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EXPOSITION

# JOACHIM KOESTER

## *OF SPIRITS AND EMPTY SPACES*

10 DECEMBER 2011 - 19 FEBRUARY 2012

INSTITUT  
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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The Institut d'art contemporain has invited Joachim Koester for his first large monographic exhibition. Born in 1962 in Copenhagen (Denmark), Joachim Koester lives and works in Copenhagen and New York.

Joachim Koester participated in Documenta 10 in Kassel (1997) and in the Venice Biennial (2005). He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world. Recent monographic exhibitions were held at Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2010), Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2010), Turker Art Museum, Finland (2009), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2007) and in France, in particular at Frac Lorraine, Metz (2009), La Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec (2007) and the Centre National de la Photographie, Paris (2001).

The exhibition at the Institute assembles a large set of existing works, most of which were made since 2005, and new works, consisting mainly of films and photographs. Joachim Koester has designed the exhibition like a pathway in half-light through

a maze that fills all the space available. This exhibition is for him a matrix whose components (ideas, characters, subjects and emotions) weave links from one room to another.

The artist has punctuated the entire space with rough wooden structures (palisades, a hut, etc.) that accentuate the organic and adventure-like dimension of the visitor's route. As a material, wood is both traditional and contemporary and exposed to the passing of time—suitable for an explorer's hut, a rudimentary shack for illicit activities or for marking a centre of life lying fallow. Using this expressive, sensual and even fantastical scene-setting, Joachim Koester has created what seems to be a large body in play in space.

Drawing on both the documentary and fiction, Joachim Koester's work re-examines and reactivates certain forms from the past while paying attention to the questions of conscience and the fading of the senses. In a cinematographic spirit, he develops a recurrent principle of image editing to grasp a collective memory and perform both mental and geographic exploration. In this permanent investigation of the test of time and of erasure, Joachim Koester draws on the duality of the scientific relationship with the real and sensitive experience. Thus the representation as photos or films of places full of history and then deserted to which he turns often accomplishes this voluntary abolition of the frontiers between rationality and empiricism.

*Message from Andrée* (2005), corresponding to a turning point for Joachim Koester, is his first work to include a film with a flicker effect and whose documentary dimension is a pretext for a perceptual experiment. From there, the artist concentrated more and more on a quest for 'spirits'.

Joachim Koester's 'ghost-hunting' in his works to bring back forgotten people or places often involves occultism or rituals experimenting with different types of perception. Mention is made of Carlos Castaneda's research on shamanism, places associated with black magic, outlaw communities and areas subjected to psychogeographic examination.

Within the framework of his interest in the exploration of an unknown mental world, the artist goes back to Henri Michaux's drawings made under mescaline by making a 'psychedelic' film whose blinding effect is provided by flicker aesthetics.

Joachim Koester's recent works display the human body by creating a gestural language evoking in a minimal mode the question of trance, a body that is 'inhabited' as if possessed.

*Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* is one of the new works that Joachim Koester has made for the exhibition at the Institute. Starting from one of Sol LeWitt's minimalist sculptures, the artist has created a 'dance for the hands' and gives the body the role of 'recording machine'.

Joachim Koester's conceptual and experimental approach, with tension between rational and irrational, matches in part the research conducted by the IAC's Laboratoire espace cerveau\*.

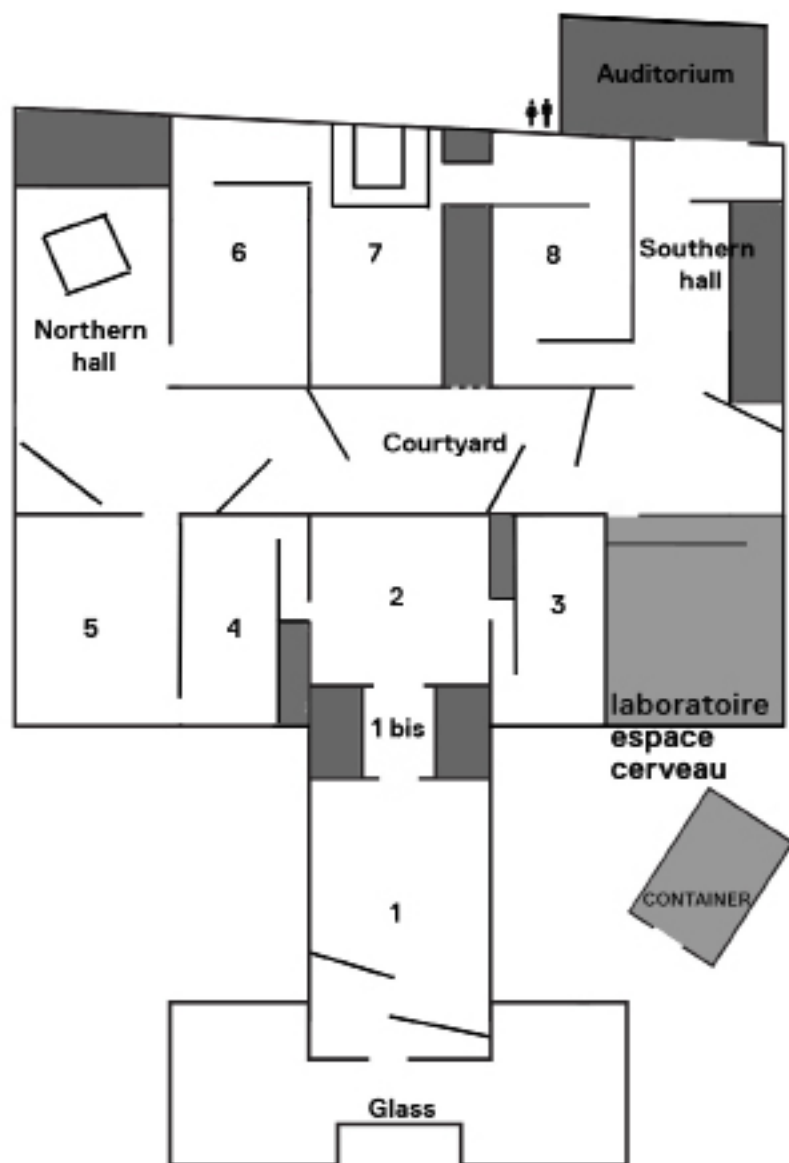
Within this framework, the artist proposes as works to be studied *Le rideau des rêves. Visions hypnagogiques* presented by Yann Chateigné, art critic, exhibition curator and head of the Visual Arts Department at HEAD (Haute École d'Art et de Design), Geneva.

