



**PRESS RELEASE**

*second\_nature*

opening:  
duration:  
location:

**Monday, 26 May 2008, 18 h**  
**27.05.-17.10.2008**  
**Parc Heintz / Galerie l'Indépendance**  
**Dexia BIL**  
**69 route d'Esch, Luxembourg**

second  
venue:

**Centre artistique et culturel ,**  
**Chamarande (20 km, south of Paris)**  
**opening 26.10.2008, sunday**  
**(VIP Programme of FIAC)**

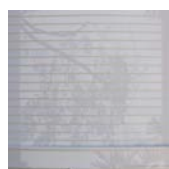
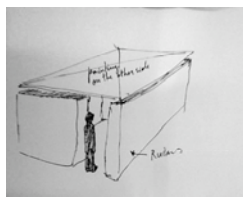
**Atelier van Lieshout** (\*63, NL)  
Aline **Bouvy** / John **Gillis** (\*74/72, LU/B)  
Pedro **Cabrita Reis** (\*56, P)  
Cyprien **Gaillard** (\*80, F)  
Una **Hunderi** (\*71, NO)  
Bertrand **Lavier** (\*49, F)  
Myriam **Mechita** (\*74, F)  
Gaby **Trinkaus** (\*66, A)  
Erwin **Wurm** (\*54, A)

Eric **Baudelaire** (73, USA)  
**Olaf Breuning** (70, CH)  
Hugo **Canoilas** (\*77, P)  
Tina **Gillen** (\*72, LU)  
Susanne **Huth** (\*72, D)  
**Lutz/Guggisberg** (\*68,/66, CH)  
Ugo **Rondinone** (\*64, CH)  
Trixi **Weis** (\*67, LU)

Marcel **Berlanger** (\*65, B)  
Chris **Burden** (\*46, USA)  
Simone **Decker** (\*68, LU)  
Alexander **Heim** (\*77, D)  
Chris **Johanson** (\*68, USA)  
Rita **McBride** (\*60, USA)  
Mary **Temple** (\*60, USA)  
Andrea **Witzmann** (370, A)

*Curator:* Dr. Sabine Dorscheid // *Coordination:* Galerie Nosbaum & Reding

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## ***second\_nature* / Sabine Dorscheid**

*“[Man] confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. [...] Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way changes his own nature.”*  
Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867)<sup>i</sup>

The term “second nature” refers both to man’s ability to intervene in his environment and to the result of this intervention – a capacity that distinguishes him from other elements in the first nature. Man’s increasing domination of nature has often been criticized as an artificial construction, most notably since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both populist and Marxist propaganda, but also various strands of esotericism which aimed to curtail man’s place in the universe, have thus spread the fear that this growing domination of nature will reduce man’s own naturalness and tighten the grip of (capitalist) society.

If we accept the premise that, speaking with Adorno, the second nature is also our first nature<sup>ii</sup>, then it lies in the nature of man to intervene in his environment and shape the tools needed to appropriate the world. After all, we owe our biological niche to rational action. Which way could possibly lead back to some imaginary first nature? Man is not an animal. Each constituted difference between the first and second nature is in fact the result of mere ideological or rhetorical speculation.

The rhetoric play with the first and second nature, along with the emphasis on the unnaturalness of human behaviour, has often been used as an explanation of blatant injustice in the world. In early industrialisation, for instance, it was believed to be the root of all capitalist evil: “In the first stone the savage throws on the beast he is hunting, the first stick he takes to grab the fruit he cannot reach with his hands, we see the appropriation of an item to acquire another one and thus discover the origins of capital.”<sup>iii</sup>

But as soon as we dismiss the idea that the notion of second nature can help us find some universal truth, and instead merely use it as a tool to evaluate our own way of dealing with nature, it can be instrumental in highlighting its ideological re-appropriations. The exhibition *second\_nature* thus intends to measure the various degrees of alienation or closeness society entertains with nature. Twenty-five artists have been asked to comment on the first and second nature. But rather than looking to second nature for justifications or excuses for human endeavours and behaviours (as Heidegger had attempted via his notion of the “obedience to Being” [Seinshörigkeit]), the works in this exhibition cover a wide range of emancipatory possibilities provided by the human mind and its potential for action. Ugo Rondinone lets nature die for art; Pedro Cabrita Reis’s sculpture presents the art system as an advance of civilisation (i.e. art as art which aims towards the sublime); Atelier van Lieshout’s monumental globe outlines the fictive dominions of a worldwide slave state; and Erwin Wurm derides society’s irrepressible faith in the future and the aesthetics it has brought forth.

