

Biography

Michel Ritter was a Swiss artist and curator born in 1949 in Fribourg and died on 2 May 2007 in Paris. In 1969, he undertook various travels around the globe over a period of 4 years to India, Nepal, Mexico, Australia and South America. Back in Fribourg in 1974, he founded the RB Gallery with his friend, the artist Bruno Baeriswyl, where he exhibited his own work in 1976 and 1978. He made several trips to New York where he became familiar with contemporary art and became the first occupant of the artist's studio of the Canton of Fribourg in New York in 1979. In 1980, he had a solo exhibition at the independent art venue Franklin Furnace in New York. In 1987, he participated in the *Furkart 87* exhibition at Furkapass. In 1993, he exhibited at the Espace d'Art Contemporain in Lausanne.

Michel Ritter was the founder and director of Friart between 1990 and 2002, where he organised important solo exhibitions and worked with artists such as David Hammons, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Renée Green, Shirin Neshat, Thomas Hirschhorn, Christian Marclay, Jimmie Durham, Bernd & Hilla Becher, Julia Scher, Mark Dion, Valentin Carron and Steven Parrino, among others. He was also director of the Centre Culturel Suisse in Paris between 2002 and 2007 and was recipient of the Meret Oppenheim Prize by the Federal Office of Culture to leading figures in Swiss contemporary art in 2005.



Translation: Jack Sims

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Dorota Dolega-Ritter, Succession Michel Ritter, Paris
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Michel Ritter

Air Power = Peace Power

3.10.2021 - 9.1.2022

The Michel Ritter exhibition *Air Power = Peace Power* marks the rediscovery of the oeuvre of an important figure in Swiss contemporary art. Michel Ritter was the founder and first director of Friart (1990 to 2002) and the exhibition has been organized to take place on the different levels of the Friart building in homage to his contribution to the art centre. It offers a window onto his artistic production, which, up until now, has been overshadowed by his curatorial work.

From the 1970s to 2000, from Fribourg to New York, Michel Ritter produced a body of work of great coherence that drew on several notable influences: a critical sensitivity with respect to Western viewpoints inspired by worldwide travel during his youth, the Swiss artists to whom he was close and the conceptual practices and pictorial and media strategies of the art of the 1970s. By means of minimal interventions, the appropriation of everyday images and the unusual combination of everyday objects, the artist offered an oblique perspective on the visually saturated environment of the end of the last century. So doing, he also contributed to the shift towards a new anthropological apprehension of visual culture, whereby images were considered as much through an architectural, as a social and intellectual lens.

Works on paper presented on the first floor, many of them showed for the first time, constitute the heart of the exhibition. They were composed with pencil, watercolours, perforations, wadding and sticky tape that alters, or even obstructs representations of the Western world. They are inhabited by a sensibility that is cinematic in its rhythms and relationship to montage. This poetic of appropriation short-circuits the apprehension of images in terms of their news and current events dimension.

The works reserve a significant place for emptiness, free space. The materials used give body to the air, to breath and put the accent on the ethereal, the gaseous state. This extreme state of matter symbolises the immaterial future of images, as well as the coming obsolescence that is the fate of each new image. This romantic derealisation places us face to face with a silent poetic justice that masks the militant dimension of a work activated by impotence in the face of the scandals of the present.

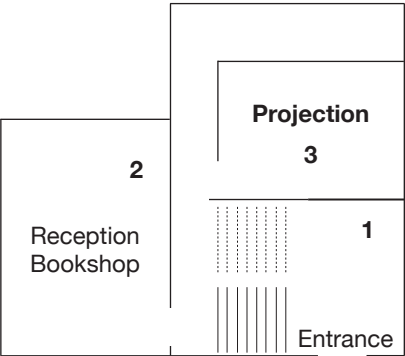
In the 1980s, Ritter's practice freed itself and moved towards more sculptural forms and installations, as can be seen in the later works and the films presented in the exhibition: our reflection distorted by bubbles of soap; the mountainous mentality of a Switzerland with enclosed horizons evoked in gas canisters plugged with the heads of chamois; the propulsion of a model plane on perforated barrel organ paper roll; plastic soldiers balanced on an inflatable cushion. These sculptural works play with a tension between visible and invisible matter that this tension gives form to: an incarnation of a pneumatic energy, of that which moves or agitates, of that which is transformed, affects and takes place.