\* [www.i-ac.eu/laboratoireespacecerveau](http://www.i-ac.eu/laboratoireespacecerveau)

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# Exhibition Rooms

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## ROOM 1

### ***Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes, 2011***

16 mm film, black and white, silent,  
8'15''

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Production : Institut d'art contemporain,  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

## ROOMS 1 b & 2

### ***Time of the Hashshashins, 2011***

Photographs, gelatin silver prints

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Production : Institut d'art contemporain,  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

### ***The Hashish Club, 2009***

Installation

16 mm film, black and white, silent, 6'  
Black and white photograph laminated  
on forex

Moroccan lamps

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

## ROOM 3

### ***From the Travel of Jonathan Harker, 2003***

Photographs, C-prints

Vintage content

Text by Joachim Koester

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Production in collaboration with *Periferic*  
6 : *Prophetic Corners*, lasi

### ***From the Secret Garden of Sleep, 2008***

Photographs, gelatin silver prints

Magazines

Text by Joachim Koester

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

### ***The Barker Ranch, 2008***

Photograph, gelatin silver print

Text by Joachim Koester

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Production : Nederlands Fotomuseum,  
Rotterdam

## ROOM 4

### ***Some Boarded Up Houses, 2009***

Photographs, gelatin silver prints

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

### ***histories, 2009***

Series of 6 diptychs, gelatin silver  
photographs

Text by Joachim Koester

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Collection : Frac Bretagne, Châteaugiron

### ***The Kant Walks, 2005***

Photographs, C-prints

Kaliningrad map, Text by Joachim Koester

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Collection : Sammlung Verbund, Vienne ;  
Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid

## ROOM 5

### ***Demonology, 2010***

16 mm film, black and white, silent,  
4'12''

Courtesy Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen ;  
Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Production : Institut d'art contemporain,  
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

### ***The Magic Mirror of John Dee, 2006***

Photograph, gelatin silver print selenium  
toned

Collection : Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
New York

## COURTYARD

### ***To navigate, in a genuine way, in the unknown necessitates an attitude of daring, but not one of recklessness (movement generated from the Magical Passes of Carlos Castaneda), 2009***

16 mm film, black and white, silent,  
3'16''

Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles

Collection : Frac île-de-France / Le  
Plateau, Paris ; S.M.A.K, Gand

Production in collaboration with *If I Can't  
Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your  
Revolution*, Amsterdam

### **Tarantism, 2007**

16 mm film, balck and white, silent, 6'30''  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Collection : Kadist Art Foundation, Paris ;  
Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris ;  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburg ;  
Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen  
Production with the support of Estratos,  
Proyecto Arte Contemporaneo, Region  
of Murcia ; S.M.A.K., Gand ; Danish  
Arts Agency, Copenhagen ; Kaaiteater,  
Bruxelles; Jan Mot, Bruxelles

### **I Myself Am Only a Receiving Apparatus, 2010**

16 mm film, balck and white, silent, 3'33''  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Production : Danish Arts Agency,  
Copenhagen ; Jan Mot, Bruxelles ;  
Kestnergesselshaftl, Hanovre ; Sprengel  
Museum, Hanovre; STUK,  
Kunstencentum, Louvain

## **NORTHERN HALL**

### **Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome, 2007**

Multi-channel installation  
Computer generated text, endless loop  
Wood  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Production : Institut d'art contemporain,  
Villeurbanne /Rhône-Alpes ; Extra City,  
Anvers

## **ROOM 6**

### **One + One + One, 2006**

Double video projection, 16 mm  
transferred onto video, black & white,  
sound, 5'03'' and 6'  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Production : Danish Arts Agency,  
Copenhagen ; Busan Biennial, Busan  
(Corée du Sud) ;  
Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland

## **ROOM 7**

### **Morning of the Magicians, 2006**

16 mm film, balck and white, silent, 4'50''  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Collection : Museum of Modern Art, New  
York

## **ROOM 8**

### **Morning of the Magicians, 2006**

Photographs, series of 6 selenium toned  
gelatin silver prints and 4 C-prints  
Adhesives on wood  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Bruxelles  
Collection : Museum of Modern Art,  
New York ; Philadelphia Museum of Art,  
Philadelphie ; Auckland Art  
Gallery, Auckland

## **SOUTHERN HALL**

### **Message from Andrée, 2005**

Installation  
16 mm film, balck and white, silent, 3'30''  
Black and white inkjet posters  
Text by Joachim Koester  
Courtesy Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen  
Collection : S.M.A.K., Gand  
Production : Pavillon Danois, 51<sup>ème</sup>  
Biennale de Venise, 2005 ; Danish Arts,  
Agency, Copenhagen ; Grenna museum,  
Grenna

# room 1

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## ***Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes,*** **2011**

Joachim Koester used 16 mm film to shoot a close-up of the hands of an actor attempting to reconstitute in space, at their small scale, the *Incomplete Open Cubes* made by Sol LeWitt in 1974.

An emblematic figure in minimal and conceptual art, Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) developed in the heart of his work the notions of sequences, modules and combinations. In *Incomplete Open Cubes* (1974), Sol LeWitt exploited all the possible permutations of a cube. The series thus consists of 122 sculptures units formed by white-lacquered cubic frameworks — referred to as ‘structures’ by the artist — defined by a numerical series in which the cube is always incomplete. Each structure has at least three and a maximum of eleven elements. This makes it possible to reconstitute the cube mentally by substituting the missing bars.

