

Related Events

I Am Making Art: *Moving Pictures* with artist Benjamin Jones

Saturday 27 October 2018, 2–5pm

Free, booking advised

Create a miniature version of Benoît Maire's exhibition *Thebes*. Bring your own photos to make assemblages with provided prints and Polaroids made on the day.

I Am Making Art: *Instant Objects* with sculptor Kate Parsons

Saturday 17 November, 2–5pm

Free, booking advised

Create your own art objects using plaster and readymade rubber moulds – taking inspiration from visual artist Benoît Maire and his approach to arranging tabletop objects in his exhibition – and keep the work you've made as a memento.

Book for events online at www.spikeisland.org.uk, call 0117 929 2266 or visit reception.

Spike Island

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Visitor Information

Gallery open Tuesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
(during exhibitions only).

Admission to the gallery is free.

Café open Monday to Friday, 8.30am–5pm
Saturday and Sunday, 10am–5pm.

Spike Island aims to be a fully accessible building.



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Exhibition Guide

Benoît Maire *Thebes*

6 October to 9 December 2018

Spike Island

Artist Benoît Maire might be described as a ‘visual philosopher’, taking inspiration from a range of disciplines including geometry, sociology, art history and mythology. His major solo exhibition at Spike Island—featuring more than one hundred works, ranging from paintings and sculptures to furniture, everyday objects and films—gives form to his thought process.

The exhibition is named after Thebes, a city in Boeotia, central Greece. According to myth, its inhabitants were once at the mercy of the Sphinx who guarded its entrance. The Sphinx posed a riddle to travellers wishing to gain passage and those who could not answer suffered a deadly fate. Maire’s exhibition holds parallels with this ill-fated riddle, as the enigmatic quality of the objects—whether manufactured by the artist himself or by others—see their uncertain origin matched by their disconcerting juxtaposition. For Maire, a number of the objects themselves resemble sphinxes. Unresolved questions exist in cryptic forms, which visitors are left to discover as they walk around the gallery.

A recurring theme in this exhibition is the question of the origin of humankind and the objects we produce. *Thebes* is designed as an assemblage of collaged elements and objects that the artist imbues with cultural, philosophical, historical and literary references. *The word origin* (2018), one of three films in this exhibition, shows a man who seems to be working for an architect’s client, tasked with resolving a budgeting issue for an unnamed architectural project. But the man’s day has an intriguing recurrent motif: the egg. Hard-boiled, soft-boiled or in its most accomplished version: grilled chicken, it illustrates the paradox of the chicken and the egg—an infinite sequence with no true beginning. Long studied by Aristotle, this dilemma has been the subject of a host of philosophical, semantic and even genetic investigations. The beginning of Maire’s film offers a counterpoint to this famous conundrum in the form of a radio interview with the famous American political scientist Francis Fukuyama, whose seminal work is entitled *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

The question of distance—the space between things, whether in conflict or harmony, and how

we as humans relate to objects—is fundamental to Maire’s work. In *Thebes*, his more recent works *Clouds Paintings* (2015–18), *War Newspapers* (2016–17) and *Castles* (2018) are presented amongst older creations and documents re-worked by the artist. Borrowed objects, such as paintings by Lito S. Freeman and furniture designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens are installed alongside religious icons, fossils, casts, shells and rocks. Arranged in a linear formation and hung at specific heights, our eyes travel across these works as if stringing together a sentence. In the exhibition space, Maire sees the potential for meaning to exist without language; where the image can take the place of the word.

One of the works featured in the exhibition is *War Newspapers* (2016–17); a series based on an observation of the world in the throes of conflict. For this work, Maire acquired a selection of daily newspapers printed during the Second World War, isolated a particular word on each front page (that he refers to as the “concept”), then stamped, dated and framed them. Hung to suit the reading height of children, these works quietly draw our attention to a continuity between the historic reality of the war and our own anxiety-ridden contemporary society. Maire’s exhibition ultimately raises questions about the dangers that weigh heavily upon our present.

The main gallery is filled with Maire’s *Clouds Paintings* (a series he began in 2012), which draw a parallel between painting and the ever changing forms of clouds, passing through figuration and abstraction and allowing for leaps of the imagination. These paintings attempt to narrow the gap between seeing and saying by being ungraspable. Depending on how far you stand from the canvas, or how much time you spend looking, or how quickly your gaze moves across the surface, the same blue mark can be an accidental spill, a bubble of air, or a lake.

