

Noémie Goudal

Inhale Exhale

May 2–31, 2025

Opening: May 2, 6–9pm

Addressing the challenges inherent in her work, Noémie Goudal engages in a dizzying exercise: through the prism of paleoclimatology, how can we comprehend a world *in motion* - a reality that runs counter to contemporary conceptions of our planet as a fixed entity, with neatly defined continents and immutable borders?

For the artist, this fundamental problem - the landscape in flux and our struggle to grasp it - is explored from a variety of vantage points, through photographic series, videos and immersive installations. What binds the works together is paleo-climatology, a compelling discipline that studies the past to better understand the future. Noémie Goudal draws on it as a foundation to craft the chapters of a visual epic; currently on view at the exhibition *Inhale Exhale*.

IN EX HALE: a neon work presented on the gallery's window repeats its title in a jolting rhythm, the two prefixes IN and EX alternately flickering on and off. This is no image of calm respiration: the light flares and stutters like a syncopated breath, an extrasystole. What does this restless breathing suggest, poised between the resistance of concrete matter and a metaphorical commentary on the world?

For this exhibition, Noémie Goudal's approach to space is a conceptual continuation of her previous research: her scenographic gesture displaces and reimagines the very tools that contributed to the making of themselves. As in her photographs and videos, the artist embraces a form of decorative craftsmanship in constructing her visual apparatuses. She does not obscure the structural archaisms, nor does she relinquish the poetic dimension of the *mise en scène*. Here, the artist has lined several walls with floating color filters, which inevitably evoke celluloid film, gelatinous strips that quite literally measure the time of an image in footage. On these striped partitions which allow air to circulate and sculpt the light, the photographs appear to mysteriously levitate.

Within this space of virtual projection, Noémie Goudal presents a selection of works that all interrogate the construction of images. Whether from recent or older photographic or videographic works, they probe the physical and philosophical frameworks of representation. While manipulating the art of illusion, the artist nonetheless leaves visible clues to her artifacts to the attentive observer. The exhibition thus unfolds like an investigation: through water and fire, in the living matter of the landscape, the images reveal their multiple layers as well as their off-frame dimensions, all the while probing the place of humankind within its environment.

Text: Eva Prouteau

Translation: Bárbara Borges de Campos

ORIGIN I, II, III

Noémie Goudal reflects on what is often referred to as the cradle of humanity: human evolution can be traced back to Kenya, at the southern tip of the Great Rift Valley. Here, ancient sedimentary layers have surfaced due to intense tectonic activity. The progressive drought of Africa has been marked here by abrupt climatic shifts: geological stability lasting a thousand years, followed by a sudden volcanic eruption, then the formation of a lake which endured five centuries, a subsequent drought, and lake's eventual return. These observations gave rise to a new theory: rapid change catalyzed human evolution, the need to survive violent climatic fluctuations drove our ancestors to adapt. The series *Origin* explores this hypothesis, and confirms the carefully constructed dimension of Noémie Goudal's photographs, the poetics of subtle visual effects, and the inventiveness of the visual layers in which the materiality of the image asserts itself. The artist presents a jungle of red soil, populated by tree ferns, palms and other prehistoric species. This biotope, which alternately in a state of drought and immersion, flourishes in what resembles a vast terrarium, a sealed environment behind glass.

Could these fragments of the untamed world, taken in cross-section, be the breeding ground of the human species? How do they, through the gallery window, interact with the flow of urban life on the other side of the glass?

PHOENIX

The title of the series *Phoenix* evokes the metaphor of fire as a force of death and rebirth. Using the motif of the palm tree as a thermal marker across the ages, Goudal employs a distinct production method: the artist captures a palm grove, illuminating it with artificial white light, then prints this electrified landscape at a 1:1 scale. The image is then divided into strips, stretched over a frame, and placed in front of the palm grove where it was originally shot. The scene is photographed again, resulting in an unsettling *mise en abyme*. Through this complex device, Noémie Goudal constructs a kind of visual marquetry - a disconcerting photographic weave that disrupts gravity and perspective.

In alternating appearances and disappearances, the series invite us to delve into its layered imagery, while also drawing attention to the polysemy of its title: the date palm was named *Phoenix dactylifera* by the botanist Linné in 1734 - perhaps because the ancient Greeks considered it with the Phoenicians (*Phoinix*), or perhaps because of palm's ability to survive partially burning, like the bird rising from its ashes.