Using a play of rebounds and in the spirit of a musical score, *Incomplete Open Cubes* generates the continuous movement of the eye and the mind in order to grasp the cubic structure as a whole.

Joachim Koester used this duality in Sol LeWitt’s work to run through all the possibilities. Performing variations of *Incomplete Open Cubes* with the hands is a strange exercise that is sometimes difficult or hesitant as geometry is interpreted by gestures. Here, incompleteness, fragmentation and serial language are expressed by a minimal choreography where Joachim Koester ‘considers the body as a recording machine’.

Using the idea that ‘we learn and understand things via the body’, the artist presents a theatre of gesture that is not devoid of magic effects (the expressiveness of hands, the enigmatic character of the language unfolding) and provides a possible new development of the Sol LeWitt’s approaches that are material for Joachim Koester’s reflection :

1. Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2. Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.
3. Irrational judgements lead to new experience.
4. Formal art is essentially rational.
5. Irrational thoughts should be followed absolutely and logically.’  
(Sol LeWitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, first published in the journal 0-9, New York, 1969, extracts).

Joachim Koester’s *Variations of Incomplete Open Cubes* contains the different components of all his work and accentuates its evolution, and particularly the dialectic between the conceptual approach and perceptual experience, in which the body is increasingly present.

## rooms 1b & 2

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### ***Time of the Hashshashins, 2011***

This series consists of five photographs — three posters and two in A3 format — displayed in two exhibition rooms. They are from a series of twelve images. The black and white views show a building in ruin or being rebuilt. Set on a rocky cliff, the architecture seems to be an old fortress that is now battling with scaffolding. Each one is accompanied by the title of the work, the name of the place (Alamut), the camera angle (interior, facade, north, etc.) and a few phrases written by Joachim Koester to describe his discovery. But the whole needs an active approach by the visitor: the photographs and texts may be presented upside-down or inverted within the same composition. The artist went to Alamut castle in the Alborz mountains in northern Iran. During his trip, he visited the archaeological site where a dig was in progress.

In the 11th century, this castle that was considered to be impregnable was occupied by Hassan ibn al-Sabbah and became a place for meetings and initiation of the Nizari Ismaili sect, also called 'Assassins' or 'Hashshashins'. While 'Assas' means the 'foundation', some interpreted the term as being the equivalent of 'users of hashish' because of the legends recounted by the crusaders on their return to Europe and the fears generated by the inhabitants of the castle.

In the heart of the architectural complex, there is said to have been a secret garden imitating Paradise, with luxuriant vegetation and the presence of the most beautiful women to reward the most devout who, under the influence of hashish and opium, could enter. These hired killers were fearsome and reputedly infallible, murdering people in the street with a knife in their hand and ready to die unquestioningly for their beliefs.

The legends of Alamut then took Joachim Koester to the 19th century and the founding by Jacques-Joseph Moreau of the Club des Hashichins in Paris in 1844 (the subject of the work entitled *The Hashish Club* shown in room 2).

Joachim Koester uses the experience of this testing and astonishing journey to show a set of items mingling photographs of ruins that remind the visitor of 19th century documentary photography (the images of far-off places by Francis Frith or Edouard Baldus), poetic, scrambled fragments of his impressions and a play of temporal sedimentation: an experienced present that works on reconstituting a past that may perhaps reveal our future.

### ***The Hashish Club, 2009***

*The Hashish Club* is an immersive installation with warm light provided by several Moroccan lamps. Joachim Koester shows several black and white images in this quiet atmosphere: an animated projection of photos of cannabis plants — with an acceleration and slowing of the succession of images, creating a hypnotic flashing effect — on a photograph of a luxurious nineteenth century Baroque drawing room with folding screens, carpets and upholstered chairs and armchairs.

The artist uses this visual environment to show the visitor his reading of a specific episode of French culture, related to a theme addressed in his work on several occasions: the history of hashish.

In 1844, the psychiatrist Jacques-Joseph Moreau (1804-1884) founded Le Club des Hashichins. After several trips to the east at the end of the 1830s, the doctor became interested in the effects of Indian hemp and wished to make closer observations. Until 1849, he invited various personalities and anonymous persons to consume 'Dawamesk' (a greenish paste consisting of a mixture of cannabis resin, honey and pistachios) at the mansion 'Hôtel de Lauzun' on Île Saint-Louis in Paris.

In addition to Moreau's theoretical and scientific writings, including *Du haschich et de l'aliénation mentale* (1845), his guests also wrote reports, essays or analyses based on their personal impressions. Among the most famous of them, Théophile Gautier, a founder member of the Club, published an article entitled *Le Haschich* in 1843 and Charles Baudelaire published *Les Paradis artificiels* in 1860.

Handled using different approaches according to the works, the history of hashish interests Joachim Koester as it allows the establishment of historical links between different periods and to show how the consumption of this plant was always linked to beliefs, fears, political considerations and experiments. Today, marijuana is still considered as a symbol of counter-culture.

## room 3

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### ***From the Travel of Jonathan Harker, 2003***

A series of ten photographs of which only one is in black and white. As often with Joachim Koester, the subjects of the images alternate between views of dwellings under construction or abandoned and natural landscapes changed by the passage of people. The poetry of pines and undulating countryside is contrasted here with an atmosphere of desolation, abandonment and proliferating, stereotyped contemporary urbanism.

The photographs are accompanied by a showcase containing the French edition of the novel *Dracula* (1897) by the Irish writer Bram Stoker (1847-1912), two posters of its adaptation for the cinema (1931) by Tod Browning with Bela Lugosi in the title role, the work *In Search of Dracula : the History of Dracula and Vampires* (1994) by Radu Florescu who documented the history of Vlad Tepes (Vlad III the Impaler), prince of Wallachia in the fifteenth century and Stoker's main source of inspiration for his vampire

character, and a text by the artist to present the project.

