

PROVENCE

Letter from the Editor Saturday, June 22, 2024

Dear _____,

Denis Savary's exhibition *Quiet Clubbing* is on view at the Centre d'édition contemporaine (CEC) in Geneva until August 23. PROVENCE traveled to the end of Lake Geneva to discuss with the artist his cinematographic references, his affection for the night, and shooting a music video in a surf park in Switzerland.

Best, PROVENCE

Contributions PROVENCE

Denis Savary: *Quiet Clubbing*

PROVENCE: Between other works, you show a series of prints on the wall which are your own photographs of northern lights and the social and technical activities associated with hunting the perfect picture: people spreading in a field, deploying the high-tech equipment. An activity that allows for all those images to appear, underlying your repeated interest in "how images are made"?

Denis Savary: All these people on the beach reminded me of my early days working with video, the many times I found myself in the middle of nowhere, waiting, behind a camera, filming.

At the time, I systematically filmed using fixed shots. This constraint that I had given myself allowed me to study and carefully observe what was taking place within the frame. I was looking for given (live) situations in which several different things coexisted. My goal was to record the complexity of the things around me, to then take the time to observe them, and then share my observations.

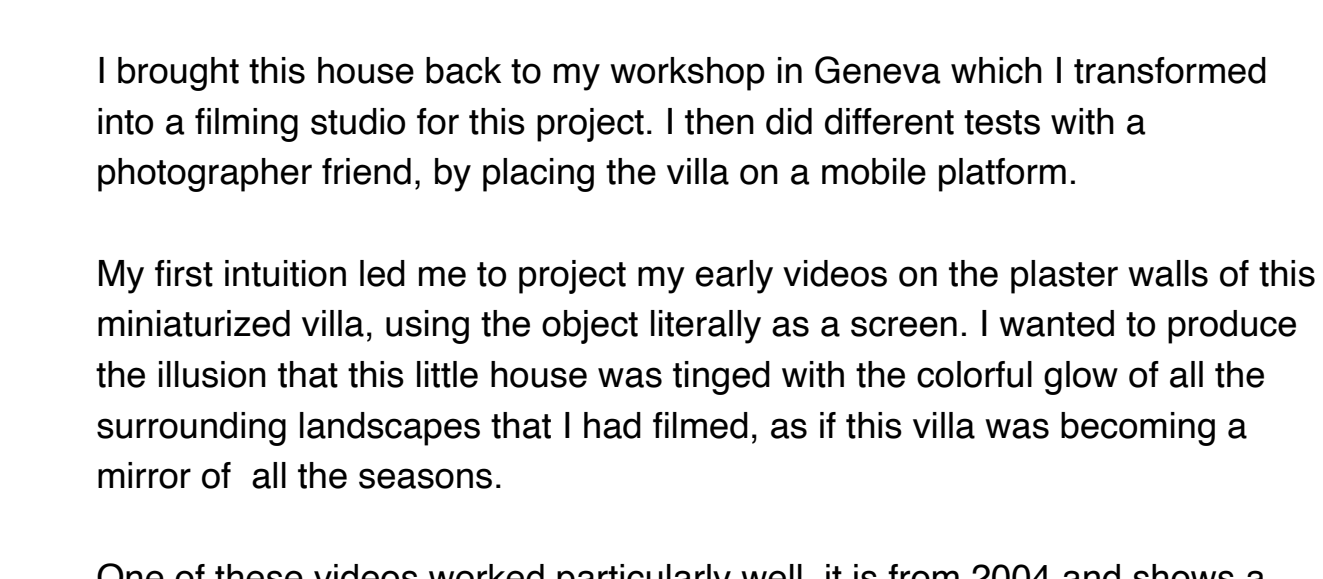
Today I no longer work in the same way. I no longer walk around with a mini dv camera in my pocket, but I still want to produce images.

At the CEC I wanted to "reproduce" the image of this beach. In order to do this, I used some photographs taken on site with my mobile phone. I had taken them initially to keep a memory of this situation, then, after discussing it with Véronique Bacchetta, the director of the Centre d'édition contemporaine (CEC), we decided to include them in the exhibition.

These images were printed on glossy sticker paper, and we stuck them next to each other on the wall, which had the effect of bringing out the rough edges; these smooth images became grainy.

Hung at a radiator's height, this frieze produces a sort of backdrop to the seven glass pieces arranged on the ground, which are imprints of campfires produced in the studio of the glassmaker Vincent Breed.

In the exhibition space, these translucent objects echo the presences that inhabited this snowy beach.



Denis Savary, *Quiet Clubbing* (detail), posters, polymer films, colors, variable dimensions, 2024. View of the exhibition Denis Savary, *Quiet Clubbing*, CEC, 2024, 17.05-23.08.2024. Courtesy Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva, photo: © Sandra Pointet

PR: In the same space, there's also a TV screen, hung high in a corner, in a kind of hotel room display. The video, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, shows a doll house that turns on itself lit by fatigued disco lights of what we imagine an almost empty bar, inhabited by one last tipsy guest: the house dances alone, there's no music, only the video, projected onto its body. The true "quiet clubbing" piece of the show. Could you tell us more about the video?

