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EXHIBITION

MICHEL FRANÇOIS
PLANS D'ÉVASION

12 MARCH - 9 MAY 2010

INSTITUT
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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Michel François, born in 1956 in Saint-Trond (Belgium) has participated in the Venice Biennial (1999), in Documenta 9 in Kassel (1992) and has shown his work at many solo and group shows around the world.

The Institut d'art contemporain presents *Plans d'évasion*, the first large monographic exhibition of Michel François' work produced jointly with the S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent.

This collaboration between the S.M.A.K. and the IAC shows their common interest in monographic exhibitions, that is to say directly with the artist, providing him with the space, the time and the means to show work in all its complexity. It also allows the publication of the first retrospective catalogue of the artist's work, an occasion to take full measure of what he has done since the 1980s.

Symmetry is a fundamental element in the relation between

Michel François and the two exhibition spaces. At the Institute, the artist explores the characteristic of the place that corresponds particularly well with his preoccupation with splitting and mirrored perception while readapting the presentation of existing works and making new ones. A fundamental practice in his work, sculpture covers photography, video, installations as well as performance to address issues of space, volume and balance that determine representation, whatever the medium used.

Matching the artist's approach, the exhibition is designed on the basis of recycling and using a principle of overspill or contamination.

Michel François is always interested in movement between two states and all his works can be read using a 'formal pass' that shows a slide between the density of a mass and its potential for dispersion or disappearance.

Michel François' objects, images and volumes ceaselessly change, convert, become rearranged or clumped, acting out a natural growth process and going through transitory forms.

Set in a vast, apparently disparate system governed by accumulation, repetition and entropy, the works appear to be frozen in an expansion of forms and meanings. All is cycle and all is circulation, with no ranking and with the energy latent or freed as the theme.

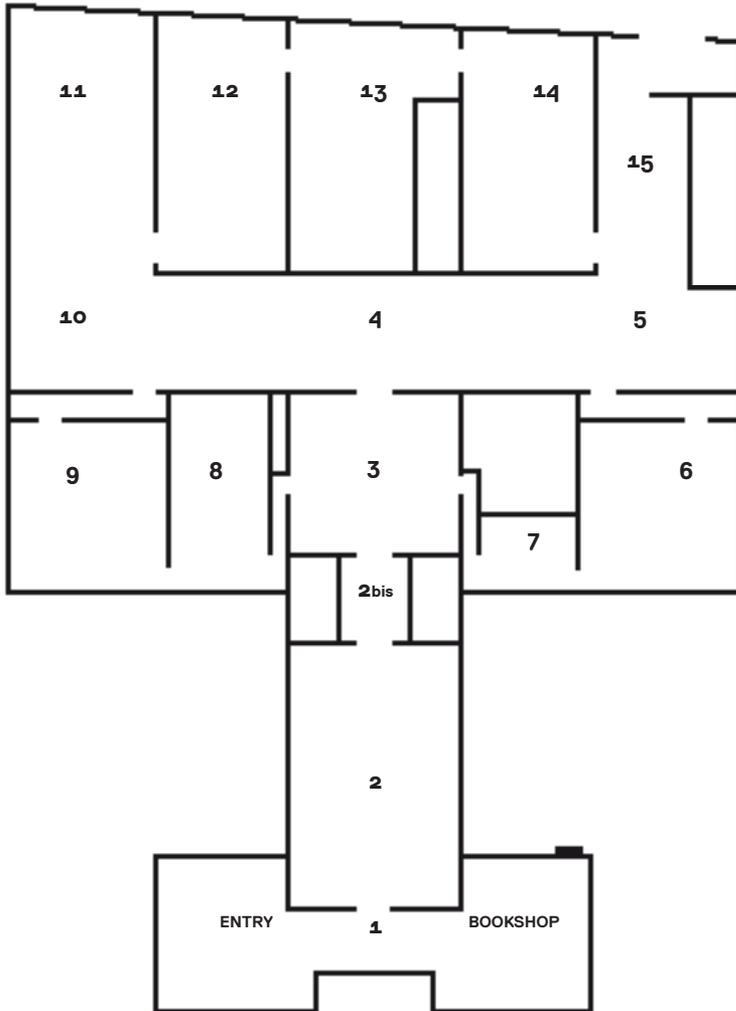
Recurrent preoccupations emerge from the heart of this spreading, moving work: living beings in all their forms (insertion of plants, representation of the mineral, human gestures, etc.), the ordering of forces (gravity, balance and strength) and the metaphor of escape or the exercise of freedom, with all that it induces (delimitations, breaks, holes and so forth).

Inspired by the novel A Plan for Escape by Adolfo Bioy Casarès, the title of the exhibition plunges us directly into a mental universe whose scenario and form involve a prison dimension, a route through a labyrinth and the theatricalisation of the plot (in the novel, the inversion of the five senses and

perceptions of the prisoners). Michel François unrolls 'escape plans' in space like a ball of string whose status swings between that of finished object and the materialisation of a process, between the catching of instants and temporal inscription, between plastic act and metaphysical reflection.

