

Denis Savary

*Quiet Clubbing*

Opening, Thursday, May 16, 2024, from 6pm to 9pm (Nuit des Bains)  
Exhibition from May 17 to August 23, 2024

Each of Denis Savary's artwork is the fruit of thorough research into fields as varied as history, art history, literature and sometimes even science. The result of this process is a series of cross-referenced pieces, whose hybridity also plays out at a technical level. Savary values collaboration with craftspeople from different trades (glass, carpentry, ceramics, tapestry, etc.), which works as an opportunity for him to explore their knowledge and to experiment with techniques. At first sight fragmented, his work produces an abundant and heterogenous world, filled with objects charged with a multitude of mythologies, a patchwork of personal memories and references — literary, musical, historical, and folkloric — transformed or reinterpreted. These intertwined mentions constitute a mental archive, a sort of non-hierarchical library made of extracts, flashbacks and shortcuts between art history, literary figures, between fascination for a variety of artisanal techniques and scientific informations. Savary's work seemingly belongs within this generic and playful sense of research: the emphasis shall be put on the manufacturing of the objects, prior to their transformation into actual artworks. Therefore, the process itself is fundamental, as a research system, empirical as well as experimental, a never-ending stream of thoughts. If production is carried out upstream, these new propositions might still be reworked, recombined, and modified during the exhibition set-up. Savary is an artist who favors continuity over finality, as a way of escaping the finiteness of the work and remaining curious and receptive to new narratives.

The exhibition title itself, *Quiet Clubbing*, works as a common thread running through several editions that come together in a nocturnal, festive atmosphere, through which light beams, plays of transparency and dancing movements occur: a collection of glass objects, a video, and a series of posters. Savary's objects, being transformed and offbeat, filled with references and modified with technical manipulations pushed to the limits of feasibility, are the products of a sensual enjoyment of craftsmanship and the manipulated matter. In a way, one could argue that Savary invents ultra-pop objects, sort of giant toys, unreal, which build an eerie theater from one exhibition to the other.

For the CEC edition, *Campfire*, Savary invoked the image of the wood fire. This edition is made of seven glass objects produced by the workshop of master glassmaker Vincent Breed, in Brussieu in Lyonnais, with whom Savary has been collaborating since 2013. The choice of the wood fire works as a reference to the origins of the birth of glass. Following Pline the Elder, the first glass was made by accident around 2000 years B.C. by Phoenicians nitre (sodium carbonate) dealers who were lighting a fire on a beach. The heat emanating from the fire, in contact with nitre and silice coming from the sand, generated a chemical reaction which allowed for glass to form.

The idea for this project goes back to 2021, when the artist began an experimental work session on glass. One of the collaborations between Denis Savary and the glassmaker consisted of covering various wooden objects in molten glass, in order to eventually recover the molding. Savary based his edition on the same precedent. These seven unique shapes were made as a technical challenge: reproducing in glass a campfire built with wooden elements. The aim was to cover this highly flammable material with molten glass and obtain its imprint: to destroy and to create with fire, to let emerge out of this incandescent matter a glass silhouette, transparent and liquid, a ghost which would contain the traces and the souls of the wood and the fire; an achievement that evokes the alchemist's gesture — an artist as alchemist. These aquatic objects made of glass produce luminous diffraction effects that recall the series of images installed in a panorama: aurora borealis seen from a beach covered in snow, between sky and sea, between the shadow of the night of the Far North and the spectral, iridescent waves of the northern lights.

