

Die Hütte

The hut that wanted to be a temple



Die Hütte (2020)
20 x 16 x 16 cm

I proclaimed that conceptual art, in order to remove the constraints it self-imposed by its conditioning to language, had to return to the question of *being*; and I conjectured that this return to the enigma of being would allow art to reconcile the modern and the contemporary¹. It was therefore inevitable that sooner or later I would have to confront this thesis with the philosophy of the man who, during the first half of the twentieth century, resurrected the question of being, forgotten, he said, since Plato had outlawed poetry.

But what does it mean to say that art must "return to the enigma of being"? What is this enigma of being? And what is this being we talking about exactly? Is it the existential man, the *being-there*, the Dasein from which the world opens up and exists? Or is it the empty set, the starting point of Cantor's infinite hierarchies? Or, more concretely, is it the simple things that surround us? The first approach, based on a metaphysics of subjectivity, seems to me to have been exhausted by the masters of abstract expressionism, Barnett Newman in particular², and by the formal and radical conclusions of the avant-garde. With *Le nom propre de l'être* (2019) and *Ordinal* (2020), artworks that are faithful to Alain Badiou's inaugural axiom "mathematics = ontology"³, I explored the second possibility. *Choses* (2020), the installation inspired by the treatise of the same name by Tristan Garcia⁴, follows the third path. And yet, despite all these attempts, it seems that the enigma of being is still there, inaccessible. What to do then?

¹ M. Tombroff, *The Axiom of Choice*, Cookie Butcher, Antwerp, 2019.

² C. Cernuschi, *Barnett Newman and Heideggerian Philosophy*, Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012.

³ A. Badiou, *L'Être et l'événement*, Seuil, Paris, 1988.

⁴ T. Garcia, *Forme et objet – Un traité des choses*, PUF, Paris, 2010.



Le nom propre de l'être (2019)



Choses (2020)

Guy Scarpetta, in his book *L'Impureté*, reports this excerpt from the Shōbōgenzō of the Zen monk Dōgen (13th century):

“To put spring on a map, you must not paint willows, red plums, green plums, peaches. Just paint the spring. To draw these plants is to draw willows, red and green plum trees, and peaches. It's not yet painting spring⁵. ”

Change the words "spring" into "being", "willows", "plum" and "peach" into "things", and our enigma appears under a new prism. How then should we represent being, being-qua-being, without representing things?

This is the question that *Die Hütte* tries to answer, by revisiting Heidegger's thought: not the Heidegger of 1927 (the author of *Being and Time*⁶), but the Heidegger after the turning point of 1935, the author of *The Origin of the Work of Art*⁷. It is indeed in the work of art that Heidegger "finds the point of reference making it possible to discover a human activity which is not only ontic (interior to the world of being) but ontological (determining the very opening in which being presents itself)⁸", and it is through the example of the Greek temple that Heidegger illustrates the unveiling and the radiance of being that the work of art allows.

⁵ G. Scarpetta, *L'Impureté*, Grasset, Paris, 1985, p. 41.

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Être et Temps*, Gallimard, Paris, 1992.

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part, L'origine de l'oeuvre d'art*, Gallimard, Paris 1962.

⁸ G. Vattimo, *Introduction à Heidegger*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1985, p. 127.



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The hut, like the Greek temple, "portrays nothing", it "simply stands there in the valley's notch" and, like the temple on the rock, it "rests on the rocky ground. This resting of the work draws up out of the rock the mystery of that rock's clumsy yet spontaneous support. Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence." But how can a poor hut rise to the status of a Greek temple, whose "luster and gleam of the stone, though itself apparently glowing only by the grace of the sun, yet first brings to light the light of the day, the breadth of the sky the darkness of the night." How can the humble hut measure up with the temple's firm towering "that makes visible the invisible space of air"? How, finally, can the hut compete with the temple which is "the battle where the coming of being is conquered in its totality, that is to say the truth⁹"?

It cannot, of course, except by becoming an artwork. Because then, in spite of its smallness and the fragility of the balsa wood that composes it, this hut, thanks to its new status of artwork, "imposes itself as worthy by itself of attention, and carries within itself its own world, it finds it and institutes it¹⁰. "

This hut, it is Heidegger's hut, in Todtnauberg. *Die Hütte*¹¹.



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⁹ M. Heidegger, *ibid.* p. 44 et p. 61.

¹⁰ G. Vattimo, *ibid.* p. 129.

¹¹ A. Sharr, *Heidegger's Hut*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2017.

The spectator shall decide whether this detour through Heidegger, a parenthesis in my research generally guided by dialectical or speculative materialism, has shed some light on the question of being, or, on the contrary, has reinforced the correlational argument, which tells us that "one cannot know being without making it an object of thought¹²." In any case, *Die Hütte*, by its rusticity and its Central European background, has allowed me to revisit the relationship between the modern and the contemporary, and to foresee, in the notion of "anti-modern modernity¹³" proposed by Guy Scarpetta, a possible path for future explorations.

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¹² P.-A. Fradet et T. Garcia, *Petit panorama du réalisme spéculatif*, Spirale, Montréal, 2016.

¹³ G. Scarpetta, *Ibid.*, p. 74.