Spaces exhibition

AUDITORIUM - TOILETS



SPACE 1

Déjà-vu (hallu), 2004

Video

Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

SPACE 2

Pas tomber, 2009-2010

Dandelions, sentence engraved on the wall
Coproduction Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes - S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk
Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent, Belgium
Courtesy Michel François

TBS, Plan d'une cellule, 2009

Shaved carpet

Coproduction Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes - S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk
Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent, Belgium
Courtesy Michel François

Contamination (pommes), 2004

Wood, burned wood

Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels,
Belgium

SPACE 2 bis

Brisé, 2009

Offset posters

Coproduction Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes - S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk
Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent, Belgium
Courtesy Michel François

Libération (22 juillet 1996, p. 9 and 32), 2002

Facsimile

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 3

Pavillon interface, 2002

Glass, steel, plasticine

Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin,
Germany and Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussel

Two Dimensional Neon Rope, 2006

Neon

Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin,
Germany

SPACE 4

Psycho Jardin (cactus), 2009

Cactuses, polystyrene, wood and bottles

Courtesy Galerie Carlier | Gebauer, Berlin,
Germany

Passage d'eau, 1998

Water, natural sponge

Production Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
Courtesy Michel François

Mur à l'emporte-pièce, 1999-2010

Core drilling in the wall

Production Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
Courtesy Michel François

Bottes élastiques, 1991

Plaster, rubber

Installation with Psycho Jardin (cactus)
Private collection, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Enroulement (ciment), 1991

Paper, cement

Collection S.M.A.K. (Stedelijk Museum voor
Actuele Kunst), Ghent, Belgium

Enroulement (polystyrene), 2009

Plastic, polystyrene

Courtesy Michel François

Heat, 1988

Cast iron, plasticine

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 5

Pièce détachée, 2009

Steel, magnetic balls

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 6

Studio, 2004

Light beams and slides

Collection M.J.S., Paris, France - On deposit
in Mudam, Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc
Jean, Luxembourg, Luxembourg

Cracheur de feu, 1996

Poster

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 7

Apparition d'un verre, 2006

Video projection behind a wall with a hole

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 8

Autoportrait contre nature, 2002

Video projection

Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 9

Studio 2, 2010

Light beams and slides
Production Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
Courtesy Michel François

Film, 2005

Poster
Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 10

Scribble, 2008

Aluminium, plaster bandage, PVC
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels,
Belgium

SPACE 11

*Studio**

SPACE 12

Drapeau, 1999

Poster
Courtesy Michel François

Gratification immédiate (El Horror), 2009

Paper, bronze
Courtesy Michel François

Souffles dans le verre (noirs), 2004

Glass, nylon
Collection Christine Bogart and Pander
Galliaert, Knokke-zoute, Belgium

Pièce à conviction (pavillon brisé), 2009

Bullet-proof reinforced glass, steel
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels,
Belgium

Pièce à conviction (sandales), 2008

Rubber, sandals, facsimile
Courtesy Michel François

Ink Revenge (Octopus) II, 2004

Printing and Indian ink on canvas
Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin
Germany

SPACE 13

Psycho Jardin (aigle), 2006

Frozen eagle, powdered marble, wood and
bottles
Collection D. Daskalopoulos, Greece

Self-Floating Flag, 2006

Aluminium, cloth, compressed air
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels,
Belgium

SPACE 14

Map of the World (Last Flag), 2006

Video projection, map of the world
Courtesy Michel François

Golden Cage II, 2008

Steel, gold leaf
Collection of the Museum cantonal des Beaux-
Arts de Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Last Edition (Financial Times), 2009

Candle, Financial Times
Courtesy Michel François

Walk Through a Line of Neon Lights,

2004-2009

Broken neons
Courtesy Michel François

SPACE 15

Néon Plâtre, 2009

Neon, plaster
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels,
Belgium

Retenue d'eau, 1998

Plastic bags, water, nylon
Production Institut d'art contemporain,
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes
Courtesy Michel François

Savon Mâle, 1991-2009

Soap
Courtesy Michel François

Savon Femelle, 1991-2009

Soap
Courtesy Michel François

Cactus Tattoo, 1998

Poster
Courtesy Michel François

*ATELIER

Sans titre, 2008

Plaster, steel, acrylic painting
Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Great Britain

Model, 2008

Plaster, steel, acrylic painting
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

Gratification Immédiate, 2008

Clay, silver
Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Great Britain

Two Dimensional Neon Rope, 2006

Neon
Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Sans titre, 2007

Plaster, aluminium
Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Great Britain

One from the Other, 2007

Aluminium sculpture
Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Great Britain

