

# THE ART DAILY

LE QUOTIDIEN DE L'ART

# NEWS

## WEEKLY EDITION

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Weekly Edition

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## PALAZZO GRASSI: INTO THE LIGHT

BY ROXANA AZIMI

Some exhibitions radiate sensitivity whilst others highlight intelligence. A nice balance between the two hemispheres of the brain is proposed by "L'illusione della luce" (The Illusion of Light) organized by Caroline Bourgeois at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice. Straightaway, at the beginning of the exhibition, the visitor comes to a standstill before an opalescent, almost cloud-like blanket. Could Ann Veronica Janssens be the guardian of the secret behind this vertiginous fog? Or, perhaps it's a James Turrell room-trap? No, this infinite space is the work of the Californian, Doug Wheeler. In this pristine desert, blurred perspectives force visitors to feel their way forward. The light itself seems to vacillate in this magical experience. But Wheeler is a magician who provides the keys to his tricks. The somnambulist reverie is quickly over and the visitors realize how the effect is achieved: their steps have led to the rounded edges of a hull where their shadows are gradually projected. Turning around reveals the row of spotlights modulating the light from above with extreme sophistication. Though there may be a sense of disappointment at the exposure



Vidya Gastaldon, *Escalator (Rainbow Rain)*, 2007. Courtesy of the artist, Galerie Art: Concept, Paris. Pinault Collection. Installation view at the Palazzo Grassi, 2014. Photo: © Palazzo Grassi, ORCH orsenigo\_chemollo.

of the artifice, the visitor will not really have time to dwell on it, as upon climbing the stairs he is instantly seized by another dizzying, epileptic experience: a *Marquee* by Philippe Parreno. A critique of the society of spectacle, all the more pleasing for the way its flashes make the Palazzo's frescoes flicker, practically satirizing the aristocrats leaning on their balconies. This broken rhythm is succeeded by the lissome softness of a rainbow of threads and bits of wool tautened by Vidya Gastaldon. In this artist's work, calm or balance are often false, threatened by a dull tremor of the unconscious. Further on, Julio Le Parc mesmerizes visitors with an optical vortex resting upon a simple makeshift object, but to maximum effect in this fascinating piece already seen in the artist's retrospective at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris.

More effectively than the "Dynamo" exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris - which by its extreme density induced, more than amazement, feelings of nausea - "The Illusion of Light", infinitely more modest in scale, smoother and more diverse, plunges visitors into the abyss in order to render them more attentive. Because light is not only treated like a sensory stimulus - one that would freeze visitors like animals caught in the headlights of a car. It also awakens a critical sense. Danh Vo and Latifa Echakhch attempt to shed new light on Vietnam's history and the concept of colonialism, or on the current issues relating to the Arab Spring. **CONTINUED ON P 3**

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Cover photo: Latifa Echakhch, *Ghost (Jasmin)*, 2012 / A each stencil a revolution. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Kamel mennour, Paris. Pinault Collection. Installation view at the Palazzo Grassi, 2014. Photo: © Palazzo Grassi, ORCH orsenigo\_chemollo.



# PALAZZO GRASSI: INTO THE LIGHT

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2 The utopian flame and its dark excesses are played upon respectively by Dan Flavin, whose clinical whiteness pays tribute to Tatlin, and Bruce Conner with his famous montage of nuclear tests carried out by the Americans on the Bikini Atoll in the aftermath of Hiroshima. With ruthless efficiency, this film magnifies the visual effects of nuclear bombs, creating an almost floating ambiance, rendering horror attractive. What could be more appalling and fascinating than the mushroom cloud? The film by David Claerbout, showing Nigerian workers for the Shell oil company stranded in the rain, is also nurtured by paradox. In a long tracking shot, by a curious coincidence, two issues are intertwined: oil and water. The dialogue by Antoni Muntadas questions our society, opposing a light bulb and a candle, two economies, two temporalities and two states of consciousness. In his brilliant foreword to the exhibition catalog, Pascal Rousseau cites the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who wrote in *La flamme d'une chandelle*: "The electric light bulb will never yield the reveries of this living lamp which made light with oil." The exhibition also plays subtly on a deathly chroma. From the black mourning of Marcel Broodthaers to the white shroud of *White Aids* by General Idea, where the viewer only gauges the piece by allowing the eye to adjust, the retina gently peeling the white layer to guess



Philippe Parreno, *Marquee*, 2013. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Esther Schipper, Berlin. Pinault Collection. Installation view at the Palazzo Grassi, 2014. Photo: © Palazzo Grassi, ORCH orsenigo\_chemollo.

the word "Aids" painted like the famous *Love* by Robert Indiana. The exhibition course ends with an odd color, deliquescent green, fluorescent like fireflies in the night, enshrouding Claire Tabouret's painting, suggestive of science fiction. The blond heads in carnival dress recall the disturbing cherubs from the film *Village of the Damned*. They weigh us up, with an empty and impassive gaze. It only remains for the adults that we are to give way and leave. ■ [Twitter](#)

**THE ILLUSION OF LIGHT**, until December 31st, Palazzo Grassi, Campo San Samuele 3231, Venice, Italy. Tel: +39 041 523 1680, [www.palazzograssi.it](http://www.palazzograssi.it)



David Claerbout, *Oil workers* (from the company of Shell Nigeria) returning home from work, caught in torrential rain, 2013. Pinault Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Yvon Lambert, Paris. © David Claerbout by SIAE 2014.