TROPIQUES

The series *Tropiques* continues Goudal's reflection on the instability of landscapes, interweaving and deploying different temporalities within a single, densely layered image. Tinkering with lures, Goudal stages lush vegetation in front of her lens, in the open air, in a forests on the periphery of Paris, merging ancient times with present-day landscapes, as if the ghost of the jungle, which grew in Vincennes in the past, were coming back to haunt her.

After experiencing the elevation of high peaks, like Tibet, the Paris basin was eventually submerged by a tropical sea. These intense upheavals, invisible today, lurk in the artist's photographs. This series was inspired by the discovery of jungle fossils in Europe:

palaeoclimatologists estimate the age of this fossilised forest is 390 million years, making it the oldest ever discovered.

INHALE, EXHALE

In the video installation *Inhale, Exhale*, the viewer enters a tranquil marsh landscape, defined by the dense vegetation of its banks. Here, sections of scenery are lifted by a system of ropes and pulleys, then submerged back beneath the stagnant water surface. Shot in a fixed frame, the installation gradually reveals new strata of tropical flora - palms and banana trees - which evoke different stratum landscape memory. The artist subtly evokes the history of geology, citing the German climatologist Alfred Wegener and his 1912 theory of continental drift. *Inhale, Exhale* incorporates this notion of perpetual movement in a meditative and choreographic form. Its rhythmic point and counterpoint, like a vital and primordial breath, is intensified by the surrounding soundscape, coupled with the almost comical squeaks of the production set. Goudal alludes to the many fluctuations in sea levels and to the idea of level zero, a hydrographic reference point of limited relevance in palaeoclimatology, yet now it has become a crucial unit of measurement. This waterline separates what is visible from what lies hidden: from the surface emerges the scenery and the out-of-frame space of the image's out-of-frame space - a fertile ground for the imaginary, and for the poetry of the invisible unveiled.

ROCKS

In geology, the principle of superposition is one of the methods of dating, and a fundamental basis of stratigraphy: sedimentary layers accumulate horizontally, one atop another. From this principle, the scientist Nicolas Sténon concluded in 1669 that each stratum corresponds to a unit of time. In her installation *Rocks*, Noémie Goudal projects a looped video onto a photograph taken from the same viewpoint. The video, plunged in darkness, captures the sweeping light beam of a torch as it reveals the rock strata. The work suggests that the projector's light itself illuminates the still image. With this device - both rudimentary and ingenious - the artist superimposes two temporalities: the 24 frames per second of the moving image unsettle the fixed photograph with their dynamic presence, amplifying its iconographic weight (the deep, layered time of the mineral mass). The result is a visual transcription of a rocky landscape, seemingly motionless, yet in perpetual transformation. Taken as a whole, *Rocks* holds a perfect balance between conceptual reflection on the nature of the images and a poetic intersection of writing and light.

WHITE PULSE

The series *White Pulse* was inspired by René Daumal's unfinished adventure novel *Le Mont analogue* (Mount Analogue), in which Daumal describes the ascent of a mysterious mountain in the southern hemisphere - a place inaccessible to ordinary mortals, conceived as a counterweight to the mountainous ranges of the northern hemisphere. This mountain would correspond to all those evoked by ancient traditions, such as Sinai, Meru, Olympus, etc., allowing pilgrims who climb it to progress through different spiritual states.

xs

While reading it, Noémie Goudal was struck by the phrase: *La porte de l'invisible doit être visible* ("The door to the invisible should be visible"). *White Pulse* offers a visual expression on this elusive threshold, a space that might pave the way to unknown dimensions. How can one talk about the invisible forces at work within landscapes? How can we access new incomprehensible strata, the spiritual layers of the image? A series of five identical

photographs of different sizes that recreate the optical cone, *White Pulse* explores free folding, generated by the simple gravity of the print. The artist leaves the accessories of her method unconcealed (ordinary metal clamps), emphasising the link between the visible and invisible, the materiality of the image and its cosmic-telluric energy.

STUDY ON MATTERS AND FIRE

In an open-air non-place - a concrete slab within an overgrown vegetation - Noémie Goudal creates a deliberate confusion of scale. A succession of anamorphic sets, seamlessly blending into their surroundings, gradually goes up in smoke, as though the landscape's strata were simultaneously being revealed and consumed. In this otherwise unremarkable site, geometric shapes appear unexpectedly: the composition becomes distilled, exposing its latent abstraction - a distant echo of Cézanne's phrase ("Treat nature in terms of the cylinder, the sphere, and the cone"). As the fire transforms the scene, a choreography of destruction and rebirth unfolds before our eyes: the delicate equilibrium of image-making, as fragile and fleeting as the captured reality itself remains.

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