DS: The starting point for this video was the desire to film a miniaturized villa, similar to the one in which I grew up. This is an object that I produced for an exhibition at Maria Bernheim Gallery in Zurich in 2021.

I brought this house back to my workshop in Geneva which I transformed into a filming studio for this project. I then did different tests with a photographer friend, by placing the villa on a mobile platform.

My first intuition led me to project my early videos on the plaster walls of this miniaturized villa, using the object literally as a screen. I wanted to produce the illusion that this little house was tinged with the colorful glow of all the surrounding landscapes that I had filmed, as if this villa was becoming a mirror of all the seasons.

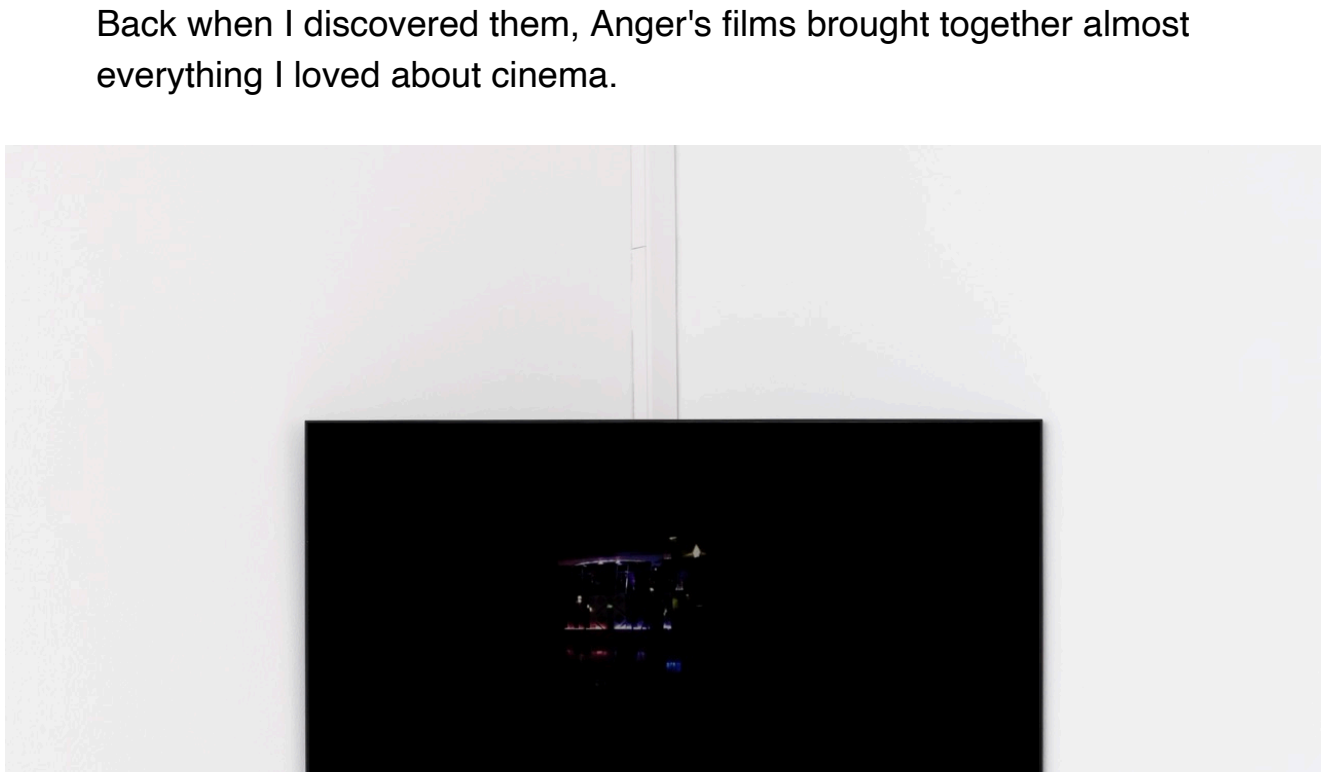
One of these videos worked particularly well, it is from 2004 and shows a light show that I had filmed in an almost empty interior of the village bar-discotheque called Le Must and which gave its title to the film.

The resulting image of this encounter is curious because, at times, the film looks like 3D modeling, while everything is done in a very artisanal way. I spent several hours making this house dance in the light of "Must", sequences that I then transmitted to the artist Nicolas Ponce, who helped me to edit them together.

At the CEC, this television screen placed in the corner of this second space was to function as a sort of counterpart to the main room, a bit as if it were offering a condensed version of it.

The method of hanging, in the corner, was in fact reminiscent of hotels or pubs and was intended to reinforce the image of solitude produced by this villa which dances all by itself.

