



**VISITOR'S GUIDE**

**JIMMY ROBERT**

***DESCENDANCES DU NU***

**EXHIBITION**

**18 JUNE - 25 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Jimmy Robert's practice oscillates between various formats: photography, drawing, video, sculpture or performance, all fields he invests with his body and voice. But his work is also crossed by other bodies and voices, those of major 20th-century artists whose gestures, poses, manifestos or images he reproduces. For example, *Figure de style* (2008) reworks a famous performance by Japanese artist Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*, 1965) in which Ono asked the public to cut off pieces of her clothing with scissors, gradually denuding her body. Jimmy Robert reuses the principle of the original performance, its potential erotic tension and its underlying violence, but in his case, visitors are invited to pull pieces of white masking tape off the artist's black body. To gender power relations, Jimmy Robert adds an additional element of tension, that of the opposition between hegemonic and peripheral figures, in a play of unsatisfied desires and ambiguous gestures. By deliberately placing himself in the wake of female artists (choreographer Yvonne Rainer, performer Carolee Schneemann, or Marguerite Duras, whose literary and cinematic writing inspired several of his works), Jimmy Robert constructs an artistic genealogy that is no longer written according to the patriarchal model.

At the Synagogue de Delme, Jimmy Robert offers a new visual and theatrical installation in which these questions of genealogy, citation and appropriation remain central. The title of the exhibition *Descendance du nu* [Descendance of the Nude] is a direct reference to Duchamp's famous 1912 painting: *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Though it caused a scandal in 1912, the painting nevertheless marked a major turning point in the history of art and made Marcel Duchamp into one of the fathers of modern and contemporary art. To this father figure, Jimmy Robert links mothers, that is to say female artists who in their own way reproduced the motif of the nude descending a staircase: Elaine Sturtevant, Sherrie Levine and Louise Lawler, all three of whom were known for lending their credibility to copies and appropriation, dynamiting questions of authorship and originality, by transforming artistic practice into an infinite recirculation of images.

The installation that Jimmy Robert conceived for Delme is made up of several elements: a curtain falling from the first-floor balcony, printed with repeated patterns, literally pulverises Marcel Duchamp's painting while turning the exhibition site into a theatre set, a space where images are activated, where one can perform the history of art, in order to bring out new base lines and show what was previously outside the frame.

Opposite this immense curtain, images placed on a staircase combine various references to, and appropriations of, the nude descending the staircase, as reinterpreted by several women artists in the 20th century. The text commissioned from theorist and art critic Elisabeth Lebovici, published by the art centre for the occasion, sheds its own fascinating light on Jimmy Robert's work.

Furthermore, a sound piece conceived by sound artist Ain Bailey allows us to hear a succession of female voices. Although they emanate from the passageway upstairs (a space once reserved for women in the old synagogue), the voices escape this dedicated place in order to circulate through the whole building and occupy it fully.

On the evening of the opening, Jimmy Robert is giving a performance, presenting himself at floor-level. This crawling body, on the ground, vulnerable and having descended the staircase for good, provokes confused feelings; at any moment, laughter is liable to become the hidden side of desire.

Marie Cozette

## BIOGRAPHY

Jimmy Robert was born in 1975 in Saint Claude, Guadeloupe. He studied at Goldsmiths College in London, as well as at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam (2004 – 2005). He lives in Bucharest, Romania.

He is represented by Stigter / Van Doesburg gallery in Amsterdam and Tanya Leighton gallery in Berlin.

Recent solo exhibitions include: M Museum Leuven, Tanya Leighton gallery in Berlin (2015), The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto (2013), the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Picture This in Bristol, the Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume in Paris (2012), the Brétigny contemporary art centre and CCA Kitakyushu (2009). He has given performances at many institutions: Migros Museum in Zürich, Kunsthalle Basel, the South London Gallery, the Museum of Modern Art New York, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London...

Recent group exhibitions include: the Centre d'art contemporain Genève (2015), the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Biennale of Dakar, the Berlin Biennale (2014, 2008), the Kunstverein München, the Mart di Roverto (2012), Tate Liverpool, WIELS in Brussels (2011).