Model 5, 2007

Plaster
Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Sans titre, 2007

Plaster, sponge, ink
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

Sans titre (ceinture de plâtre), 2007

Plaster, leather
Collection Charles Kaisin, Brussels, Belgium

Black Vanity, 2007

Plaster, chalk
Collection Charles Kaisin, Brussels, Belgium

Dénouement, 2006

Plaster, nylon
Courtesy Michel François

Deux souffles dans le verre, 2006

Glass
Courtesy Michel François

Gratification immédiate (arbre à chips), 2006

Brass, gold leaf
Courtesy Michel François

Contigus, 2006

Plaster, sponge, ink
Courtesy Thomas Dane Gallery, London, Great Britain

Sans titre (effaceurs), 2005

Plaster, fabrics
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

Ecarter de Conduite, 2005

Céramic, brass
Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Dé SEX, 1999

Wood

Courtesy Michel François

Hat, 1994

Felt, plasticine
Courtesy Carlier | Gebauer Gallery, Berlin, Germany

Le monde and les bras, 1994

Plaster, fabrics, black and white photographs
Private collection, Geneva, Switzerland

La Sieste, 1989-1994

Mixed media
Collection Communauté Française de Belgique,
Brussels, Belgium

Sans titre (Gants), 1991

Rubber, wax
Courtesy Galerie Carlier | Gebauer, Berlin, Germany

After Use (deux chaussures), 1991

Plaster, wax, rubber
Collection Inès and Philippe Kempeneers, Deinze,
Belgium

680 000 Bâilleurs, 1991

Offset printing on paper
Collection F.R.A.C. Provence Alpes Côte d'Azur,
Marseille

Objet itinérant I, 1990

Plaster
Collection Ophuis Oxenaar, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Sans titre, 1989

Plaster, plastic foam
Courtesy Galerie Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, Belgium

Achoppement Mur, 1989

Polystyrene, rubber
Courtesy Michel François

Boule élastique, 1988

Rubber
Courtesy Michel François

After Mondrian, 1988

Steel, plasticine
Private collection, Hasselt, Belgium

Sans Titre

Glass, rubber
Collection Mimi Dusselier, Meulebeke, Belgium

Sans Titre

Plaster, wood
Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels, Belgium

space 1

DÉJÀ-VU (HALLU), 2004

Placed at the entry to the Institute under the glass roof and also visible from the street, Michel François' video *Déjà-Vu (Hallu)* appears as the postulate of the entire exhibition—marked by the double and symmetry. It heralds the symmetrical deployment of the works in the exhibition spaces and the resulting ambivalence of perception when the same form is addressed from different viewpoints (visual, physical or mental) and the potentials of the materials unfold in space in a variable way.

With extremely simple procedures (folding, crumpling and unfolding a sheet of aluminium), the artist has used a computer video technique to create perfect artificial symmetry. In illusionist style, the image appears double on the Rorschach test principle. This psychological test developed in 1921 by the psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach consists of a series of cards printed with symmetrical inkblots submitted to the patient for free interpretation, from which personality traits are deduced. Like the Rorschach test, the video image in *Déjà-Vu* produces symbolic forms bringing to mind animal figures or monstrous or fantastic patterns. The hypnotic aspect is underlined by the title. The term 'déjà-vu' or paramnesia (from the Greek *para* meaning beside and *mnesis*, memory) refers to the feeling of having already experienced a situation. Analysed since the early days of psychoanalysis and observed in particular in case of epilepsy, it can also occur fairly frequently without being a pathological symptom. This mental phenomenon has been associated with the re-appearance of a memory or fantasy or with that of a dream. The clinical dimension of the title is completed by the humour of the

wordplay of the subtitle that combines the material (aluminium) and perception (hallucination).

space 2

PAS TOMBER, 2009-2010

TBS, PLAN D'UNE CELLULE, 2009

A large rectangle of grey carpet bears a full-scale detailed plan of a cell, shaved into the body of the material. TBS (ter berschikkingstelling) meaning 'to be held at disposal' are clinical detention centres in the Netherlands for holding offenders with psychological problems. For a year (1996-97), Michel François ran a project with patients held at the Kijvelanden (Rotterdam) TBS. The works and discussions generated by this experience gave substantial inspiration to the artist for the aesthetics of subsequent installations and projects.

A two-dimensional projection of a cell, the plan on the scale 1:1 traces the real boundaries of imprisonment, of which it gives us a symbolic experience. A warning engraved in the wall—'Pas Tomber !' ('Don't Fall') runs above several rows of cables from which rows of dandelion flowers hang, head down. The words are written in monumental style like a universal law, an urgent warning to children and also a graver exhortation to people of all ages and concerning all risks (falling before the law, falling psychologically, falling socially, stumbling when very old, etc.).

Visible traces of this work directly on the wall, plaster debris spread on the floor, risking overflow into passage and creative areas, contaminating them like an organic substance.

Dandelions interest the artist because of their form, evoking a certain density (spherical around a core) and at the same time suited to the most total scattering (the flowers that grows in wasteland, weeds, the ones we like to blow).