The presence of these documents opposite the images shows the visitor which region Joachim Koester chose for his photographs: Transylvania, part of Romania since 1918, the land of the famous Count Dracula. The artist made this set of works in spring 2003 following an invitation to participate in an exhibition called *Prophetic Corners* at Iasi in Romania. The concept was expressed in the title of the exhibition, in other words places carrying a rich cultural or historical load that could give a glimpse of an image of the future.

Transylvania has become a legendary region and a recurrent theme in films because of the many adaptations of *Dracula*. Joachim Koester therefore chose to test what was a 'mental landscape' for him and to follow the route of the narrator in Bram Stoker's work across the Carpathians to Bistrita.

While following the trail of the fictional character, Joachim Koester documented a Transylvania that is remote from the collective imagination. In the heart of deforested landscapes where timber is exploited illegally, the artist shows the modern constraints of the market economy. Count Dracula's disturbing forests now bear the stigmata of axes and chainsaws that are sharper than the vampire's teeth, very remote from a distant image (which perhaps never existed) and closer to a post-apocalyptic setting in a science fiction film.

## ***From the Secret Garden of Sleep,* 2008**

Three black and white photographs from a series of seven show the flowering tips of hemp plants — cannabis — photographs with a science fiction style halo of light giving them a hybrid, almost mutant appearance. The images are accompanied by a showcase containing issues of the periodicals *High Times Magazine* and *Sinsemilla Tips* published in the 1970s and 80s in the United States, together with a text by Joachim Koester.

A new iconography spread in counter-culture magazines in the United States in the 1970s: images of cannabis plants revealing increasing consumption and production.

But in 1982, Ronald Reagan (1911-2004), newly-elected as president, decided to strengthen the legislation covering what he considered to be a symbol of rebellion and counter-culture. Contrary to all expectations, these directives resulted in the creation of new plants that could be grown indoors, unseen by all.

*From the Secret Garden of Sleep* proposes two lines of reflection that are recurrent in Joachim Koester's work. First of all, by using photographs and archives to document home-grown cannabis plants, he reappropriates previous iconography to reactivate a historical fact by comparing it with the present.

In addition, as photography is one of his preferred tools, the artist also ceaselessly examines its history. Here, he mentions 'botanical photography' that appeared at the end of the 19th century and that was initiated by Anna Atkins (1799-1871) who is often considered to have been the first female photographer.

## ***The Barker Ranch, 2008***

Joachim Koester shows a silver process photograph (one of a series of four) of Barker Ranch in Death Valley in California where the legendary criminal Manson family hid in the 1960s. A text by the artist accompanies the image.

Charles Manson was the leader of a hippy community known as the Family that lived in various abandoned ranches in Death Valley. In 1971, Manson was found guilty of a series of murders committed in 1969 in the Los Angeles region (including the murder of the actress Sharon Tate, Roman Polanski's wife) and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Beyond the factual story, the setting of Barker Ranch is rich in cinema memories—in the heart of the mythology of the western, of America's individualistic and violent past. Death Valley National Park is in the eastern Sierra Nevada in California and part extends into the state of Nevada. Death Valley was given its name by Gold Rush miners in the mid-nineteenth century because survival there was difficult.

It has been used for location shooting of many westerns and B films.

Joachim Koester continues his 'ghost-hunting' using his 'return to the scene of the crime' investigation method — in the true sense of the words in this case. Photography is of major interest to him here as it can examine the relationship between the real and its representation and set out the question of proof, a thread that runs through all his work.

Joachim Koester performs rational observation of the irrational; he shows a circumscribed place, traversed in all directions, analysed and demystified but that has nonetheless conserved its almost supernatural dimension of fantasy and threat.

## room 4

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### ***Some Boarded Up Houses, 2009***

Photography as a medium is a constant in Joachim Koester's work. He started to use it in the 1990s.

Since then, he has developed a technique that clearly reflects a genre in the history of photography : the documentary style, characterised by serial work, a frontal camera angle and attention paid to objectivity with no sentimentalism.

Thus, in the tradition of Walker Evans, the photographer of the Great Depression in the USA after the 1929 crisis, and Bernd and Hilla Becher who visited abandoned industrial sites in the Ruhr in Germany, Joachim Koester took frontal shots from the street of houses in Brooklyn, New York, whose facades had been boarded up. These houses with blocked openings seem like a somewhat disturbing inventory. The atmosphere is one of strangeness and silence and buildings remain enigmatic with regard to the lives that they have housed and the 'spirits' that they may still hide. The nine photographs are accompanied by a written presentation by the artist.

Joachim Koester's 'documentary' photography also refers to the treatment of this kind of image — contributing to the work of certain artists in the 1960s and 70s: Ed Ruscha and his series on the places in which Americans live, Dan Graham and his work *Homes for America* in 1967 for *Art Magazine* and that consisted of photos and text devoted to suburban houses in New Jersey, built in series and typical of post-war constructions.

Although Joachim Koester's work fits in with these sociological urban studies, he nonetheless goes beyond the already broad field of a conceptual, documentary and narrative approach to the social and political aspect of architecture. By seeking to decode the

signs of repressed history with which the walls are impregnated, the artist acts as an explorer of the invisible, an observer of a reality inhabited by ghosts.

### ***The Kant Walks, 2005***

The seven photographs that form the *The Kant Walks* series show wintery urban landscapes haloed with mist. Strangely clear light accompanies each shot: dilapidated monumental architecture, residential buildings bordered with trees, industrial wasteland and no-man's-land. The series brings to mind both documentary photography and photos taken before the development of an area, or a meditative wander through a small abandoned country municipal area. The photographs are accompanied by a showcase containing a map of Kaliningrad in Russia — an enclave on the Baltic enclosed between Poland and Lithuania — and a text by the artist specifying that this series of images shows his research on the walks by the illustrious German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in this town.

