

ARTslant Paris

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Benoît Maire

Cortex Athletico - Paris

12 rue du Grenier Saint-Lazare , F-75003 Paris, France

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Elegantly Constructed Oddities

by Mara Hoberman

Benoît Maire's diverse oeuvre, which includes film, performance, writing, installation and painting, is characterized by erudite philosophical and art historical references. Focusing on a series of small sculptures, Maire's first solo exhibition in Paris presents puzzling, seemingly functional, objects in sleek Plexiglas vitrines, on rustic wooden surfaces, and through documentary-style photographs. Ambiguously—or perhaps simultaneously—tools, weapons, and quasi-scientific instruments, these works of art are part of Maire's ongoing examination of how theory and philosophy can be translated into useful physical forms. As hinted by the exhibition's title "Le fruit est defendu" (a wordplay on the French phrase for "forbidden fruit"), Maire's latest fruitions are enticing and educative.

Maire's elegantly constructed oddities combine natural materials like seashells, coral, and crystals with tools such as rulers, levels, and awls. In some instances, the beautifully fabricated nature/culture hybrids are presented in pristine museum-quality cases. *Arma*, 2012, for example, comprises four impossibly fragile mallets horizontally aligned on a white pedestal and protected with a clear plastic bonnet. The specimens give the impression of precious archeological findings. Consequently approaching them as such, the viewer yearns to glean function from their form. However, other than a high level of craftsmanship—as is evidenced especially by two thin strands of copper topped respectively with a small square of translucent resin and a split-open clamshell—and the work's title (which identifies the objects as weapons), there is not much to go on. Like the troubling experience of looking at decontextualized fragments of material culture from distant civilizations in an ethnographic exhibition, mystification shrouds the implied uses of these contemporary utensils. We are forced to appreciate them as purely aesthetic objects.

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Benoît Maire, *arma*, 2012, Cuivre, laiton, coquillage, bois, résine 110,5 x 64 x 30,5 cm pièce unique + 1 EA; photo : Grégory Copitet / courtesy cortex athletico

Also slick and decontextualized in terms of its formal presentation, an enclosed clear plastic shelving unit across the gallery creates an ostentatious showcase for a bright red level (*Untitled*, 2013.) One end

of the measuring tool has been sawed off and replaced with a bronze cast of a seashell. By relating the imposed order of architecture (as symbolized by the level) to the naturally occurring geometric precision of the shell's logarithmic spiral, this artwork provides a clue that perhaps the essential function of all of Maire's would-be tools is not physical construction, but mental exploration.



Benoît Maire, *Le Fruit est défendu vue d'exposition*; photo : Grégory Copitet / courtesy cortex athletico

Two more presentations of similarly enigmatic objects reinforce the conceptual exercise incited by Maire's sculptures. *Arme et loupe sur socle* ("weapon and magnifier on a base"), 2013, features two utensils—an irregularly shaped piece of coral speared onto a thin copper stem with a wooden handle and a paperweight-style magnifying glass. Instead of the clinical presentation of the other so-titled armaments, these objects are displayed casually. Resting directly on the surface of a makeshift wooden worktable with no protective covering, these hand tools seem to imply that studio supplies are the artist's weapons. Also evoking a studio scenario, a series of Plexi-mounted photographs showing additional tool/weapons curios rest on the gallery floor and balance on crude shelves made of plywood planks. One step further removed from reality, like catalogued crime-scene evidence, these shadowy images exemplify an additional complication separating theory and form.

—Mara Hoberman

(Image on top: Benoît Maire, *Arme longue*, 2013, Brass, glass, resin unique artwork; Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Cortex Athleticco)

Posted by Mara Hoberman on 5/24 | tags: installation mixed-media

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