Here, dandelions form a strange sky that is just as natural as it is artificial, between wild gust and military uniformisation.

CONTAMINATION (POMMES), 2004

Another reference to plants and another form of writing, opposite the order carved in stone, *Contamination (pommes)* [*Contamination (apples)*] displays two apples carved in wood and fixed to the wall. The first is completely burned and the other just at the point of contact.

space 2 bis

BRISÉ, 2009

A pile of large offset posters lies on the floor. The image is that of a sheet of glass broken from its centre on an intense red ground. The impact in the material has left an irregular radiating form, a kind of mineral spider's web highlighted by flashes of light.

The work is participative and hence open-ended: a visitor can take a poster, thus changing the thickness of the 'sculpture' little by little. Underpinned by the image, the idea of dissemination is also corroborated by the visitor's gesture of appropriation; this materialises the symbolic movement from one space to another in a place that is precisely that of circulation.

LIBÉRATION (22 JUILLET 1996, P. 9 ET 32), 2002

When he first read this issue of the newspaper *Libération*, Michel François had an impression of déjà-vu when he saw within a few pages of each other two practically identical photos (an overturned bus), one an account of an accident and the other that of a theatrical event.

space 3

PAVILLON INTERFACE, 2002

Pavillon interface consists of a glass and metal cube open at the top and containing a mass of back plasticine—also cubic—that seems to have an 'exploded' part, with pieces of the material thrown against the glass walls.

Using the traditional motifs of minimal (cube) and conceptual (house) art, Michel François nevertheless introduces the notion of movement, contamination and overspill into the work by means of the spattering movement that expresses both dispersal, and hence expansion, and destruction.

Moving in an apparently uncontrolled manner, although this is very closely managed by the artist's gesture, the material is nonetheless halted by the walls. Without these 'interfaces', or through them, one can imagine that the material would have exploded and hit the walls, in addition to the splashes of plasticine that cover the ceiling. This work shows the artist's taste for expression using an organic model: growth, development and crystallisation. It is as if he freezes chaos at a moment during its expansion, the latter being only temporarily interrupted.

This work can also be seen as a metaphor of sculpture, the gesture and the

procedures involved: between material and form, solid and empty, container and content, latency and materialisation.

TWO DIMENSIONAL NEON ROPE, 2006

Two neon lights snake down like ropes released from the ceiling. A kind of minimalist sculpture, they condense rope and light, two symbols of escape. This allusion to escape is seen again in the Studio (Atelier) space in the form of a neon and a rope running to the floor.

space 4

PASSAGE D'EAU, 1998 MUR À L'EMPORTE-PIÈCE, 1999-2010

On the central route of the exhibition, where the perspective opens on to a transverse axis, a small stream of water falls from the ceiling on to a sponge.

A visual and symbolic point of disappearance, the waterfall traces the axis of symmetry bounding the installation of the two gardens and orders the visitor's viewpoint and route. The eye sees just a line—silent and almost transparent, practically abstract and close to a minimalist sculpture.

A metaphor of time passing and perpetual movement, the work responds to a hole made in the wall that from a distance makes it possible to look and to see *Psycho Jardin (aigle)* installed in the next exhibition space, to glimpse another reality.

With the idea of permanent recycling, the core drilled from the wall is displayed as a trace of the operation.

PSYCHO JARDIN (CACTUS), 2009

Surrounded by flooring in thick rough-sawn boards, two rectangular expanses of white expanded polystyrene pellets are bounded by rows of upside-down bottles. Cacti of different kinds and sizes emerge from this artificial snow. The idea of contamination is present here again in the apparent interaction between the plant (a cactus emerging from synthetic soil) and the environment in which it has grown (polystyrene 'dripping' from each cactus prickle).

Michel François' *Psycho jardins (Cactus)* works form incongruous, enigmatic environments combining natural and artificial components in marginal territories. They seem to freeze the moment at which nature emerges from a hostile context and proclaims its resistance. Seemingly immobile in time and generating an atmosphere with a degree of fantasy, *Psycho jardins* can be seen as a visual rendering of an inner reality, a 'world in the head' that allows mixed combinations and indeterminate narration.

ENROULEMENT (CIMENT), 1991 ENROULEMENT (POLYSTYRÈNE), 2009

Many of Michel François' sculptures have a rolled form, often with two different, complementary materials (paper and stone, rubber and plaster, paper and plaster, paper and cement, paper and polystyrene, etc.). Mixed for casting, plaster or cement give solidity to this curving movement that evokes the freedom of the material and the idea of biological growth.

As in all Michel François' work, everything rolls and unrolls, is compressed or unfolds in a continuous movement in the image of the conditions of everything alive.

BOTTES ÉLASTIQUES, 1991

Boots form part of a set of objects made by the artist, often with plaster and elastic bands, relating the body through its fragments and prints.

