

Haus am Gern

Rudolf Steiner & Barbara Meyer Cesta



Je ne sais quoi

An Exhibition, installation and intervention in Ten Frames at Les Halles, Space for Contemporary Art, Porrentruy (JU), 2007

with Tilo Steireif, Lausanne; Silvain Froidevaux, Geneva; Claude Gigon, Delémont; René Zäch, Biel/Bienne; Lukas Skapski, Cracow, Poland; Eugène Cattin, Les Bois.

Guests: Michel Hauser, Ernst Häusermann, La Roue de Bollement, Les Béliers.

General notes

Jura is the most recent addition to Switzerland's cantons. It was created in the aftermath of violent cultural and political conflict in the 1960s and 1970s that saw Les Béliers, a youth organisation calling themselves The Rams, carry out bomb attacks and destroy symbols such as the memorial to soldiers fallen in the First World War in Les Rangiers.

Je ne sais quoi was an exhibition in Les Halles Porrentruy, a contemporary art space. It attempted an aesthetic and scientific response to (his)stories and episodes in the canton of Jura, focusing particularly on anarchistic and separatist movements, and tried to tease out something of more general validity, not least in regard to other regions and countries with separatist tendencies.

The show was conceived as an interdisciplinary pastiche of ten associatively linked themes and stories. An important element in the run-up to the show was its protagonists roaming far afield, disseminating rumours, and co-opting individuals and groups to become a more or less voluntary part of the show.

The exhibition played with the French expression „je ne sais quoi“ on various levels. For example, the exhibits added a non-verbal dimension to the conveying of information and stories, not least by cheekily appropriating political action, events and celebrities. The show also modelled the way in which an object's significance changes from the mundane to the sublime when, for example, an ornament becomes a memorial for a comrade fallen in action – and showed how a government out of its depth attempted to deal with this phenomenon.

The exhibition wanted to open a free space for the kind of reflection that allowed a new view of art and society regardless of any political and aesthetic rules and preconceptions.





