

GOWEN CONTEMPORARY

GENEVA, Switzerland

NICK LAESSING (UK, 1973)

Solo Project

21 February – 30 March 2013

In his work, composed of sculptures, installations, films and drawings, Nick Laessing explores the border areas of science, probing its relationship to the inconceivable.

Reflecting the utopian and romantic aspirations of amateur scientists and mathematicians of the past centuries, he designs and builds his own devices. Often departing from historical research of inventions that never became mainstream or were short-lived, Laessing's sculptures and installations attempt to find the unexploited potentials in the obsolete or overlooked. Examples of this include *Spatial Harmonics*, a mechanical installation that employs pendulums to create geometric drawings corresponding to the theory of harmonics. He has also worked with electrical machines alleged to harness energy from the atmosphere, as well as a radio first made by Friedrich Jürgenson to capture the frequency of the voices of the dead.

The current exhibition presents **Untitled**, 2013, an installation made in collaboration with self-taught British engineer Jimmy Whitmore. As well as **Water Car**, 2012-13, which was recently presented at Artgenève, Geneva, this project is the most recent development of the artist's experiments with the material qualities of water. In this work steel plates with an electric charge transform water into the flammable gas of oxygen and hydrogen. When it is ignited or burned the gas instantly returns back to water.

Laessing's fascination with the transformation of these states reflects and explores recent ideas of many amateur inventors about the possibility of the use of water to create energy. Though this technology originates from the 19th Century, it has recently gained the interest of experimenters attempting to find the holy grail of a naturally occurring energy source. Many myths surround it such as claims that it was in use in the first decades of the 20th century and during the Second World War while there were shortages of conventional fuels.

The series of works presented at this exhibition also include a group of copper and zinc plates titled **Galvanic Reactions** (2013). They originate from the artist's experiments with different forms of making batteries. The results reveal a complex and delicate surface which affirms the mysterious qualities of energy making processes. **After Alessandro Volta**, 2012, is a replication of Alessandro Volta's 1800 invention of the first primitive battery. Six weeks after its initial public demonstration at the Royal Institution in London it was used to discover the electrolysis of water. **Steel Plate Destroyed by Electrolyser I**, as well as a series of photographic prints, present found objects that have been destroyed by the flame of the gas produced by the electrolyser. The production of the 'destroyed' works counterpoints the intensive and fastidious effort and research involved in building the electrolyser.

The artist's journey to Geneva in **Water Car** for this exhibition, three weeks after its presentation at Artgenève, is an important step for the project and it follows the spirit of other artists such as Chris Burden and Panamarenko who also worked with idealised forms of vehicles:

« An attempt to drive a car to Geneva on water is about the carrying out of an act. This is a response to my curiosity about whether water can contain useable energy as so many apocryphal stories seem to suggest. It is a self-consciously absurd act, like a joke, that is open to failure. It might also create other questions: political and ideological, about energy and sustainability. And it might question our preconceptions about what we understand to be possible and scientifically true » (Laessing, 2013).

Laessing, who lives and works in Berlin, has extensively exhibited in Europe and has received important awards, including the DAAD Artists in Residence at PIK, Potsdam (2012) and the Laurenz Stiftung Artist in Residence, Basel (2010-11). Past exhibitions include CEAAC, Strasbourg (2011); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2011); Gregor Podnar, Berlin (2010); 2nd Athens Biennial, Athens (2009); FormContent, London (2008); Serpentine Gallery, London performance, 2008).

GOWEN CONTEMPORARY Sàrl

Registered office: place du Grand-Mézel 2-4, 1204 Genève

Gallery: 4 rue Jean-Calvin, 1204 Genève

Tel: +41 (0) 22 700 30 68 / Mob: +41 (0) 79 330 17 54 / E-mail: info@gowencontemporary.com

www.gowencontemporary.com