Boots, old shoes, gloves, stockings, trouser pockets, sweaters with holes in the elbows—all these tell the story of a life, of wear, erosion, ever-repeated movements, as if the artist wished to collect 'all the forms in the world' or, at least, all the gestures that we use to learn, test and proceed.

Plaster-coated and garrotted by rubber bands, the boots are massive and seem to have been washed up, like the boots of a giant that had been all over the world.

space 5

PIÈCE DÉTACHÉE, 2009

Pièce détachée is a construction of steel rods connected by magnetic spheres. The balance of the whole is based on the fields of electromagnetic forces between the various components.

Here, Michel François uses a structure of objects that is reminiscent of scientific models (of DNA for example) to represent a combinatorial arrangement. There are variants of the work, with the steel bars and magnetic spheres projecting to a greater or lesser degree, in a rhizomatous manner with a parallelepipedal structure forming the initial framework for expansion.

Like a drawing in space, the work combines slenderness and radiating energy.

The physical principle of its cohesion makes the work extremely fragile. Very little is required to cause it to collapse.

space 6

STUDIO, 2004

Studio is part of the series *Studios* (sometimes sub-titled *Projections*) made since 2004. Studios are complex works combining different types of light beam and slide projection that criss-cross and reflect each other, creating shadows and images that disturb the viewer's perception.

For Michel François, this is setting a photographic studio within the work. The technique required for making an image is set out: a projector, its reflection on the wall, the beam of light emitted, the projection screen and the high-angle shot of a studio.

Paradoxically, in spite of the academic style of visual listing, the stripping of the components and the stages of the taking of a shot creates a bewitching atmosphere, as in reconstitutions of the invention of cinematography (the appearance of a halo of light in the darkness, the first trace of projection on the screen, flickering light, the silhouette of the projector, etc.). Beyond the photographic studio, the exhibition space itself is encapsulated by the artist as the setting 'of a light in the scenery'

CRACHEUR DE FEU, 1996

A kind of natural accompaniment to *Film* (a light in an industrial landscape at night), the fire-eater projects a flaming cloud into a sandy area seen at night.

A breath expels a creative power of the person in the centre of natural elements.



Projecteur, 2004. Poster. Courtesy Michel François

space 7

APPARITION D'UN VERRE, 2006

Apparition d'un verre is a video projection that the visitor can see only through a perforation in the wall. The magical effect given by the title ('apparition') is corroborated by the vertical filming of juggling with wine glasses. This skilled gesture shows only the throwing of light, transparent glasses through an opening in the wall, with the rubble on the floor leading to supposing that it has been smashed through.

Flying, suspended, as in a dreamlike vision, the glasses look like soap bubbles and only regain their physical nature through the loud noise made when they break on the floor.

The work exploits the gap between the senses (sight and hearing) and the notions of interior and exterior. A remote observer of the movement of objects, the viewer is physically in another space, looking at the subject through a hole, and thus possesses a viewpoint that is both precise and precarious.

space 8

AUTO PORTRAIT CONTRE NATURE, 2002

Autoportrait contre nature takes the form of movement of the artist within the field of the camera set vertically. As he moves in space, deliberately slowed by the video procedure, glass bottles fall and break at his feet, sometimes brushing past him but without halting his movement.

As often in Michel François' work, high-angle shooting was used, giving the spectator height and enabling the artist to make a different kind of self-portrait from

an unusual viewpoint

Several features make this video disturbing: the high-angle shooting, the narrow space in which the figure moves, the repeated impact of glass and the haunting atmosphere of the scene. It also allows the artist to fix a moment during a movement, whence his interest in photo and video shooting combined with his sculptor's sensitivity with regard to moving bodies and attitudes in a space. For Michel François, 'art, in any case, is the life that we sculpt'.

This self-portrait 'against nature' is to be understood as a movement closer to nature through intoxication to allow 'the triumph of the plant within one' (Carlos Castaneda, 1925-1998).

space 9

STUDIO II, 2010

Studio II, like *Studio*, is part of the *Studios* series that the artist has made since 2004 and in which he sets the exhibition space as a scene for showing his mental projections.

With a layout mirroring *Studio* shown in Room 5, this one orders shadows with reference to Plato's cave allegory (Book VII of the *Republic*). In this famous text, men turn their backs to the light and see only their shadows on the wall. Plato illustrates an initiatory procedure that takes men from the world of the senses (physical objects and appearances) towards the intelligible world (ideas) to overcome prejudices, beliefs and conformist thinking. Difficult to obtain, knowledge of reality would enable it to be passed on satisfactorily, guaranteeing a form of freedom and responsibility.

Faced with an illusionistic play of multiple openings (real or projected), the spectator is plunged into the mirage of a hall of

mirrors.

FILM, 2005

Bringing to mind a film set, a night photograph depicts three non-moving cars caught in the raw beam of a floodlight. A prefiguration or visual memory of *Studio*, the image may also seem to be a flash, in the sense of being dazzling or an inner revelation.

space 10

SCRIBBLE, 2008

Mainly consisting of aluminium and plaster, the *Scribble* sculptures are a volumic materialisation of the automatic, un conscious gesture of a scribble on a corner of a piece of paper. Both monumental and fragile, they display a form that at first sight is anarchic and profuse in the exhibition space.