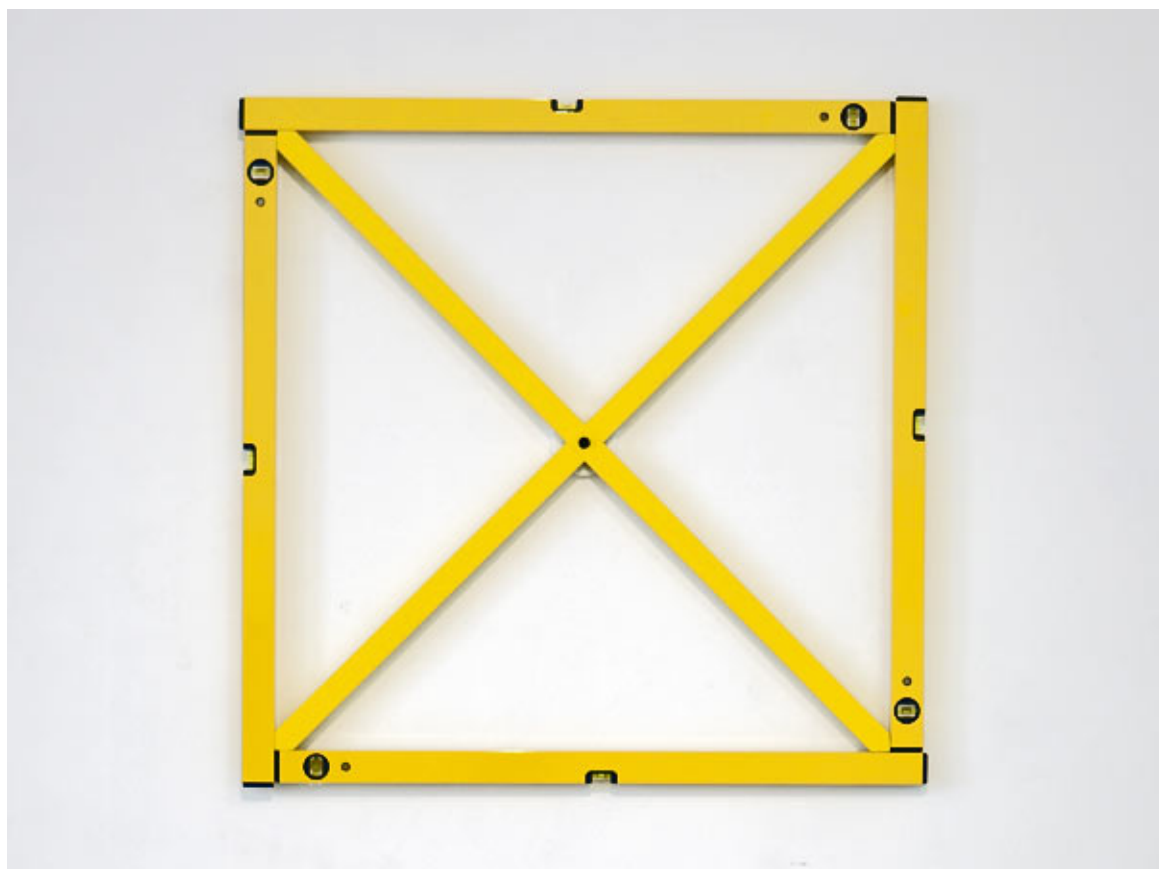
Frame 1

Frame One shows an object concealed by soft blankets. It is the Roue de Bollement, the wooden water wheel from the medieval sawmill of Bollement near Saint-Brais in the Jura. In 1972 the Bernese government mindlessly ordered the destruction of the mill, and the Swiss army proceeded to burn it down. Prior to this event, two Bernese soldiers, Ernst Häusermann from Langenthal BE, and Fritz Lanz from Schmiedrued AG, had appropriated the wheel, which was eventually sold to the Cantonal Bank of Berne to adorn its bank building in Lengnau.



Frame 2

Frame Two shows 100 times the soft blankets gently concealing the Roue de Bollement from the onlookers' eyes. The pattern (printed onto the blanket by diligent Chinese) shows a curious painting made by 9th graders from Lengnau: nine panels whose dimensions equal the space on the wall of the bank building in Lengnau BE, which was left empty on 12th October 1996, when a horde of Béliers took the wheel down in broad daylight and carted it back to a sanctuary in its homeland.



Frame 3

Frame Three shows a „water wheel“ – a piece called „stabil-labil“ (stable-instabile) by René Zäch, an artist from Biel/Bienne. His yellow square „wheel“ consisting of four water levels is inspired by the humorous gift from the Béliers who, on 1st April 1997, presented a square water wheel to the Lengnau BE branch of the Cantonal Bank of Berne.



Frame 4

Frame Four is a triptych depicting two men standing in the Hôtel-Restaurant du Soleil in Saint-Brais in front of a golden tapestry with hunting motifs. The men are connected by the Roue de Bollement: Michel Hauser (l) is head of the Department of Culture of the Republic and Canton of Jura; Ernst Häusermann (r), from Langenthal, owns a landscaping business; the restaurateurs' son is missing from the central image. This very young man, a fervent Béliier, travelled to Berne with a bomb in his luggage. It exploded early that day in Berne's Kramgasse. He has remained the only martyr to the separatist cause and the Béliers wanted to dedicate a monument to him – the Roue de Bollement set on a concrete plinth.



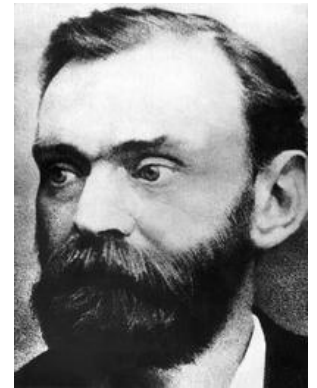
Frame 5

Frame Five depicts a frieze of wall tiles containing 36 drawings by Lausanne artist Tilo Steireif: he researched the politically motivated events in the Jura, mixed them up and burnt them into these ceramic tiles.



Frame 6

Frame Six shows a series of ingenious tractors ingeniously hand-assembled by poor farmers – for example in the Beskid mountains in Poland Polish artist Lukas Skapski discovered them and transformed them into works of art.



Frame 7

Frame Seven shows tractor snow chains of the unusual size of 14.9/913-26 and bearing metal letters. They would print the words of German typographer and anarchist, August Reinsdorf, „Soll dies wirklich ewig dauern?/Should this really last forever?“, into snow. Reinsdorf was executed in 1885 following his abortive attempt to assassinate the German Kaiser; he is said to have coined the expression „propaganda of the deed“ – but to explore this further would go too far.



