

art press

Article by Dominique Baqué, June 2014

The Unshowable Truth (extracts)

There are two of them, and each, in a different way interrogates perception, the question of seeing, the ambiguities of what we see and the disturbing dialogue between truth and falseness. In her last series of photos, Noémie Goudal invented impossible but imposing landscapes: in abandoned places with a certain fallen beauty, factories, warehouses and other industrial sites transformed by time and nature, she placed sublime, large format landscape photos.

Her current work is even more fraught with perceptual illusions. For Iceberg, Goudal made a fake block of ice out of polystyrene and then set it floating on the water. Another, even more confounding photo, Blockhaus, appears fake but really is a bunker, looking unreal half underwater. Our power of perception fail us; in this world of tricks and false appearances we find ourselves dizzy in the face of the ontological loss of the fundamental difference between the true and the false.

In her black-and-white Observatoires from the series The Geometrical Determination of the Sunrise (2013), Goudal simultaneously explores her curiosity about ritual structures designed to frame the solstice and her fascination with concrete, the defining material for both modernist and fascist architecture, especially between the two world wars, producing a fictional inventory of modern architecture, a typology of forms.

The process involved here is relatively complex. She photographs an architectural element – for example, a fragment of the staircase at the Fondation Ricard – then reworks the image on a computer and prints it out and mounts it on a solid structure such as wood block cut to match the shape of the building. Finally, she takes this image/form and sets it into a real landscape. Here too, as in the preceding series, the fabrication is visible, signalling to the attentive eye that this cannot be « real » concrete nor a « real » building.

Plunged into white water, with no relief nor waves, these real but fake structures can be read as a kind of stele, like tombs from a twentieth century clogged with catastrophes and massacres [...].