Michel François has long collected the paper provided in shops for testing pens before buying them and that display two types of trace of users—a signature or a meaningless scribble. These universal scribbles like a proto-language interest the artist and he stabilises them as ‘giant monuments to deletion’ (Guillaume Désanges, ‘It’s all there’, catalogue for *Michel François, Plans d’évasion*, Roma Publications, Amsterdam, 2010).

space 11

STUDIO

The artist has made a space for the exhibition that contains sculptures, objects and studies made since the end of

the 1980s.

The aim was to assemble a disparate, abundant ensemble, to construct a multiform space expressing a place of activity, bringing to mind an exhibition as much as a studio.

In 1999, Michel François explained the passage in his art from the production of objects to an approach based more on the exhibition space as a place for assembling the miscellaneous items that he accumulates, by the fact that he no longer had a studio.

‘It is as if during the whole of this period of studio work he acted to go through the entire history of sculpture and the image, etc., to understand, to repeat his school and then, afterwards, to go out and check it all in the world’.

In an obsessive quest for measurements of bodies, Michel François is interested in what he calls the ‘blind spaces’ (pockets, stomach, etc.). He collects a great variety of objects, forms and experiments, gaining an archaeological dimension.

LE MONDE ET LES BRAS, 1994

Le monde et les bras is the generic title of a series of sculpture, photographs, videos and installations related to the body, the studio, the house, the street and the world.

Here, a plaster mould was used to cast the precise amplitude of the artist’s arm, everything he can reach. Through this constant interest in the body as a mould, Michel François addresses a more subtly political question concerning the relation of individuality to the exterior. How can one ‘let in’ the din of the world, how can one be indispensably concerned by the world while allowing personal life and the family microcosm that it houses to flourish?

OBJET ITINÉRANT I, 1990

A plaster cube bears the marks of much handling during its transport to various places: studios and exhibitions.

Crystallising this twin movement of private life/insertion in the outside world, the object accompanies the artist in most of his projects, like the material memory of this continuous porosity and contamination.

Beyond accumulation and extension, this working space referred to as an *atelier* (studio) can also be filled with an atmosphere of emptiness and become the expression of the artist's wait, or even apathy, a form of idleness that, paradoxically, can generate creative inspiration.

680.000 BÂILLEURS, 1991

Michel François has made wallpaper whose repeated pattern is a yawning man (his self-portrait as a yawner) inspired by a small painting of a yawner by Brueghel the Elder. The artist is interested in the yawn as an unforeseeable moment 'when you lose control of your expression, you devote yourself completely to the air that enters and is expelled'. The motive is related to exhaustion and repetition, to repeated actions by the body.

LA SIESTE, 1989-1994

The entire 'studio' space seems to consist of the harnessing of a period of research and reflection by the artist: the pieces are related to prototypes, quasi-scientific trials. Their arrangement in the space or on shelves—between organisation and shambles—forms a reserve of potential exhibitions, like for example *La Sieste*, in which sculptures and miscellaneous objects are temporarily assembled and arranged in the same place, on a mobile

shelf.

GRATIFICATION IMMÉDIATE (ARBRE À CHIPS), 2006

In a corner of the room, *Gratification immédiate* (2006) is the name of a 'potato crisp' tree with golden petals. Nature and artifice are combined once again with a mythological reference to the golden apples of the garden of the Hesperides.

ACHOPPEMENT II (MUR), 1989

This work is one of various attempts at connecting and blending objects, for example by gluing or tying them to each other.

Michel François refers to *Achoppements* as the sudden appearance of a volume that 'produces actions that have effects on the continuity of reality. [...] Reality, its presence, forms a kind of catastrophe.'

