitate the march of progress when it has served social progress, or contributed to changing for the better our ways of living and thinking about the world.

The language of ruin or petrification, frequently used in their work, makes us take a tender look at certain productions of our consumer society. The sculpture *Blue Beat* (2020) is inspired by a cult object from the 1980s, the radio cassette player, inseparable from the emergence of an uninhibited, popular, musical and urban counter-culture. Through art, the object turns into a vestige, and revives the memory of an electronic device that has certainly become obsolete, but transgressive in its time. In an adequate relationship to art, *Blue Beat* plays with the codes of geometric abstraction and kinetic art. The bas-relief *Untitled (blue)* (2019), similar in technique and robotic animation, is, for its part, not unrelated to the Bauhaus style or art deco facades, with which it shares clean lines, curves, and a sober chromatic palette. With *Untitled*

(Lunar), (Solar) (2019), these are two works that underline the artists' pronounced interest in modernist architecture, its use of materials from the industrial revolution such as concrete and polymers, and processes manufacturing such as formwork and molding. The formal dialogue with the history of techniques, which is tied in their borrowings from engineering, serves to highlight the attentive gaze given to the transformation of our environment. Mechanization, robotization, new materials have shaped modernity and, through construction and industry, shaped our contemporary lives. Feipel and Bechameil also questioned the post-war "large housing estates" in one of their project in 2013 (Un Monde Parfait). They reminded us that before being denounced as problem areas, these "bars to be knocked down" were wanted "radiant" cities, putting modern comfort within reach of the greatest number, and born of visionary desires.

However, even more than showing how the models are constantly shaken, the artists point out that modernity has, in a double movement, both rethought the community and accentuated individualism, to the point of creating a schizophrenic world, densely populated by artificially connected people, increasingly cut off from the natural world. Thus, the desire to recreate social ties underlies all the projects in the public space developed by artists over the past ten years. As in Nantes in 2020 when they install a sculpture in the center of a new district which is also a bread oven, accessible to all (Les Brutalistes).



Under the stars, up above the ground, 2022, acrylic resin and wood, 180 x 120 x 16 cm (70,87 x 47,24 x 6,3 inches)

But, with the clear observation of the accelerated degradation of our environment, to the question of living together has been added that of living differently. For our materialistic and tech-savvy societies, this is a challenge of unprecedented magnitude and the upheavals that are already at work could not fail to challenge artists. Also, strange plant and animal forms have appeared in their work for a few years, following in particular a study trip to Trinidad and Tobago. In 2009, they discovered on these islands a jungle that had remained untouched by men. They come out impressed by the profusion of vegetation and its gigantism. Their bas-reliefs *Under the stars, above the ground* (2022) preserve the memory of this. They also translate this source of vitality into their work by hybridizing it with synthetic forms, composite

alloys, and robotic systems. In their recent project at Mudam Luxembourg (Garden of Resistance, 2022), they present a chimerical nature, which nourishes their reflection on a possible positive interaction between an artificial world and living forms. The idea of resistance would then be that of the resilience of nature extended to technology, which, by mimicry, would then be able to regenerate itself to put an end to the principle of obsolescence. A relationship between human industry and the natural world that would exclude the predation of one on the other could thus see the light of day. It is this happy phantasmagoria that the work *Dreamers, Lovers* (2021) suggests, which is presented as a tree trunk combining ceramic and acrylic resin, placed on an oak block.



Shelter #36, 2022, ceramic and glaze, 38 x 23 x 16 cm (14,96 x 9,06 x 6,3 inches)

As artists engage in a reflection on our environment, they are interested in natural habitats just as they have become attached to human achievements. Originally designed to be installed on the facade of a shelter, the ceramic sculptures of the series *Shelters* (2022) are in fact nests for black swifts (*apus apus*). This bird, at the peak of evolution, spends its entire life in flight, even when sleeping, and only alights to brood. Unfortunate collateral victim of the architecture of modern cities, it has been deprived of the crevices offered by our buildings of yesteryear, replaced by modern buildings with impenetrable concrete facades. In a successful synthesis of modernist forms and primitive arts, the artists then designed these habitats.

Finally, the *Rebels* series (2022), from which the exhibition borrows its title, deals with the human figure. These sculptures draw a link between the series of *Shelters* and the public art project *Les Brutalistes*. However, if all these works belong to the same aesthetic register, the lines and geometric shapes of the *Rebels* are no longer only the expression of an architecture, but also that of a character, of a revolt. Taken together, these three projects demonstrate both the diversity and plastic rigor of the entire work of Martine Feipel and Jean Bechameil, as well as its ability to find applications in reality, by creating links in the public space as in natural areas.