The author of a historical and decisive body of work (including the three *Critiques: Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Critique of Judgement* (1790)), Kant nevertheless left no information about his private life. The rare information available was collected from neighbours or disciples who all agreed about the philosopher's very strict organisation of working time and his long walks in the town where he was born and lived : Königsberg, the historical name of the Prussian town before it became part of Russia. The approach to Kant of Thomas de Quincey (1785-1859), English author, poet and journalist, in his biographical essay on the thinker, *The Last Days of Immanuel Kant* (1854) interests Joachim Koester particularly. He was worried about Kant's failing consciousness at the end of his life (nightmares, insomnia, a wandering mind and sometimes even irrational reasoning) that reveal another form of exploration of

the 'saturated dreams' that he himself had experienced as a result of his heavy use of opium.

Joachim Koester considers that Kant's medical problems can be read as an announcement of the fall of the city of which he was the emblem.

Joachim Koester wishes to use his artistic approach to highlight different ways of looking at Kaliningrad. He first traces its tragic history marked by bloody conquests, Nazism, bombardments and a radical change of regime.

The viewpoints then become mingled: that of the 'artist-explorer', that of his guide, Professor Kalinnikov, a Kant specialist who lives in Kaliningrad, and finally the angle reconstituted of the philosopher and his circular walks that revealed 'subtle kingdoms'.

*The Kant Walks* is an attempt at plotting the psychogeography of a town. The series is sited at the threshold — between what we know and what we don't know, what we feel, between the physical emptiness of the town that was never rebuilt and 'history like chaos, a dormant presence that is perhaps much more possible than linear narratives'.

### **histories, 2009**

Joachim Koester made a series of six photographic diptychs juxtaposing major photography work of the 1960s and 1970s and recent shots of the same places. The work uses previous works in line with the artist's constant concern to bring out the past and reactivate a certain representation of the real by comparing it with the present, as explained in the text that accompanies the ensemble.

Entitled 'histories', the series also provides a history of conceptual photography via several of its representatives (from right to left): Ed Ruscha (born in 1937), Robert Adams (born in 1937), Robert Smithson (1938-1973), Bernd and Hilla Becher (Bernd, 1931-2007, Hilla, born in 1934), Gordon Matta-Clark (1943-1978) and Hans Haacke (born in 1936). This particular history of photography treats

the image as a document with a much more informative than artistic viewpoint.

Joachim Koester's series also evokes the multiple history of the places and events depicted. Fashioned by human activity and more or less taken over, deserted or transformed, the places shown in a twin manner speak of collective memory (or erasure) and a historical awareness given form by the artistic viewpoint.

In the 1960s, Ed Ruscha published a series of books inspired by American life. Favouring 'quality-less' subjects of everyday urban life, his books of photographs are at the crossroads between the documentary style defined by Walker Evans and a Duchamp-style ready-made.

The house photographed here by Ed Ruscha in 1965 is part of the series *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, presenting frontal views of apartments with straight, cold lines, with no human presence. Forty years on, Joachim Koester's photograph indicates a change in vocabulary ('Now Renting' has become 'Now Leasing'), which does nothing to dispel the feeling of vacancy that permeates the place.

Robert Adams belonged to the New Topographics movement in the 1970s. He favoured neutral images and recorded urbanisation developments and the artificialisation of landscape while taking a position of defence of the environment in his written texts.

The image shown is from a series of documentary photographs taken by Robert Adams of the town of Colorado Springs in 1969. Joachim Koester records the passage of time at the place: trees have grown, the house has become dilapidated while the shape of a mountain in the background is unchanged.

Known as the theoretician of Land Art, Robert Smithson was interested in industrial and vernacular forms of architecture and worked in suburban areas. A text and series of photographs documenting the edifices of Passaic, New Jersey, the town where he was

born, was published in *Artforum* in 1967. The structures — characteristic of industrial modernity and the perishable aspect of buildings — were described as ‘monuments’ by the artist.

Robert Smith talked in terms of entropic landscape on the subject of the dislocated space of Passaic. ‘Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future. ... They are not built for the ages, but rather against the ages.’ (Robert Smithson, *Entropy and the New Monuments* (1966) in *Unpublished Writings in Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam, published University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 2nd Edition 1996).

Joachim Koester’s work is in agreement with Robert Smithson’s assertion and underlines the ‘ordinary void’ of the space photographed, the ephemeral aspect of its constructions.

Bernd and Hilla Becher were the leading figures of an important German documentary movement. All their work stems from a vast descriptive, systematic census of industrial architecture<sup>7</sup>, usually abandoned, using photography. It is organised by types of building using a strict protocol: frontal shot, subject centred, black and white photography, diffused light and a raised viewing point.

Joachim Koester’s photograph of coal mine tipples in Pennsylvania taken thirty years after those of the Bechers confirms the validity of the records of the German artists: in just a few decades, the industry in question has changed from being the world leader to the status of ruin.

Gordon Matta-Clark is known for his radical work on architecture: cuts in buildings, apartments and abandoned houses (*Building Cuts*). He kept records of these using different media (film, video, photography, photomontage).

For *Fake Estates* (1973-74), Gordon Matta-Clark bought plots from the City of New York when the city authorities put them up for sale in a context of economic slump. Gordon Matta-Clark accurately documented and photographed the fifteen plots purchased — fourteen in Queens and one in Staten Island. He considered them as sites for future ‘anarchitecture’ operations. Joachim Koester chose a photo from Pamela M. Lee’s book *Object to be Destroyed. The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark*, MIT Press, 1998. He went to the street depicted, wondering about the temporal uncertainties of the image.

Hans Haacke is a conceptual artist whose approach is often similar to investigative journalism. His aim is to denounce the interactions between politics, industry and the art world.