The exhibition ends with a large installation of sculptures, objects, and fragments placed on various platforms and plinths to create a three-dimensional collage where industrially produced or found objects are combined with Maire’s own artistic production. Since 2015, Maire has worked in partnership with Ker-Xavier, a collective of

artists and architects to make exhibition furniture such as tables and chairs for many purposes. This furniture is used here as a base for sculpture. By mixing his own works with those of other artists and designers, Maire questions the status of the object, and how we categorise form in art, culture and nature.

The exhibition is conceived with additional works by Pierre Dariel, Jean Derval, Lito S. Freeman, Josef Hoffmann, Jacques Innocenti, Alberto Korda, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Ker-Xavier, anonymous artists.

Biographies

Benoît Maire was born in 1978 in Pessac, near Bordeaux. After studying art and philosophy he enrolled at the Villa Arson art school in Nice in 2002 and took a postgraduate degree in philosophy in Paris the same year. His first solo show took place in 2004 at the Cortex Athletico Gallery in Bordeaux. In 2010, he was awarded the Prix Foundation d’Entreprise Ricard. He has also been awarded the official public art commission for the MECA (Maison de l’économie creative et de la culture en Nouvelle-Aquitaine). In 2017 he was the SOLO Prize, Brussels winner.

Pierre Dariel (1886–1945) was a French furniture designer.

Jean Derval (1925–2010) was a French ceramicist.

Lito S. Freeman was born in 1987 in Buenos Aires, where he completed a double degree in mathematics and literature before starting a series of minimal paintings following the tradition of Robert Ryman. “Le musée d’une nuit (script for leaving traces)” at the Fondation Hippocrène was his first public exhibition. Freeman paints on pieces of elm, which he either cut from a tree, or found. Though the circumstances are unknown, he died in 2014.

Josef Hoffmann (1870–1956) was an Austrian architect and designer, who co-established the Wiener Werkstätte in 1903, a pioneering production community of visual artists in Vienna, Austria.

Alberto Korda (1928–2001) was a Cuban photographer.

Robert Mallet-Stevens (1886–1945) was an influential French architect. He designed many different types of buildings in France such as shops, factories, a fire station, apartment buildings, private homes, and a cinema.

- 90 Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2018)
Charm, walnut, lacquered plywood
- 91 Benoît Maire
Weapon That Sees (2013)
Marble, wood, crystal, Lambda print, Letraset
- 92 Benoît Maire
Imagination of the Hunt (2018)
Plaster, flint embedded in a plexiglass block
- 93 Benoît Maire
Long Weapon (2013)
Epoxy resin, glass
- 94 Benoît Maire
Song Universe (2018)
Vintage radio, presence sensor, music composed by the artist on keyboard
- 95 Benoît Maire
Spirit Level with Indexed Waste (2014)
Mixed media
- 96 Benoît Maire
The Nose (Aesthetics of Differends, Figure n°1)
Edition 3/8 (2010)
Bronze, iron, tripod
- 97 Anonymous
Portrait of Alberto Giacometti
(c. 1963)
Photograph
- 98 Benoît Maire
Indexed Waste (2018)
Mixed media
- 99 Benoît Maire
Socrates (2015)
Soap, knife, plexiglass
- 100 Benoît Maire
Open (2018)
Cement, ruler
- 101 Josef Hoffmann
Seat (c. 1905)
Lacquered wood, velvet
- 102 Benoît Maire
Eye Divided by Two (2015)
Bronze, silver
- 103 Benoît Maire
Sphinx (2018)
Conch shell, crystal

- 104 Benoît Maire
Evening table (2016)
Wood
- 105 Benoît Maire
Mathematics (2018)
Butterfly, pencil
- 106 Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2016)
Plywood
- 107 Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2017)
Varnish and lacquered birch plywood

All works courtesy of the artist

Works 30, 31, 36, 37, 44, 48, 60, 68, 83, 87-90, 92, 94, 100, 103
Courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Works 25, 27, 28, 32, 34, 35 Courtesy of Croy Nielsen, Vienna