Man’s emancipation from life-threatening natural constraints (climate, predators, food supply etc.) is inseparably linked to the technical and social progress of civilisation. There is something charmingly simple about Norbert Elias’s idea to present civilisation as a constant refinement of manners and customs from the Middle Ages to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alas, the successive civilisatory disasters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have shown how naïve this vision was. It is therefore no wonder that Elias’s theories should have spurred countless debates in the past 30 years, in which Hans Peter Duerr (*The Myth of the Civilisation Process*) has proven his fiercest opponent. Jens Maassen’s contribution to the exhibition catalogue analyses the development of civilisation as we know it from a philosophical and sociological standpoint. Karl Marx’s short text “The Criminal, No Less than the Capitalist, Is ‘Productive’”, in which the author melancholically ponders that evil is also a source and motivation of positive cultural manifestations, serves as transition to the theme developed by Laurence Massy, who is not only an art historian but also one of the few Belgian police detectives specialised in art crime. In her essay, Massy deals with the dark side of the art market, a parallel world with its own rules. Artworks, some of which are of unfathomable worth, have become a currency of their own in drugs and arms deals. The fact that old master paintings represent irreplaceable cultural achievements makes their value incontrovertible; a quite handy one, too, provided they are small in format. Conventions and regulations, including those of the art market, are part of the second nature. They are consensual arrangements, which are de facto circumvented by art crime. The theft, smuggling, and concealed buying and selling of art in exchange for drugs, weapons, or diamonds undermine the conventionalised trade with art. Detective Massy provides us with picturesque insights into the underworld.

The majority of artworks in *second\_nature* can be seen in Park Heintz, where they confront the first nature, as it were. The exhibition starts with an uprooted tree trunk that was used as a drawing board by Trixi Weis, followed by Myriam Mechita’s tall crystal structures. The path continues past Aline Bouvy and John Gillis’s couple of anthropomorphic sculptures before it reaches Pedro Cabrita Reis’s oversized neon tubes, Marcel Berlangier’s photographic panels high up in the branches of a tree, Atelier van Lieshout’s revolving globe, and Gabi Trinkaus’s delicate flesh-coloured children’s tents. After Bertrand Lavier’s large readymade, visitors cross the lawn to meet Chris Johanson’s yoga master. From Olaf Breuning’s parodic set of garden utensils with human features, they walk over to Hugo Canoilas’s mock archaeological site revealing the ceiling frescoes in the

remains of Villa Heintz. In the lower part of the park, three specially furnished black boxes await spectators who can watch screenings of works by Cyprien Gaillard, Susanne Huth and Eric Baudelaire. Their films, each in its own way, deal with architectural manifestations of civilisation, respectively French castles and gardens, the outskirts of Los Angeles, and the Paris suburbs during recent riots. Walking out of the video booths, one stands face to face with Erwin Wurm's UFO, which has landed on the lawn. Next to it, Ugo Rondinone's melancholic work invites visitors to take a rest at the foot of a tree wrapped in silver-coloured tape, whilst listening to the esoteric sounds of an oversized carillon. Simone Decker's picnic blankets are also an invitation to sit down and relax, but when people sitting on them are being photographed, they literally disappear from the picture since the retro-reflexive cloth bounces back the flashlight.

Several artworks, which could not have been exposed to outdoor conditions (the first nature, if you will), are presented in the adjoining exhibition hall. Upon entering, visitors face a large painting by Tina Gillen depicting an uninhabited architectural landscape reminiscent of a mirage, which addresses the ephemerality and fleetingness of the second nature. Generally speaking the construction of reality is the dominant topic in the gallery space. By inventing a story that reconstructs the characteristics of evil, Chris Burden makes a deceitfully simple demonstration of how good and evil have come into the world and how they can be told apart, leaving us with the astute observation that the world is just like the stories we invent to describe it. Another ancient story is at the heart of Andrei Tarkovsky's epic film *Andrei Rublev* (1966), around short excerpts of which Hugo Canoilas has reconstructed a no less archaic village architecture, thus creating a space for a historic survey of the early beginnings of civilisation. Rita McBride presents an instrument to measure the world, which makes us wonder if there are corresponding objects in reality that it could be applied to. In other words, do we adapt our tools to the world or is it the other way around? Una Hunderi, whose meta-idyllic photographs question stereotypes of natural beauty, tackles our perception of the world from a different angle. As for Andrea Witzmann's photographs of exit ways, though they appear to be documenting real-life situations, it is never clear where they originate or where they lead to. Are they symbolic attempts to escape civilisation?

While Alexander Heim's broken wing mirrors present the real consequences of civilisatory changes, Mary Temple casts ghost shadows onto the gallery walls. Humour is an important instrument of the second nature, since it allows for a detached analysis of events. Humour is furthermore a tool of knowledge specific to man. In Lutz/Guggisberg's miniature armada, the immemorial process of baking was used to produce something never seen before in this shape or form: a ship – or more precisely a container ship with small pilot boats – made of bread. The muzak to this naval scenery is played by small table fountain, which has mutated into a creepy little monster thanks to the fake eyes Olaf Breuning has glued onto it. This trashy version of a historic garden motif evokes the attempt by Renaissance landscape gardeners to shape nature and populate it with monsters and ruins. More than anything else, it reasserts the fact that the urge to design is an integral part of our second nature.

The exhibition *second\_nature* was made possible thanks to the generous support of Dexia Banque Internationale in Luxembourg and its Fondation Indépendance. We are particularly indebted to the artists for producing exciting new work. Our gratitude extends to their respective galleries. Alex Reding deserves a special acknowledgement for his untiring engagement and support of this project, which has proven a challenge for all people involved.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/alteration/ch06.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Robert Torrens, *An Essay on the Production of Wealth*, London, 1821, p. 79.

<sup>iii</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Frankfurt, 1973, p. 365.