Joachim Koester follows the trail of Haacke’s work *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* which was much talked about when it was made in 1971 as it caused the cancelling of the artist’s solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Consisting of 146 black and white photographs of architecture showing facades of buildings in Harlem and the Lower East Side in New York, together with typed sheets and various documents, Haacke’s work formed meticulous proof of the doubtful transactions Harry Shapolsky, a real estate magnate, from 1951 to 1971.

Joachim Koester returned to ‘the scene of the crime’ and observed that there only one of these poor apartment buildings inventoried by Hans Haacke was still in the hands of rich investors.

## room 5

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### *Demonology, 2010*

*Demonology* consists of a black and white photograph (shown within the framework of the Laboratoire espace cerveau) and the projection of a 16 mm film that the visitor can see in two stages. The image first appears to be a compact block with tendrils or grey dots. But the contours gradually become clearer as you get nearer. Deformed faces appear with disturbing eyes — enigmatic calligraphy. Increasingly numerous and dense figures move on the screen and create a mysterious myriad of images.

'Demonology' is the study of demons. Although these have always been present in the various cultures since the Mesopotamian era, the first so-called 'scientific' writings on the subject go back to the end of the thirteenth century and *On Evil* (1272) by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274). In his book, Aquinas focuses on the devil and the practice of sorcery and describes what he considers to be heretical behaviour. Numerous theologians have since tried to define the entities of evil and rank them.

Joachim Koester found the iconography he used in a Norwegian church; he used the motifs of a 1647 fresco.

Norway was particularly concerned by sorcery trials at the beginning of the seventeenth century as a result of a law passed in 1620. The most famous was that of Vardø (1621) in the Finnmark region that followed a strong gale on Christmas Eve 1617, during which most of the men died at sea. This event led to the sentencing and execution of 150 persons, mainly women, suspected of having been manipulated by Satan.

*Demonology* combines hypnotic and psychedelic forms and the occult and the invisible that are dear to Joachim Koester. The enigmatic assembly of his demonic forms refers the visitor to medieval

cosmological thinking whose decoding is sometimes complex.

### *The Magic Mirror of John Dee, 2006*

*The Magic Mirror of John Dee* is a practically abstract photograph of the surface of a mirror. It is the black mirror used during their séances by the British occultist John Dee and the necromancer Edward Kelley and that is on display in the British Museum alongside their crystal ball, another instrument for their visions (see the photograph *Crystal Ball, 2011*, displayed within the framework of the Laboratoire espace cerveau).

John Dee (1527-1608) was a mathematician, astronomer, astrologist and geographer who was revered in his time as the most erudite man in Europe. He studied the Kabbalah, discovered Agrippa's famous work *De Occulta Philosophia* (1930) and turned towards the hermetic doctrines, developing angelic kabbalistic magic based strongly on numerology. In 1564 (in twelve days in a mystical state), John Dee wrote his '*Monas Hieroglyphica*' (the Monad Hieroglyph), a hermetic work creating occult writing that could explain all things. From 1582 to 1589, Dee held invocation sessions aided by the medium Edward Kelley (1555-1595) to enter into contact with the angels. Kelley reported that during these spiritual conferences, that they also held in Central Europe, he saw and heard in the crystal ball and the obsidian mirror while Dee recorded these messages from elsewhere. This is how the language referred to as angelic or Enochian (after the biblical patriarch Enoch, the father of Methuselah in the Book of Genesis) language gradually took shape. Dee finished his life alone and forgotten but was rehabilitated in the twentieth century, becoming a person much appreciated by storytellers, people interested in magic and writers of horror stories. He inspired numerous works of fiction.

Thus Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), the British occultist with a doubtful reputation was convinced that he was the reincarnation of Kelley, Dee's companion, and performed Enochian rituals, for example conjuring up Choronzon, the dragon of death, in the Algerian desert in 1909.

John Dee's personality, with its duality of proven scientific knowledge and a quest for empirical information, corresponds to Joachim Koester's preoccupations. The subject of the study is irrational (a magic mirror) and is set at a distance here and re-evaluated by repositioning the object and shifting the viewpoint. The eye approaches the mirror to the point of entering its shadowy surface, as if sucked in by an interior state in search of buried images.

## Courtyard

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***To Navigate, in a Genuine Way, in the Unknown Necessitates an Attitude of Daring, but no One of Recklessness (Movements Generated from the Magical Passes of Carlos Castaneda), 2009***

In this 16 mm video, a man against a black background enters and leaves the coverage of the camera filming the scene as a still shot. In each of his appearances, the actor makes a series of repeated gestures with his hands, his legs, his head and sometimes with his whole body. These enigmatic gestures resemble mime, a theatrical presentation or a magic ritual. The positions taken cause the visitor to wonder about whether the work is serious or humorous and about the choreographic, hypnotic or pathological nature of the actions of the character.

Here, Joachim Koester is interested in the accounts by the Californian anthropologist Carlos Castaneda (1925-1998) who in the 1960s recounted his experiences of Meso-American shamanism.

Castaneda said that he had been initiated in the Sonora Desert by Don Juan Matus, a Yaqui Indian sorcerer (*Brujo*), in the use of psychedelic and medicinal plants (*The Teachings of Don Juan*, 1968). The researcher then developed different theories and practices that were supposed to make it possible to sail on 'the dark sea of awareness'.

Published in 1998, *Magical Passes* contains exercises for learning these movements that make it possible to amplify the perception of another reality. The links between the language of the body and illusionist perception are said to have been established by Don Juan's teacher, Julian Osorio, a professional actor in Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century. He is said to have used magic passes at a 'shamanic theatre' that sought to change theatrical performance into a new pathway for teaching.

Joachim Koester's work thus stages this principle of the association of mime and gesture with magic and illusion. The concept is amplified by the choice of video which, like photography, has been the subject of the same beliefs during its history : the technical possibility of recording the invisible on film, of showing the immateriality of spirits and ghosts.