Works 16, 19, 33, 54, 55, 86 Courtesy of Meessen De Clercq, Brussels

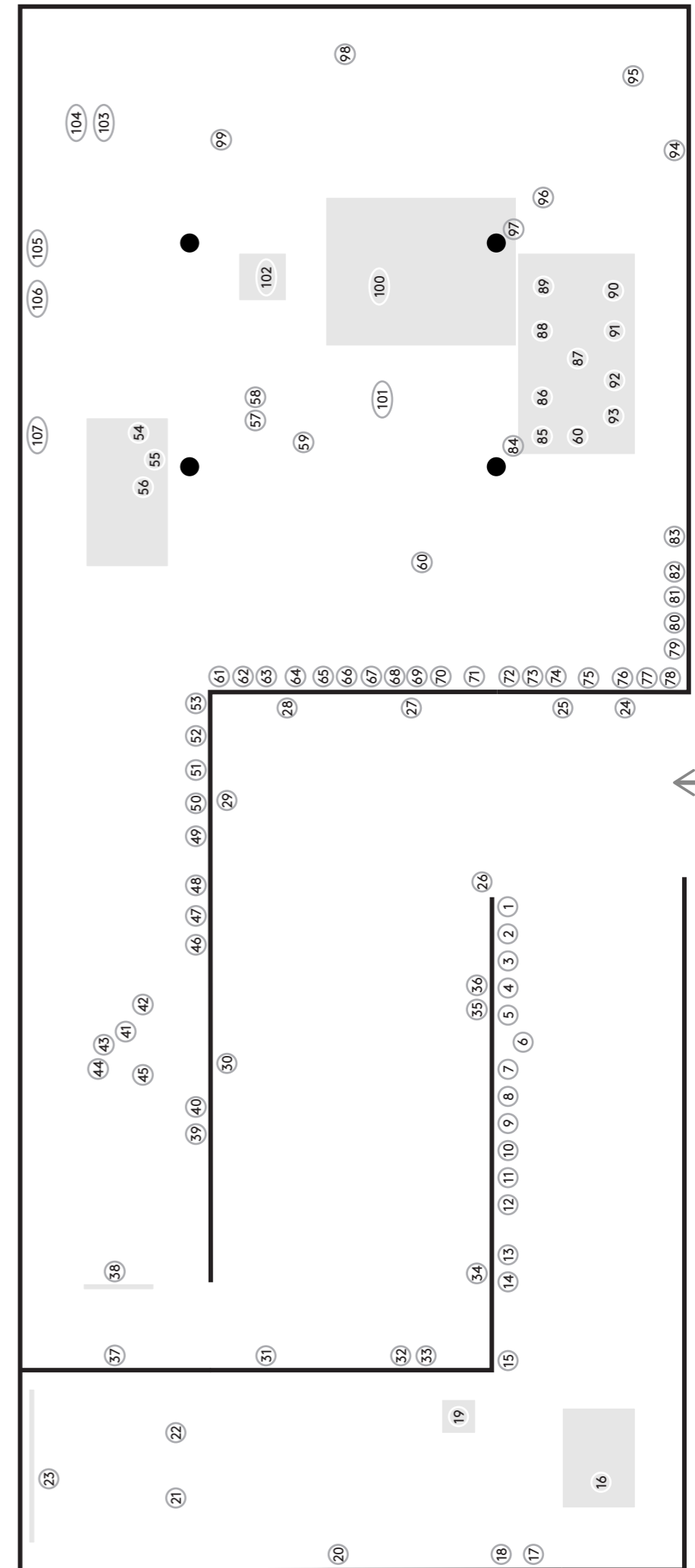
Works 5, 7, 22, 42, 43, 70, 85, 97, 101 Private collection