This passage of light is reversed in a new video produced especially for this exhibition, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, realized with the help of Geoffrey Cottenceau for the photography and Nicolas Ponce for the editing. The first few seconds suggest a CGI animated video reminiscent of the slow, slightly jerky

movements of obsolete computer screensavers. Then, little by little, one can enter into the image as in a dark room, where the eye struggles to find its way around and to discern shapes and objects. Architectural elements progressively appear thanks to the spotlights of the nightclub, but it then becomes quickly noticeable that this space is a mere illusion. Indeed, the single object of the video is one of the *Villa* series' miniature houses that Denis Savary exhibited in the Bernheim gallery, in Zurich, in 2021 (*Ithaca*). Now working as a projection surface, it welcomes on its walls another video, *Le Must*, which was realized by Savary in 2004 and which describes, in still image, a light show inside a nightclub. The video was the central motif of his solo exhibition *Baltiques*, in 2012, at the Kunsthalle Bern. This *mise en abyme* actually dissimulates a voluntary play of inversion, of movements and passages, from the inside to the outside, a sort of interpenetration of private and public spaces.

*Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* borrows its title to Gertrude Stein's first detective novel, written after the successful *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. As she lived reclusively with her partner, Alice, in the French village of Bilignin, Stein started writing this novel, inspired by the various events and intrigues of the small hamlet daily life. Her country house then becomes a location from which Stein could observe this microcosm filled with underlying violence.

With this video, Savary looks back to a specific period in his work, in the beginning of the 2000s, when he was producing videos mostly from or within the immediate environment of his family home in Vaud. Realized in miniDV, a bygone production mean, these videos represent an era where the house worked as a studio and as a vantage point overlooking the world. Curiously, amongst the miniature houses of the *Villa* series, the one chosen for *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* is the one which looks the most similar to the artist's old house.

In his version realized for the CEC website, the video is accompanied by an eponym sound piece, a work commissioned to the artists/composers Maria Esteves and Mathilde Hansen. The sound and the image are merged and seem to be out of sync, as a dance off the beat. Progressively, the house's motion slows down, and reveals the complexity of a multi-track House sound from which emerges a voice that chants extract from Gertrude Stein's novel. The video dissimulates a pun, between the musical genre of House music and the main subject of the film, the artist's childhood house.

Set in a rotating movement, the miniature house from the *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* video reminds of dance-floor disco balls projecting rays of colored light: a light show, like the festive counterpart to the northern lights on the *Quiet Clubbing* posters, or the mysterious reflections caught in the transparency of the glass objects in the *Campfire* edition.

Denis Savary (1981) lives and works in Geneva. His work has been shown in a number of solo exhibitions, such as: *Josy's Club*, with Pierre-Olivier Arnaud, Synagogue de Delme, Delme (2023); *Octogone*, with Chloé Delarue, Mayday, Basel (2023); *Flower of Fog*, GNYP Gallery, Berlin (2022); *Ithaca*, Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zurich (2021); *Ambarabà Ciccio Cocco*, with Alfredo Aceto, Stiftung Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, Saint Gall (2021); *Ventimiglia*, Galerie Maria Bernheim, London (2021); *Phantom*, Lemme, Sion (2021). His many recent group exhibitions include: *Temps de Mars*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, La Chaux-de-Fonds (2024); *The Big Chill*, Galerie Maria Bernheim, London (2023); *Mirage*, MCBA, Lausanne (2023); *Deep Deep Down*, MUDAM Luxembourg, Luxembourg (2023); *The Puppet Show*, Centre d'art contemporain, Geneva (2022); *Inventaire*, Mamco, Geneva (2021); *Ballard in Albisola*, Casa Jorn House, Albisola (2021); *La Suite – Regards sur les artistes des collections des Frac*, Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne (2021); *Body Double*, Galerie Maria Bernheim, London (2021). In 2024, Denis Savary's work will be the subject of several solo and group exhibitions: *Fonderia Artistica Battaglia*, Milan; *Denis Savary*, Galerie Maria Bernheim, London; *Roma, Roma, Roma*, Rolex Learning Center, Ecole polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne. In 2025, he will be exhibited at KBCB Kunsthau Biel Centre d'art, Biel.

Zsuzsanna Szabo, production manager, is in charge of digital transformation projects for the CEC (2021-2024).

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The CEC will be closed from July 13 to August 12, 2024.