At the same time I commissioned two artists and composers, Maria Esteves and Mathilde Hansen, a soundtrack for this film inspired by the book by Gertrude Stein, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, which gives the title to the video. This soundtrack is not audible in the exhibition space but it accompanies the online version of the film which will eventually be hosted on the [CEC website](#).



Denis Savary, *Campfire*, glass, wood particles, colors, dimensions variables, ed. of 5 + 1 e.a. and 1 H.C., certificate of authenticity numbered, dated and signed by the artist, edition of the CEC, 2024. View of the exhibition Denis Savary, *Quiet Clubbing*, CEC, 2024, 17.05-23.08.2024. Courtesy Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva, photo: © Sandra Pointet

PR: The video, together with the prints, all point to a relationship with the night: the loneliness, the disco, the northern lights as flashes that appear in the dark sky, a slight melancholic feeling.. There's also cinema here, for example in the prints, where we see scattered people all looking in the same direction, handling their expensive photographic apparatuses to capture the perfect image. What is this relationship between the night and the cinema to you?

DS: The first film that comes to mind is *Geschichte der Nacht* by Clemens Klopfenstein. The film consists of night shots of European cities, mainly exterior shots of often deserted streets and buildings, but also some interior scenes, including a waiting hall or dancers in a nightclub.

The most distant places and sounds merge into a single space. Snippets of conversations in Turkish are superimposed in the film onto images of Belfast.

In this film, the night seems an inexhaustible subject.

PR: The video, together with previous works of yours, point to Kenneth Anger's experimental movie *Eaux d'artifice* from 1953. The movie, shot in a garden plunged in a dark night, is a baroque ode to the erotic power of the image: an aristocratic character appearing and disappearing behind the water jets of the fountains, in all the suggestive powers of the artifice. Anger's movie is short, in black and white, tinted blue. Your photographs seem to have a similar quality, black and white with a green hue. *Eaux d'artifice* is built with a kind of staccato structure, a jerky montage where shots interrupt each other, another form of flash, an unstable image that appears and disappears, like the Northern lights. Your early video works often present a similar quality, with poor images and the feeling of a "rough" cut made by re-assemblage and the transformation of footage. Is there an affinity with structuralist movies?

DS: I love Anger's films. *Eaux d'artifice* is amazing. The film was shot in the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy. The actress, Carmilla Salvatorelli, was only four feet tall. Anger had met her through Federico Fellini. Anger used a woman of small stature to suggest a different sense of scale, in order to make the monuments seem bigger - a technique he said was inspired by etchings of the gardens of the Villa d'Este by Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

Back when I discovered them, Anger's films brought together almost everything I loved about cinema.



Denis Savary, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, video, 26'23", loop, production of the CEC, 2024 (version 1). View of the exhibition Denis Savary, *Quiet Clubbing*, CEC, 2024, 17.05-23.08.2024. Courtesy Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva, photo: © Sandra Pointet

PR: Did you ever produce videos for other artists?

DS: No, well yes, once with Stephan Eicher, a bit by accident. He had asked a few artist friends to make a short film in one of the cities where he was on tour. In my case, I had to imagine something in the Swiss region of Valais.

I suggested filming his musicians, a small band composed mainly of brass instruments, at Alaïa Bay, a surf park at the entrance to Sion, in Valais. Located on the pier, right in the middle of the wave pool, the musicians had to play surrounded by the surfers training around them.

Stephan must have liked it, because he finally went to join his musicians to sing *L'orage*, a piece he had just composed. It was great!

PR: The absence of a clear plot together with the TV screen in the corner of the exhibition space reminds me of "ambient TV", content that plays in the background without the viewer giving it their full attention. This type of content doesn't need a strong narrative tension. It sort of dilutes the necessity of the story to shape some kind of new unfocused image. What is your relationship to TV?

DS: I grew up in a house where there was a television in every room. So this idea of TVs being part of the backdrop is quite familiar to me.

As a child, I watched loads of TV, I watched everything and anything. In a way television made me curious. I discovered all kinds of things through the screen without having to leave my room. As it was on almost continuously, it functioned a bit like a night light. To read, I just turned off the sound.

I discovered lots of cult films there, classics, as they often played late at night. I fell asleep watching them but they still managed to enter my room. I loved waking up in the middle of the night with the TV on and finding this kind of movie playing.

PR: Your videos often display a fixed shot, a kind of pretension of objectivity that flirts with a voyeuristic neutrality, similar to well known reality TV shows.

DS: Subsequently, my television sets essentially became work tools, that's when I started looking at my own images. I don't think they have anything to do with reality TV, it never really interested me.

Exhibition view, Denis Savary, *Quiet Clubbing*, CEC, 2024, 17.05-23.08.2024. Courtesy Centre d'édition contemporaine, Geneva, photo: © Sandra Pointet

Publications PROVENCE

Out now: *My Alphabet*

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