## DESCENDANCES DU NU, 2016

The installation produced by Jimmy Robert for the Synagogue de Delme includes several elements:

- *Untitled Lawler Sturtevant*, 2016, inkjet print on wooden stand
- *Untitled Levine*, 2016, inkjet print on wooden stand
- a printed velvet curtain and painted metal bar
- a booklet available to the public, with a text (in French and in English) by art critic Elisabeth Lebovici on Jimmy Robert's work
- props from Jimmy Robert's performance on the night of the opening (mask and costume)
- a sound piece composed by artist Ain Bailey, broadcast in the space every fifteen minutes
- two painted wood sculptures

## A FEW REFERENCES TO GO FURTHER

In his installation, Jimmy Robert cites several major works of 20th-century art and plays with these references. Here are the works in question:



Marcel Duchamp,  
*Nu descendant un  
escalier n°2*, 1912,  
oil on canvas

**Marcel Duchamp** (1887 - 1968) is regarded by many as one of the founding fathers of contemporary art. He is the inventor of the readymade, an everyday object elevated to the status of a work of art. The beginning of his career was also marked by the influence of the avant-gardes of the years 1890-1910: impressionism, Fauvism, cubism, futurism... *Nude Descending a Staircase* draws from the tonalities and decomposition characteristic of cubism, while attempting to give shape to movement, as the futurists had succeeded in doing.

The painting faced sharp criticism when it was first presented to the public. It was compared to a pile of shingles or wood shavings. At a time when cinema and photography were making their appearance, Marcel Duchamp attempted to translate movement through the resources of painting.



Louise Lawler,  
*Nude*, 2002/2003,  
photography

**Louise Lawler** (born in 1947 in New York; lives and works in New York) is an American artist who can be connected with the appropriationist current, which literally consists in appropriating or overtly citing the work of other artists.

Since the 1970s, she has been photographing works in various contexts: museum picture rails, collectors' interiors, fairs, auction houses... Through these photographs, she suggests that every work is part of a complex bundle of gestures, perspectives, views, manipulations and mises en scène that construct the system that legitimises art, taste and style. Who produces the work, who presents it, who buys it? The work is never exempt from the context in which it appears.

The photograph entitled *Nude*, dated 2002, represents a painting by German artist Gerhard Richter, left leaning against a wall on a gallery stand before being hung. The painting in turn draws from the motif of the nude descending a staircase.



Sturtevant, *Duchamp  
nue descendant  
l'escalier*, 1968,  
video

**Elaine Sturtevant** (1924, Lakewood, United States – 2014, Paris) was an American artist. She settled in Paris in the 1990s. Though she rejected the appropriationist label, she still strongly influenced this current through her repeating practice of copying and reproducing major 20th-century works. She began her career in New York in the 1960s, choosing to reproduce the works of emerging artists, who were later to become key figures of contemporary art, as was the case with Andy Warhol.

Although she always chose artists who were still not well-known, Marcel Duchamp was an exception. In 1968 she made a film entitled *Duchamp nue descendant un escalier*, in which we see Sturtevant herself descending a staircase.



Sherrie Levine,  
*After Duchamp from  
meltdown*, 1989,  
woodcut

**Sherrie Levine** (born in 1947 in Hazelton, Pennsylvania; lives and works in New York) also belongs to the appropriationist current. In the early 1980s, she became known through the identical reproduction of photographs taken by Walker Evans in the 1930s, documenting American poverty in the southern United States after the Great Depression of 1929. By re-photographing major works from the history of photography, Sherrie Levine demolished the notion of authors and authorship, of originals and uniqueness.

In 1989-1991 she created a series of woodcuts entitled *Meltdown*: she photographed famous works by Duchamp, Mondrian or Monet, scanned these images and then reduced the files to 12 pixels of colour, thus obtaining a simplified, smooth, totally abstract image.

Jimmy Robert reuses the meltdown principle, this time applying it to Marcel Duchamp's work *Nude Descending a Staircase*.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Exhibition open :  
Wednesday-Saturday: 2-6pm.  
Sunday: 11am-6pm. Free entrance.  
Guided Tour every Sunday at 4pm.

## CONTACT / EDUCATION SERVICE

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## LOCATION AND ACCESS

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FROM PARIS (by train 90 mins):  
TGV Est, get off at Metz or Nancy  
FROM METZ (by car, 30 mins):  
D955, formerly route de Strasbourg  
FROM NANCY (by car, 30 mins):  
N74 towards Château-Salins  
then D955 towards Metz

## PARTNERS

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La synagogue de Delme Centre for Contemporary Art is a member of  
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Image : *Descendances du Nu*, 2016, courtesy Jimmy Robert.