space 12

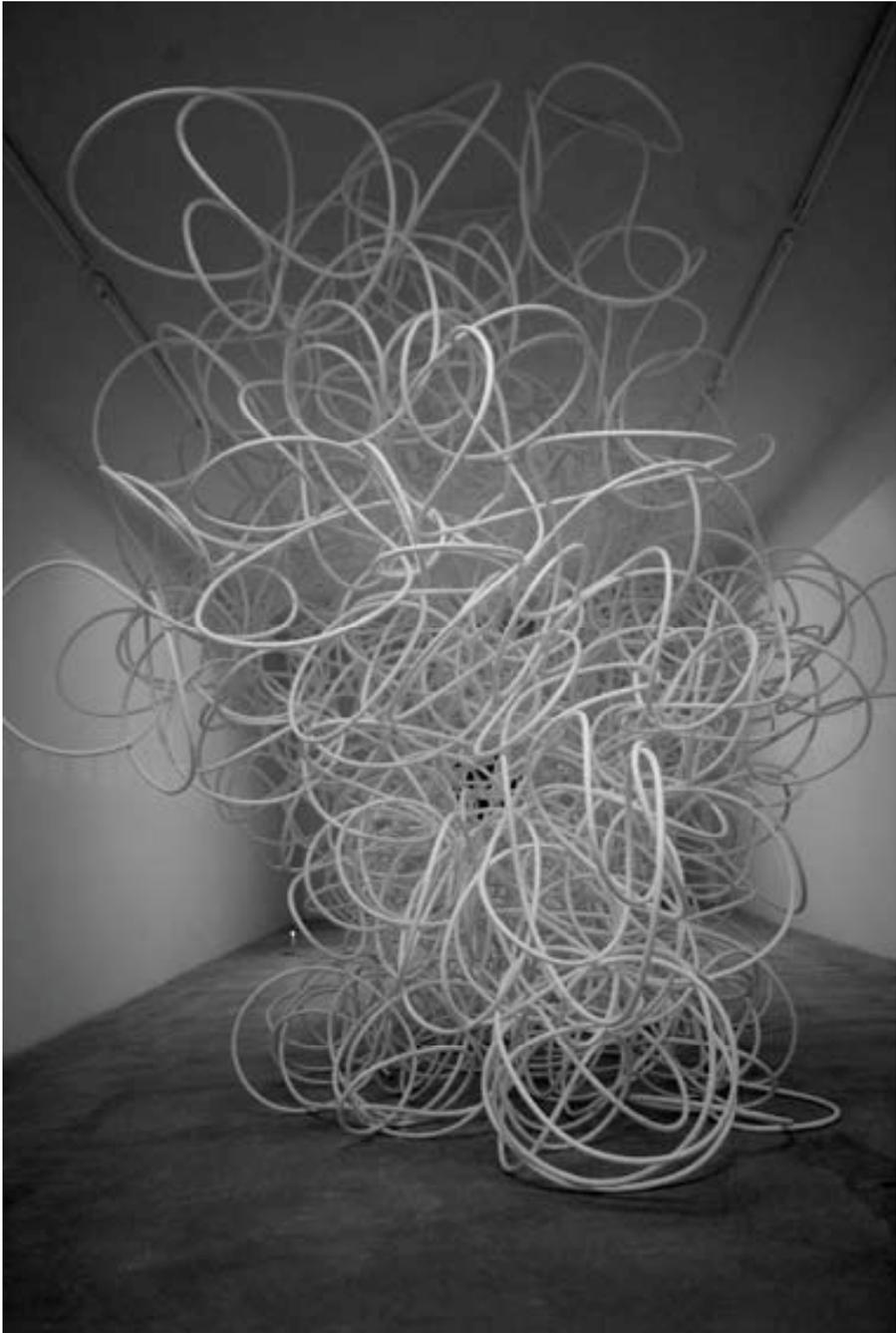
DRAPEAU, 1999

A black flag is pushed into the ground in farmland.

Proclaiming a territory while marking a frontier, the various readings of the flag (scarecrow, piracy, anarchy) refer to the idea of a power that we claim to possess.

SOUFFLES DANS LE VERRE (NOIRS), 2004

Two hundred blown glass balloons of various sizes contain a volume of air equivalent to the various expirations of the artist according to his physical capacity at the moment of blowing. The work forms one of his preoccupations: sunk casts of the human



Scribble, 2008. Aluminium, plaster, PVC. Courtesy Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Brussels

body in action, capable of 'making sculpture', and the fixing of what is in fact properly immaterial.

Like the piece *Retenue d'eau*, the work plays on the contrast between the effect of weight (a mass of material) and the illusion of lightness (suspended by nylon lines).

PIÈCE À CONVICTION (SANDALES), 2008

Pièce à conviction ['Exhibit', in the legal sense] was initially the title of a large installation by Michel François. This one was inspired by the footwear of an illegal immigrant exhibited by the frontier guards in New Mexico and whose soles have been changed to leave prints like those of a cow. You have to become 'dehumanised' to cross the frontier.

PIÈCE À CONVICTION (PAVILLON BRISÉ), 2009

Pièce à conviction (Pavillon brisé) is a cube of armoured glass and steel; each face has received a strong impact. The cracked glass motif echoes the Brisé posters as the cube can be seen from various places along the visitors' route at the exhibition. The work can be seen as responding to a reversible principle, with it being impossible to know where the impact came from inside in an escape attempt or from outside as an act of aggression. The only 'exhibit', if there is one, is the impact on the material.