The title of the exhibition *Air Power = Peace Power* is taken from a slogan for an American Air Force recruitment campaign; a panel that the artist brought back in his suitcase from one of his stays in the US. This appropriation and the inversion of meaning it produces once inserted into this artistic context remind us how criticism of the domination of space is also, always, a poetic art in Michel Ritter's work.

Air Power = Peace Power is the first retrospective of an oeuvre that still has much to reveal. It was brought together thanks to close collaboration with the Succession Michel Ritter (Paris) and Dorota Dolega-Ritter. Following the exhibition, in 2022, a catalogue of Ritter's works will be published. It will mark the last part of the Friart jubilee, celebrating 30 years in the Petites-Rames 22 building and 40 years since the first Friart exhibition, Fri-Art 81, instigated by Michel Ritter.

Entrance / Basement

All works if not mentioned Courtesy Succession Michel Ritter, Paris



- 1** *Space No. 1*, 1978
Alucobond, bubble machine
Variable dimensions
- 2** *Sans titre*, ca.1990
Epoxy, plastic soldiers, gas canister, plastic chamois head and hair dryer
145 x 145 x 107 cm
Courtesy Olivier Suter and Succession Michel Ritter, Paris
- 3 The films of Michel Ritter**
Sans titre, 2'9", Fri-Art 81, Fribourg
Sans titre, 5'31", Furkart, 1987
Animation films, *Sans titre*, 6'26", unknown date

The film tape was digitised in 2021 by the Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaire de Fribourg (BCU) where it is currently kept.

1 The artwork *Space No. 1* was exhibited by the artist in the RB gallery in Fribourg in 1978. It is the first in a series of environments that opened a dialectic between image and reality. It has been reconstructed for the Friart exhibition from photos of the artist's plans and explanatory notes. In its original version, it was activated by means of a pedal placed in front of a chair in which exhibition visitors sat.

3 The films of Michel Ritter

His films were often part of larger installations presented by the artist. Their projection on loop in a black box gives an insight into the artists' use of the film technique, which served as reflection on the evanescent status of the image as moving, projected, and circulating. The films are also part of a general reflection on the status of the photographic image and a disruption of its reality-effect. The ideas expressed in the film installations also often consist of a play between the time or place they were shot in.

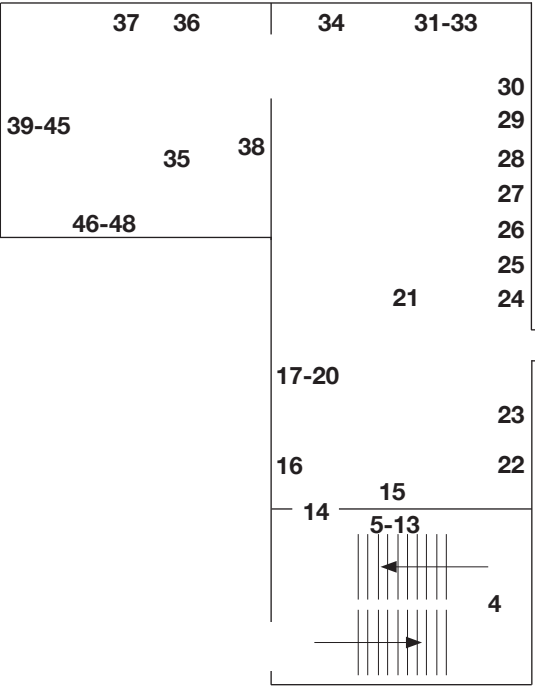
I try by [...] different means to change the original image, either by adding or subtracting something, so that, in the end, the image reflected more or less takes on its own particular identity.