### ***Tarantism, 2007***

In his constant interest in an obscure past and its reinterpretation, with the idea of both bringing it up to date, documenting it and giving it a new lease of life, Joachim Koester focused on a local tradition related to questions of ritual and exorcism that lasted until the mid-twentieth century.

Tarantism is a nervous disease that was found near Taranto in the Apulia region in the South of Italy in the fifteenth century, allegedly caused by the bite of a tarantula, the wolf spider.

The only thing that provided a temporary cure for this pathology, that caused bouts of acute hallucinatory agitation, was a dance of pagan origin, a legacy of Dionysian rites. The Tarantella was thus danced to the sound of violins, zithers

and tambourines and different brightly coloured cloths were thrown and this put an end to the spider and its spell. The tarantula myth is a kind of syncretic combination of ancient Hellenic cults and a profoundly Catholic tradition. Beyond the question of the spectacular ritual, it doubtless played a role in regulating social order and festive joy in a context of the extreme poverty and the archaic social and cultural structure of the South of Italy.

Once again, Joachim Koester freely appropriates original 'material' with work on theatrical presentation and editing, with rigorous attention to both scientific and empirical veracity.

His choreography for the dancers takes into account the nature and evolution of the Tarantella over the centuries.

To make *Tarantism*, the artist created six individually choreographed parts that are hinged by a process of rules of the game, constructing what he calls an 'anthropological platform'. The rhythm is spasmodic and solo dancers, friezes of dancers and broader shots of the group follow each other or alternate. Full shots, medium shots and shots from the ground are used to show the dancers performing routines or making convulsive movements or gesticulating in a manner similar to a state of possession.

The dancers filmed by Joachim Koester explore the 'terra incognita' of the body, or a zone almost overflowing, between trance and theatre, between primitive resurgence and contemporary expression.

### ***I Myself Am Only a Receiving Apparatus, 2010***

A film by Joachim Koester shot in the reconstitution of Kurt Schwitters' *The Merzbau* at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover. The title is a phrase written by Schwitters in a letter in 1939.

Leader of the Dada movement in Hanover, in 1919 Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) created his own movement, *Merz* and periodical with the same name. In his

pictorial work and sculpture, Schwitters developed a vocabulary based on the use of wastes of all kinds and on the procedure for making collages with mixed materials. From 1920 to 1923, he built a vast structure inside his house in Hanover and it gradually moved into the rooms and extended upward for three floors, reaching the ceiling, with the latter being cut out. Named the *Merzbau* (Merz construction) by the artist, it consisted of white volumes with planes fitting into each other and crossed by rods and beams that formed cavities to house his works and those of his friends.

A column of debris with rigorous forms (derived from the '*Merz Column*', 1923), the *Merzbau* was total, accumulative and multiform, penetrable and habitable. It became something like part of himself for Kurt Schwitters. It was destroyed during the bombardment of Hanover in 1943. Only photographs taken in 1933 remained of Schwitters' work and made it possible to reconstitute it.

Joachim Koester shows this memory by means of a 16 mm black and white film with no sound track and in which we see a mime make slight but repetitive movements of his head in an expressionist style setting. The actor and poet Morten Soekilde, who acts in the film, is also the character in *To Navigate, in a Genuine Way, in the Unknown Necessitates an Attitude of Daring, but not One of Recklessness* (Courtyard).

Here again, Joachim Koester is interested in the way to rethink history, to work on its imperfection, and uses cinematic images to reveal the opaque. Slow travelling shots in this amazing environment consisting of insertions of geometrical forms and a multiplication of niches are punctuated by close-ups of the actor, whose head oscillates as if he were keeping time to something invisible. All in concentration and inner emotion, the character seems to be 'inhabited', as if under hypnosis. The historical and conceptual space of the *Merzbau* is seen in its memory dimension here, with the staging of the body, its ritualised gesture and its mental territory.

# Northern hall

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## ***Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome, 2007***

Four texts in white are projected on a black ground inside and outside a wooden hut. The expressions seem to have been written with a typewriter and appear to be embryo narratives, pieces from a larger ensemble. They all conjure up images and an atmosphere of fantasy, esotericism and horror. Some terms may also refer the visitor to his own path through the exhibition space : museum, maze, pyramid, etc. The fragments are from the American writer H.P. Lovecraft's *Notes and Commonplace Book* (1938)

Joachim Koester shows a fundamental architectural structure, the hut or shack as simple shelter.

The hut also brings to mind the first rudimentary houses of the pioneers and fully matches children's imagination or the Far West. It is synonymous with rustic life and adventure. The visitor can relate to its multiple identities : adult and child, reason and play, user and explorer.

Known for his science fiction and horror stories, H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) gave fresh life to the popular ghost and magician stories genre by inventing a universe in which humanity fights ancient evil forces. Operating secretly, these mythological figures are sometimes discovered by a few people who then become aware of the reality of the world and go insane.

For Lovecraft, his *Notes and Commonplace Book* given to a friend in 1934 as a typescript was a collection of '... ideas, images, & quotations hastily jotted down for possible future use in weird fiction.' With the four projected texts, Joachim Koester repeats this proposal of multiple narratives by inserting the various components in a computer program. The artist thus made four videos featuring a series of phrases whose order is changed continuously.

By generating an infinite number of combinations, this work may also bring to mind the principles of the cut-up technique and 'permutation poems' invented by Brion Gysin (1916-1986) in 1959 and used in particular by William Burroughs (1914-1997).

Joachim Koester considers these random groupings of texts to be a kind of mental theatre, a text performance that constantly changes and that adds a sense of non-knowing, of chance and perhaps to the modern ritual of invocation of Lovecraft mythology. The display method itself can be considered as a way of re-using contemporary references to the American writer but referring in particular to the wooden hut in Sam Raimi's horror film *Evil Dead* (1981), in which the hero discovers *Necronomicon*, a fictitious work invented and quoted by H.P. Lovecraft in his novels.

