

The thorn birds

text for the European photography exhibition award, 2014

By Sergio Mah

Since he completed his studies in Fine Art (2007), Eric Giraudet de Boudemange's (b. 1983) artistic production has adopted various modes of expression that include photography, sculpture, performance, and video. An examination of his various works reveals a preoccupation with themes set in industrial or rural territories. These territories have allowed him to develop a body of work that brings together a conceptual approach and an ethnographic look at practices, gestures, and symbolic processes inherited from the past.

His recent works have revealed a particular interest in traditional games and sports. He explores their ludic and social nature and also sets out to investigate the processes by which a very particular knowledge and sensibility are constructed that diverge significantly from the logic and parameters determined by the protocols of objectivity and rationality widely disseminated by a certain kind of modern perspectivism.

In 1923, in *A lecture on Serpent Ritual*, the historian Aby Warburg made the following statement: 'Telegraph and telephone are destroying the cosmos. But myths and symbols, in attempting to establish spiritual bonds between man and the outside world, create space for devotion and scope for reason which are destroyed by the instantaneous electrical contact unless a disciplined humanity re-introduce the impediment of conscience'. This is a central question in Boudemange's artistic imaginary: the possibility of rescuing ways of experiencing time and the observational intelligibility of the world that we are losing or gradually neglecting in the wake of the radical technological and civilizational changes that are taking place.

For the EPEA, Boudemange has developed a project entitled *Thorn Birds*. It all began in 2012, during the course of an artist's residency in Auby, in the French region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, where he met Freddy Vallin, a dedicated pigeon fancier. Impressed by Vallin's relationship with his birds and also by the objects used in pigeon competitions, Boudemange began to follow the activities associated with this ancestral practice, seeking to uncover its rituals and enigmas, specifically, the fact that no one knows for certain how pigeons return home after being released in places where they have never previously been.

For Boudemange, the task of breeding and racing pigeons is a metaphor for man's relationship with nature and space. What is more, given that the sole purpose (or obsession) of breeding pigeons (now that they are no longer used as a means of communication) is to return as quickly as possible to their pens in the pigeon house,

these activities can also be understood as an evocation of the idea of the labyrinth, or the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

The project *Thorn Birds* is presented in various forms. It includes performances in which Boudemange explains and analyses various aspects of the nature and culture of pigeons. The performance culminates in the releasing of a pigeon. However, it is a pigeon that was destined to die since it is a poor racer. Its release therefore frees it from its most likely fate: to be cooked and eaten by the fancier's family. In the exhibition, the artist will also present a series of photographs depicting pigeons being released. In these images, the pigeons have elongated forms, like a mass in motion, as if they were ghosts. The last piece in the project is a video that includes scenes from Boudemange's performances interlinked with recordings of pigeon fanciers going about their activities.