

# TADASHI KAWAMATA

**Tadashi Kawamata: *Under the Water***  
**Kamel Mennour, Paris**  
**10 December – 28 January**

**Tadashi Kawamata's** *in situ* installation at Kamel Mennour is a wide litter of wooden junk that hangs, swinging slightly, over the gallery's seventeenth-century porch, courtyard and three main spaces on the first floor. This suspended assemblage of shattered rubbish is entirely made of dismantled furniture such as (recognisable parts of) doors, cabinets, drawers, highchairs and cribs, all collected from waste containers outside homeless charity Emmaus in Paris prior to their artistic 'ascent'. While very nicely shading and scattering the light above the visitors, this quite monumental yet completely precarious construction seems to fall right into the softly subversive path of the eco-friendly Japanese artist, whose practice of working onsite has mindfully allied politics and poetics with reclaimed material and, to some extent, the local context of his interventions since the 1990s.

That said, *Under the Water* is absolutely unrelated to the Parisian scene, being designed to offer a semblance of submersion in remembrance of the disaster that hit Japan a year ago – the tsunami that devastated the northeastern coastal region of Tōhoku following a massive undersea earthquake. Yet don't be too quick to mentally associate all the discarded Emmaus furniture overflowing the gallery with the countless lives and households that were lost and broken during the 2011 catastrophe. This interpretation is not only simplistic (and quite frankly a bit cheap) but also incomplete. In the basement, lost between a slide projection of past interventions and a couple of notes and sketches describing an upcoming project, the artist has glued on the wall a short piece clipped from a newspaper, which opens the deciphering onto another level.

Indeed, the article points out that, while drawing back from Japan last year, the gigantic waves carried away miles of debris, forming a vast and solid field which is currently floating across the Pacific Ocean towards a West Coast landfall; Hawaii too is expected to see tsunami detritus crash ashore, possibly as soon as 2013. That is of course only the part that won't dissolve into the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, also known as the Eighth Continent – the humongous and extensive marine litter made up of all our

unwanted filth. Because it is mostly composed of disintegrated plastics, this rubbish soup is overall translucent and invisible from space. Therefore, besides the drama of the human loss, Kawamata's intention may be to figure this infinite discharge of pollutant chaos and acknowledge a problem that, contrary to his installation, may be transparent but is certainly not ephemeral.

Finally, in case *Under the Water* mesmerised you but failed to deliver that little extra frisson of the epic, the pending project – depicted downstairs – involves importing waste timber directly from Tōhoku in order to build a tower at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. Given the meltdowns and explosions at Fukushima's nuclear power plants following the cataclysm, and the understandable – yet irrational – fear of radioactive contamination it triggered all over the world (starting with the undamaged parts of Japan, like Kyoto and its annual bonfire festival, Gozan no Okuribi, which last summer cancelled its usual order of wood from Tōhoku because of the radiation scare), you won't be too surprised to learn that the French authorities have yet to approve Kawamata's proposal.

**VIOLAINE BOUTET DE MONVEL**

# LE SILENCE: UNE FICTION

***Le Silence: Une Fiction***  
**Nouveau Musée National de Monaco,**  
**Villa Paloma**  
**2 February – 3 April**

In 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Sigmund Freud analyses the 'work of mourning' – the psychological effort needed to overcome the loss of a beloved object. To oversimplify, Freud states that when such work doesn't occur, melancholia steps in and we spend much energy in trying to preserve a connection with the lost object, whose absence we refuse to acknowledge, by constantly revivifying its image. 'The shadow of the object [falls] upon the ego', he writes. Among the hundred works in *Le Silence (The Silence)*, there's one that translates Freud's concept almost to the letter: the strikingly beautiful *Grand Herbarier d'Ombres (Grand Herbarium of Shadows)*, 1972 by Portuguese artist Lourdes Castro, a collection of photographs of plants from her Madeira garden.

More powerfully than photos, these blurry silhouettes in delicate shades of blue, green and pink evoke the longing for something gone, but still visible, like a comforting ghost. They set the mood of my visit.

The exhibition, as curator Simone Menegoi writes, was inspired by Werner Herzog's sci-fi movie *The Wild Blue Yonder* (2005), where the imaginary desertion of planet earth is narrated by adding poetic captions and a fictional voiceover to vintage NASA documentary footage. Accordingly, *Le Silence* unfolds like a story divided in chapters, one for each of the museum's three floors, individual rooms forming subsections and every room introduced by a pseudoscientific caption on its 'alien' findings. Visitors go from 'City State, North American region: samples and documents', to 'Second Little Ice Age' and up to the last subsections: 'Interplanetary migration', 'Last outpost known', 'Another green world'. Photo after sculpture, after video, after painting, always devoid of human presence (the only living creatures represented are birds and plants), the viewer is confronted with visions of the end of the world. Possibly this is a melancholic way to hold onto the past – the era of optimism regarding global capitalism, obliterated by 9/11 (here evoked by Hiroshi Sugimoto's photograph *World Trade Center*, 1997) – instead of coming to terms with a painful present of economic crisis, wars, social and climatic unrest.

The choice of works is well researched and often surprising, from Bartolomeo Bimbi's animalier paintings (*Uccelli, or Birds*, c. 1715) to Peter Buggenhout's sculptural assemblage of waste, debris and household dust (*The Blind Leading the Blind #36*, 2010), to Michel Blazy's encased rotting stacks of orange halves (*Sculpture*, 2001/12). Tony Cragg's pile of sandblasted preserve jars filled with food (*Larder*, 1999) could have come from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), as could the archaic self-designed tools that Vladimir Arkhipov collected around Moscow, mostly in the post-Communist 1990s. A key work, commissioned for this exhibition, is the video *Darvaza* (2011) by Adrien Missika, shot in the Karakum desert, Turkmenistan, where a flaming crater (created by the drillings of Soviet geologists, who decided to burn the discharge of natural gas) has been alight since 1971. The 'trip' ends with an aurora borealis filmed by Carlos Casas (*Borealis (Fieldworks #10) Siberian Fieldworks*, 2007), although it ideally continues across space and time with Chris Sharp's short story in the catalogue. During the opening, Linda Fregni Nagler performed a magic-lantern projection, using original nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century glass plates from her collection: an enchanting flux of black-and-white images, from First World War fighters lost in Alpine snow to meteors, planes and flamingos. Her project, ongoing since 2010, has a telling title: *Things That Death Cannot Destroy*. If only it were true.

**BARBARA CASAVECCHIA**



**Tadashi Kawamata**  
***Under the Water***, 2011  
(installation view), elements of  
wooden furniture. Photo: Fabrice  
Seixas. © the artist. Courtesy the  
artist and Kamel Mennour, Paris



**Hiroshi Sugimoto**  
(see ***Le Silence: Une  
Fiction***)  
***World Trade Center***, 1997,  
silver gelatin print, 58 x 47 cm.  
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Koyanagi, Tokyo