## room 6

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### ***One+One+One, 2006***

One of the few sound videos in the exhibition, this double black and white projection shows a young woman walking in a seaside town and in roads in a country landscape. She continues into a wood, near an abandoned house where she stops to use a drum kit and then to explore the building. The two screens allow Joachim Koester to show two viewpoints : the observer's and the woman's.

The film is part of a larger project (including another video and photographs) made in 2006 by the artist near 'Thelema Abbey' at Cefalù in Sicily.

The old villa was used from 1920 by the Thelema community founded by Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), the famous British occultist. Named with reference to an ideal community described by Rabelais (c. 1483-1553) in *Gargantua* (1534), this society was based on magic and a mixture of the kabbalah, yoga, tantric practices,

sexual rituals and the use of various drugs. Aleister Crowley and his disciples were ordered to leave by Mussolini's government in 1923.

Although the 'abbey' was closed and isolated by the authorities, Kenneth Anger, an American film director known for his work mingling psychedelics, homoeroticism and occultism, decided to find it thirty years later. A fervent admirer of Aleister Crowley, who had inspired some of his films (*Invocation of my Demon Brother*, 1969 and *Lucifer Rising*, 1972), the film director decided to restore part of the building. In particular, Kenneth Anger used the 'chamber of horrors' (the initiatory room in the 'abbey') to show a blue velvet robe bearing the letters 'ABRA' (that appear in Joachim Koester's work) and that was the costume of the seer in Marcel Carné's film *Les enfants du Paradis* (1945).

By choosing to show the walk of a character from her arrival in Cefalù to her entry to the 'abbey', Joachim Koester worked in reconstituting his own discovery of the villa while back into the history of the place. Visitors thus cross the paths of one of the founders of contemporary occult, American underground cinema and the Rolling Stones (with whom Kenneth Anger worked and who are represented symbolically in the film by the drum kit) and the title being a reference to the film *One plus One* made by Jean-Luc Godard in 1968 in the group's studio when they recorded the famous title *Sympathy For the Devil*.

## rooms 7 & 8

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### *Morning of the Magicians, 2006*

*Morning of the Magicians* consists of a video (room 7) projected from a wooden pyramid and a set of ten photographs (five in colour and five black and white) accompanied by a text by the artist (room 8). In prints and on a screen, Joachim Koester shows images made at Cefalù in Sicily that echo the preceding work (*One+One+One*, room 6).

It is a description of his visit to 'Thelema Abbey' that oscillates ceaselessly between documentary archive and artistic fiction : views of the villa from the road, from the surrounding woods, of the outside and inside of the building (and especially the famous 'chamber of horrors').

These items show both how the place has been forgotten (lost in the middle of contemporary urbanism), its state of dilapidation and also its sometimes sinister (police scene of crime shots) and sometimes mystical character. The film enhances the latter aspect: the artist captures the atmosphere of the building at night by a travelling shot in the middle of the trees and then in the abbey, generating abstract images of a floating route consisting of a loss of landmarks and of mysteries, at the edge of a horror film in search of ghosts.

Joachim Koester thus pursues the theme that is at the heart of *One+One+One*: following Aleister Crowley's trail and questioning his influence on counter-cultures. Concentrating on the history of the occult and the obscure, he crosses the paths of the 1960s mystics and especially Louis Powels and Jacques Bergier, authors of *The Morning of the Magicians* (1960), whose name gives the title to the ensemble. A major reference in the return to the occult, and a contribution to opening up New Age culture for many people, the book describes along other things rites and supernatural phenomena, drawing inspiration in particular from the writings of H.P. Lovecraft, who is in

turn the reference of the work *Numerous Incidents of Indefinite Outcome* (Northern hall).

In order to restore the memory of events that have disappeared from history, Joachim Koester once again provides his own narrative. The last trace of an erased history, 'Thelema Abbey' is for him a key support for the emergence of a 'mental landscape' that runs through the whole of his work.

## Southern hall

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### ***Message from Andrée, 2005***

Consisting of two posters showing photographs of a hot air balloon, a video projection and a presentation written by Joachim Koester, the installation takes us into the scientific universe of the nineteenth century, Jules Verne's imagination and the great polar expeditions.

As specified by the artist, the work is focused more particularly on the voyage of Salomon August Andrée (1854-1897), a Swedish scientist who wanted to reach the North Pole using a hydrogen balloon.

On 11 July 1897, Andrée started his expedition, accompanied by the engineer K.H.F. Fraenkel and his student (appointed photographer for the occasion) Nils Strindberg.

Three days later, the balloon crashed and the scientists started a long and tragic crossing of the pack ice.

In 1930, Norwegian fishermen discovered by chance traces of the three men on White Island, a few kilometres from Spitsbergen. Their belongings were collected and an inquiry was undertaken to determine the circumstances of their wanderings during the three months before they died.

Strindberg's photographs were long left to one side in favour of the written documents (logbooks, reports, etc.). Indeed, although the first documents form a legible illustration of the situation of the three 'castaways' (balloon crash, hunting bears, walking using snowshoes, etc.), subsequent photographs were seriously damaged by cold, light and moisture. Of 204 photographs, only 93 were considered to be usable. The others have too many stains and scratches, making them 'abstract'.

Joachim Koester concentrates on what can be seen in these photographs. This is not a question of seeking the reality of the facts. However, by animating the damaged photos using data input and film editing, he generates in the exhibition space a flicker evoking the blindness caused by the ice, vertigo and the loss of landmarks through fatigue, until a myriad of grey dots appear on the screen (like 'snow' on a TV screen). Stating that we wish to evoke the 'sound' of the images, Joachim Koester takes us from physical experience to mental projection: from the swish of steps on the ice to a swing towards the unknown, the invisible, the silent.

## PRATICAL INFORMATIONS

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