Quote from Michel Ritter's portfolio *The Fixed and The Mobile Image*. The portfolio is available at reception.

In his studio, Ritter worked on stop-motion films using elements from his installation works, such as fans, smoke and gas cylinders, which he combined with everyday objects and religious icons. They document the practice of an artist who was not exhibiting his work much. They are situated between draft and finished work. The notion of the moving image as not fixed corresponds with this hybrid status. The use of animation techniques can be linked to the notion of *anima* or soul. Once again, animation encapsulates an art that seeks to reveal energy through the assembly of space, time and matter. These animated essays have to our knowledge never been shown in an exhibition context.

First floor

All works if not mentioned Courtesy Succession Michel Ritter, Paris



14 In 1982, Ritter showed the film installation *Lumières* in the group exhibition *Liestal Connection* at the Palazzo in Liestal. The two-and-a-half-minute recording of alternately illuminated ceiling lamps was projected onto unilluminated neon tubes on the ceiling.

- 4** *Sans titre*, ca.1990
Gas canister and plastic chamois head
Variable dimensions

5-13 *Sans titre*, 1976
Graphite and chalk on paper
24.7 x 33.5 cm

14 *Lumières*, 2'25", Palazzo Liestal, 1982, Liestal

15 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo and gouache on paper
42 x 59 cm

16 *Sans titre*, undated
Press photo, pen, graphite and pencil on paper
42 x 59.5 cm

17-20 *Sans titre*, 1978
Press photo, perforations and punching scraps on paper
24.5 x 17 cm

21 *Sans titre*, 1993
Score for barrel organ and steel fighter plane
38 x 653 x 8 cm

22 *Sans titre*, 1976
Press photo and graphite on paper, 42 x 30 cm

23 *Sans titre*, 1976
Press photo and graphite on paper
42 x 30 cm

24 *Sans titre*, undated
Press photo and pen on paper
42 x 59.5 cm

25 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo and pencil on paper
42 x 59 cm

26 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo, gouache and pencil on paper
42 x 59 cm

27 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo and graphite on paper
42 x 59 cm

28 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo, cotton and gouache on paper
42 x 59 cm

29 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo, gouache and pencil on paper
42 x 59 cm

30 *Sans titre*, ca.1978
Press photo, watercolor and aluminum foil on paper
42 x 59 cm

31 *John Tunney*, ca.1980
Photo and cotton on cardboard in plexi box
23.5 x 31 x 3.7 cm

32 *Arlene*, 1979
Photo and cotton on cardboard in plexi box
23.5 x 31 x 3.7 cm

33 *John Culver*, ca.1980
Photo and cotton on cardboard in plexi box
23.5 x 31 x 3.7 cm

34 *Sans titre*, undated
Pencils and glue on paper
42 x 59.5 cm

35 *Sans titre*, ca.1993
Plastic soldiers on inflatable structure, pedestal and glass
60 x 60 x 149.5 cm
Courtesy Eliane Laubscher

36 *Sans titre*, ca.1980
Photo booth and cotton on cardboard, under glass, wooden frame
25.8 x 32.5 x 3.3 cm

37 *Sans titre*, 1979
Photo and cotton on cardboard, under glass, wooden frame
24.8 x 32.5 x 3.3 cm

38 *inside the nuclear industry's heart*, 1980
Press photo, cotton, cardboard on cardboard, under glass, wooden frame
24.7 x 32.5 x 3.8 cm
Courtesy Paul Jacquat

39-45 *Sans titre*, ca.1979
Press photo and cotton on paper
42 x 57.5 cm

46-48 *Sans titre*, undated
Perforated press photo and graphite on paper
42 x 59.5 cm