INK REVENGE II (OCTOPUS), 2004

A print made with ink on canvas shows a considerably enlarged octopus. The motif showing this animal and its features – its tentacles and jet of ink – closely matches the artist's approach and, on reflection, a formal analogy with

the Rorschach test appears. The title and the setting of the projection of ink as a picture within the picture lead to deducing a revenge of the constructed image, and hence the artefact, on nature, with the latter being caught in its own trap.

space 13

PSYCHO JARDIN (AIGLE), 2006 SELF-FLOATING FLAG, 2006

The second *Psycho jardin* on the visitor's route, *Psycho jardin (aigle)* is linked formally and visually to *Psycho jardin (cactus)*. An oculus cut through the wall gives visitors an overall view of the central route of the Institute and of these desert landscapes.

Bounded once again with upside-down empty bottles and plank flooring, the ground of *Psycho jardin* consists of crushed Carrara marble, cracked like arid land, on which an eagle in black ice is melting. A mixture of water and Indian ink, the liquid soaks into the ground and contaminates a round patch that spreads as the eagle metamorphoses and melts totally. Generally 'carved in marble', the imperial black eagle dissolves. Marble is a noble material in traditional sculpture and is here the ingredient for heterogeneous ground.

A white flag (*Self-Floating Flag*, 2009) is activated by a noisy compressor and marks this infertile territory in a derisory manner.

The *Psycho jardins* are mental landscapes and function as junction zones, where each object participates in the evocation of a state and its change. Whereas the *Psycho jardins (cactus)* contain the idea of resistance, the 'eagle' version makes more immediate reference to the insidious deployment of power and is more of the surrender type – constructing a sunk

eulogy to escape.

space 14

MAP OF THE WORLD (LAST FLAG), 2006

Map of the World (Last flag) is the projection of an organic image on a world map covered with black paint. In an intense link between macrocosm and microcosm, the world territory, of which all that remains is a frieze of flags, is covered here by a cellular agglomerate.

GOLDEN CAGE II, 2008

The structure that looks fragile and malleable consists of a frame of four metal panels whose rectangular windows have been removed. The bars of the cage have been coated with gold leaf.

Here, Michel François uses the cube structure again by literally giving form to the expression 'golden cage': something comfortable and opulent but no less a device that restrains freedom. As in the artist's other cubes, the prison metaphor is latent, associated with movements of material, escapes and fleeing, that seem to be depicted during the process. It is also a question of sculpture at work, with a matricial form being constructed or, on the contrary, disintegrating.

LAST EDITION (FINANCIAL TIMES), 2009

A candle placed on the floor on which seems to be the last edition of the *Financial Times* lights the space in *Golden Cage*. With irony, Michel François imagines the isolation of a Golden Boy who still examines stock market prices when in fact there is nothing left..

WALK THROUGH A LINE OF NEON LIGHTS, 2004-2009

A row on broken neon lights is on the floor, trampled directly by the artist. Installed in the line of the door, the work forms a hilly path and confronts visitors when they cross the space.

Once again, broken glass gives form to the artistic act and that addresses the relation between creation and destruction.

space 15

NÉON PLÂTRE, 2009

Hung facing the row of broken neons, a neon light partially covered with plaster releases fragmented light that has lost its impact.

RETENUE D'EAU, 1998

Transparent plastic bags filled with water are hung above the floor in clusters.

The work uses the play of physical forces of the sculpture (empty / filling, lightness / weight, compression / release). Under tension in the space, it can respond to the other water state, that of the fall that can be seen in the centre of *Psycho jardin (cactus)*.

Michel François seems to pluck from the air what is in essence ungraspable, like the elements, and to catch the precarious moment before the fall.

SAVON MÂLE, 1991-2009

SAVON FEMELLE, 1991-2009

The motif of the two mural works is drawn from community objects. By over-sizing these bars of soap, that themselves have become fragments of the body, sculpture heightens sensuality and tactility. The preoccupations of the artist make the choice of soap appreciated as it is material made to disappear and to 'contaminate' the body.

CACTUS TATTOO, 1998

The recurrent motif of the ornamental plants cacti and agaves shows the artist's special interest in what he calls 'the plant in us' or the ability of plants to change our perception of things (they can prick, heal, make us drunk, etc.).

'The plant comes in a harmless, deep manner and changes our nature radically'.

The idea of tattooing is seen again: an operation by the artist on the actual fabric of the building (the 'Pas Tomber' inscription, the plan shaved in carpet, perforations in the walls). Here, scarified leaves bear the trace of human passage and the universal nature of this assimilation of the being to the plant.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Michel François
Plans d'évasion

Exhibition from 12 march to 9 may 2010

OPENING TIMES

wednesday to sunday - 1pm to 7pm

Free group tours
saturday an sunday at 3pm
or with advance booking

HOW TO GET THERE

Bus C3 to Institut d'art contemporain
Bus 99 to Ferrandière
Métro ligne A to République
Station vélo'v à 1 minute à pied
The Institut d'art contemporain is near
Lyon Part-Dieu station and a minute's
walk from a Vélo'v bike-hire station

ADMISSION

• full price : 4€ • reduce price : 2,50€

LIBRARY

with advance booking

BOOKSHOP SPECIALIZED IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Accessible during opening hours of the exhibitions

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