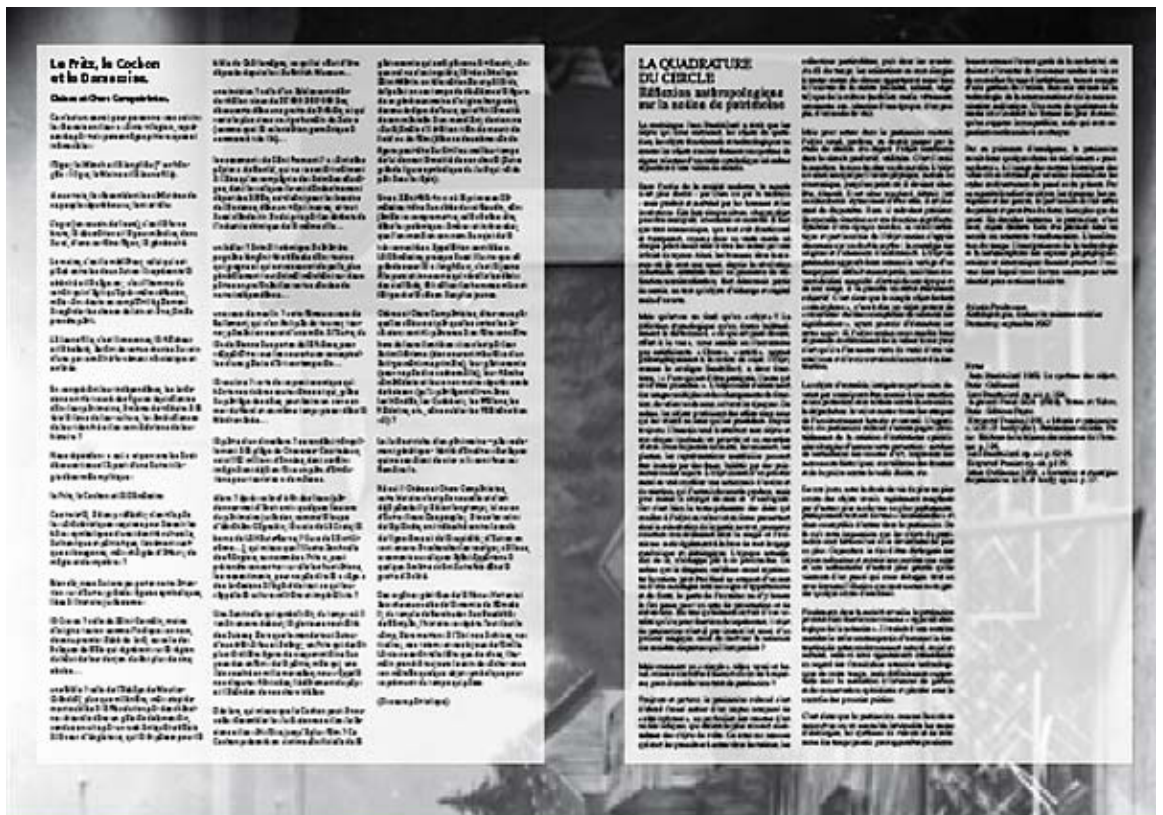
Frame 8

Frame Eight is a print from the reverse of the exhibition poster for *Je ne sais quoi*. It shows a photograph taken in the first half of the 20th century by postman/photographer Eugène Cattin (1866-1947) from Les Bois. It depicts set painter as he paints the Moulin de la Mort, the „mill of death“, near Les Bois onto a huge canvas.



Frame 9

Frame Nine shows Claude Gigon, an artist from Delémont (JU), who tirelessly swims against the current of the Doubs river, half-way in Switzerland and half-way in France, in the exact spot where the Moulin de la Mort once stood. Meanwhile, in the background, wind turbines thrum above the hilltops of the Jura mountain range.



Frame 10

Frame Ten depicts two texts written by Dr. Sylvain Froidevaux. He lives in Geneva and is an anthropologist whose family come from Noirmont (JU), and who was raised in Boncourt (JU); one text is a patriotic speech; the other an essay on waste as a cultural artefact. Both of them can be found on the exhibition poster to Je ne sais quoi.



The Opening

A large, very mixed audience found its way to Les Halles. Many people were drawn by an opportunity to see Les Béliers and the Roue de Bollement, which had been announced by the local press. Following curator Philippe Queloz' welcoming address, Sylvain Froidevaux gave his Discours patriotique, after which the Marc Freuléchaux, leader of Les Béliers, announced that they would for the third time apply to the Department of Culture to include the Roue de Bollement in the list of the canton of Jura's cultural heritage. His words were followed by an address by Michel Hauser, head of the Cantonal Department of Culture, who invited the assembled audience to buy the blanket to reveal what was underneath. Finally, people toasted each other with a glass of Jus de Béliers, or Ram's Juice.



Final Event

It was held on the St. Martin's Day weekend when the people of the region of the Jura called Ajoie slaughter their beasts before the onset of winter, and celebrate the event by feasting and drinking. The great St. Martin's market at Porrentruy, with Les Halles at its centre draws huge crowds. About 600 people attended the Final event. Mr. Michel Hauser and the Cantonal Minister of Culture, Ms. Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, however, preferred to celebrate St. Martin's Day with their families and sent their apologies. At 5pm the Béliers – wearing pink pig masks – stormed the exhibition and pulled the blankets off the Roue de Bollement. They revealed a wheel that, to the consternation of all those assembled there, was completely wrapped. Nevertheless, the Béliers carried the wheel through the throngs down the old city of Porrentruy before loading it onto a trailer and driving off.



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