

ART CRIT EUROPE

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Cross-over for the Luxembourgish Art Scene

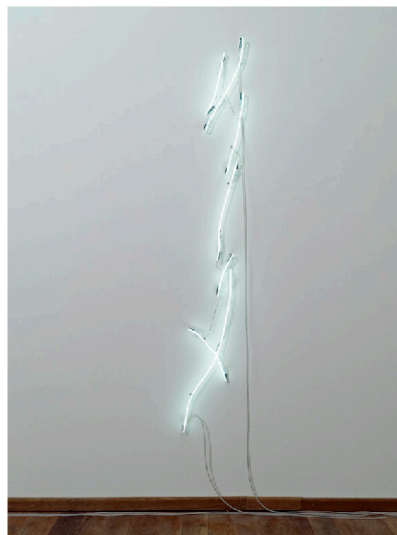
by Lucien Kayser, translated from the French by Claude Colomer

One could say that the turning point dates back to the last decade of the past century, as it is then that real changes took place. In 1995, the city of Luxembourg was the European Capital of Culture. The following year, a building situated in the city center was refurbished to host, from then on, the Casino Luxembourg – Forum d'art Contemporain, and, as early as 1998, the Manifesta 2 events. It is also at that time that the Musée d'art moderne (MUDAM), which mainly targets contemporary art projects, was first put together, although it took until 2006 to see the architect Ieoh Ming Pei's building open its doors.

There may not be any causal relationship, but everything is happening as if these changes had very rapidly borne their fruit. In 2003, Su-Mei Tse won Luxembourg its first-ever Golden Lion at the Venice Biennial for best national participation. And the artist undoubtedly deserves all the credit for it, thanks in particular to her two videos, the first one featuring the cellist, Su-Mei Tse, playing her instrument in an Alpine setting, and the second, road workers sweeping sand away in the middle of a desert.

Infrastructures, however, were not the only things to be impacted by those changes. Nowadays, young people, many of them young women, go and study all around the world. Until recently, the only art schools they attended were located in either France or Germany. There has been an important leap forward toward more professionalism, both in the creative process itself and in the marketing of the works. Su-Mei Tse's success is a perfect illustration of yet another new feature of the Luxembourgish art scene, a sort of cross-over, a mix of approaches, tools, and categories: her work is like a bridge linking the visual arts and music.

The time is long gone when conventional artistic endeavours, such as painting and sculpture, were dominant, or when the French schools' inherited lyricism would compete with German expressionism. Today's artists, like everyone else, are globalization's children, and no means or medium are foreign to them. Painting and sculpture are still present, if need be, but one can move easily from photography to video-recording, from installations to performances. It is as if Michel Majerus, who died before his time in a plane crash, and whose often large size paintings turned him into the most famous Luxembourgish artist of the second half of the 20th century, already belonged to a bygone era.



David Brognon & Stéphanie Rollin, "Fate Will Tear us apart," 2011 – 2012.

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At the same time, the art scene has kept on growing, with quite a large number of artists emerging. A choice was therefore necessary and, following in Su-Mei Tse's footsteps, fell on three artists, including a duo, who—according to the author of this review—appear to be the most promising of all.

In 2005, Su-Mei Tse became the first recipient of the Edward Steichen Award Luxembourg and was repeatedly acclaimed for her versatility and indeed her multidisciplinary approach. These exact words could also be used to describe the work of Sophie Jung, who received the same award last year and was granted an artist residency in New York. Although she first used photography, including a series of shots depicting the sky and its many colors

with the same aircraft wing bearing an airline logo in a corner of the frame—for which she was awarded a prize by the city of Levallois-Perret, near Paris. She soon decided to build on the medium, rather than discarding it, with video recordings, installations, and performances. These elements are all interconnected, allowing Jung to give language a more prominent role in her work.

There is a three-dimensional element or, better said, a superimposition in her approach, which, in many cases, finds its origin in personal experience. And that founding moment thus becomes related to the artist's life and acquires a sort of universal value, thanks to Jung's acutely sensitive poetic expression. The question, underlying from the start, then arises about photography's degree of objectivity and triggers a reflection on the status, the functioning, and the scope of the means being used.

Pourquoi écrire? (Why Write?) was the title chosen for an exhibition recently held at Sobering Gallery in Paris, where works by Marco Godinho, a young Luxembourgish artist, were shown alongside those of Lawrence Weiner, amongst others. Of course, many options have been tried since the Surrealist collages of the early 20th century to bring writing into the realm of visual arts. In his work, Godinho manages to use text to simultaneously question the state of the world and the status of his art. In a subdued and yet violent manner, the visitor's attention is caught by a red neon light, stuck in a bunch of shredded bits of paper, that flashes to reveal the two parts of the French pronoun "no(us)" one after the other. In some of his other works, Godinho has copied the last sentences of various books, ranging from Rilke to Beckett, and revisited the pages of the French daily *Le Monde* by erasing their pictures as if he wants the viewer, through this form of obituary notice, to face the irremediable character of existence.

In an exhibition held in the premises of the FRAC Poitou-Charentes in Angoulême, David Brognon and Stéphanie Rollin also focus, in a different fashion, on the passing of time. That is particularly the case with *The Most Beautiful Attempt* (2012), a video where a young boy tries to keep lines of salt he has placed on the ground aligned with the constantly moving rays of the sun, paralleled in a quite other way with a series of long neon lights representing lifelines. One comes to realize that the lines are those of people more or less excluded from society: what is shown are destinies, closely related to today's social problems. By including drug addicts and prisoners in their work, the two artists have managed to add a sense of urgency to their highly poetic endeavor. In their most recent video, *You'll Never Walk Alone* (2014), Brognon and Rollin create an ironic sense of the title simply taking the viewers inside a detention center, where a pre-programmed lighting system indicates times for either confinement or outdoors activities.

CONTRIBUTOR

Lucien Kayser

LUCIEN KAYSER was born in 1945 in Luxembourg. He studied philosophy and literature in Paris, at the Sorbonne and Ecole Normale Supérieure. Writing about art in newspapers and magazines, he is the president of the Luxembourg Section of AICA.



Marco Godinho, installation "no(us)"
Galerie Sobering, Paris, 2014.