Works 6, 18, 26, 45, 57, 59, 104, 106, 107 Courtesy of Ker-Xavier

Work 24 Courtesy of José Garcia, mx, Mérida

Spike Island

Benoît Maire
Thebes
6 October to 9 December 2018



- ① Benoît Maire
Matthias (2012)
Lambda print, Edition 3/5
- ② Lito S. Freeman
Painting 2, Series D (2014)
Pine panel, marin varnish, felt
- ③ Benoît Maire
« *the eyes* » read in *the Daily Herald*,
22 September 1942 (2016)
Ink on newsprint
- ④ Benoît Maire
White Sheet #11 and #12 (2008)
Gouache on a wood panel
- ⑤ Benoît Maire
Lucien plays with Nature and Reason
(2017)
Photograph
- ⑥ Benoît Maire and Marie Corbin for
Ker-Xavier
Active chair (2017)
Lacquered metal
- ⑦ Alberto Korda
Sartre in Cuba (c.1960)
Photograph
- ⑧ Benoît Maire
Child Pointing Forward (2013)
Contact print
- ⑨ Benoît Maire
« *night* » read in *the Daily Mirror*, 8
December 1941 (2016)
Ink on newsprint
- ⑩ Benoît Maire
Jasmine (2011)
Photograph
- ⑪ Benoît Maire
Spirit Level (2013)
Green marble from Estours, France
Spirit Level
- ⑫ Benoît Maire
The Cave (2018)
Amethyst, 17th century etching
- ⑬ Benoît Maire
Indexed Waste « phrase » (2011)
Wrench, Letraset
- ⑭ Benoît Maire
Socrates (2015)
Glass, melted credit card
- ⑮ Benoît Maire
Head of Medusa (2008)
Bronze, Edition 2/4, A.P.
- ⑯ Benoît Maire
Hand (2018)
Fossilised wood
- ⑰ Benoît Maire
« *the progress* » read in *The Daily
Telegraph*, 27 March 1944 (2016)
Ink on newsprint
- ⑱ Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2016)
Plywood
- ⑲ Benoît Maire
Leda and the Swan (2018)
Photograph and crystal
- ⑳ Benoît Maire
Either / Or (2018)
Photo print under diasec
- ㉑ Robert Mallet-Stevens
Dining chairs (1980s re-edition)
Metal
- ㉒ Robert Mallet-Stevens
Tubor seat (c. 1931)
White painted metal
- ㉓ Benoît Maire
The word origin (2018)
HD Video
12'00"
- ㉔ Benoît Maire
Origin of Numbers (2017)
Inkjet print on wood
- ㉕ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2017)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉖ Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2017)
Varnish and lacquered birch,
plywood
- ㉗ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2017)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉘ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2015)
Oil on canvas
- ㉙ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil on canvas
- ㉚ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉛ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉜ Benoît Maire [below]
Clouds Painting (2016)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉝ Benoît Maire [above]
Clouds Painting (2017)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉞ Benoît Maire [below]
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㉟ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㊱ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2017)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㊲ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2017)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㊳ Benoît Maire [below]
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㊴ Benoît Maire
Clouds Painting (2018)
Oil and spray paint on canvas
- ㊵ Benoît Maire
The World at Noon (2013)
HD Video
0'03"
- ㊶ Benoît Maire
Marie (2011)
Photograph
- ㊷ Lito S. Freeman
Painting 1, Series D (2014)
Acrylic on plywood, Brazilian
butterfly
- ㊸ Benoît Maire
Evening ensemble (2017)
Oak
- ㊹ Jean Derval for the workshop Le
Mûrier
Glazed ceramic fruit bowl (c.1959-
84)
Ceramic
- ㊺ Jacques Innocenti
Earthenware chocolate cup (c. 1950)
- ㊻ Benoît Maire
2 pieces of bread (2018)
Bronze
- ㊼ Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2016)
Scale model, 1:5
Oak and hornbeam
- ㊽ Benoît Maire
Alex (2011)
Photograph
- ㊾ Lito S. Freeman
Painting 15, Series A (2014)
Oil on elm wood
- ㊿ Benoît Maire
Child Pointing Forward (2012)
Photograph
- 1 Benoît Maire
Untitled (2013)
Oil on cardboard, wood panel
- 2 Benoît Maire
Origin of Numbers (2017)
Inkjet print
- 3 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 3, Series A (2014)
Oil on pine wood
- 4 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 1, Series B (2014)
Acrylic on plywood, marin varnish,
elm wood
- 5 Benoît Maire
« *independence* » read in *L'aube*, 26
August 1944 (2017)
Ink on newsprint
- 6 Benoît Maire
Castle (2018)
Iron, brass, jasper
- 7 Benoît Maire
Castle (2018)
Stone, brass, spirit level
- 8 Marie Corbin for Ker-Xavier
Lamp leg (2017)
Terracotta
- 9 Benoît Maire
Evening table (2016)
Wood
- 10 Benoît Maire
Waste Indexed « crush » (2013)
Letraset on textile
- 11 Benoît Maire for Ker-Xavier
Evening table (2017)
Wood, travertine
- 12 Benoît Maire
Author: Anonymous (2018)
Plastic fawn (circa 1990s), flint
arrows embedded in a block of
plexiglass
- 13 Benoît Maire
Matthias (2012)
Lambda print, Edition 4/5
- 14 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 3, Series B (2014)
Acrylic on plywood, marin varnish
- 15 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 9, Series A (2014)
Oil on oak
- 16 Lito S. Freeman
Plate 7 (2014)
Elm wood, marin varnish
- 17 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 8, Series A (2014)
Oil on elm wood
- 18 Benoît Maire
« *the figure* » read in *the Times
Tribune*, 31 March 1941 (2017)
Ink on newsprint
- 19 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 12, Series A (2014)
Oil on elm wood
- 20 Benoît Maire
Conjugation (2012)
Photograph
- 21 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 16, Series A (2014)
Oil on elm wood
- 22 Anonymous
19th century icon
Oil on wood panel
- 23 Benoît Maire
*Photograph of the idea that a
weapon is broken once approached*
(2012)
Diasec on oak
- 24 Benoît Maire
« *Freedom* » read in *the Tages-Post*,
31 January 1941 (2017)
Ink on newsprint
- 25 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 13 and 14, Series A (2014)
Oil on pine wood
- 26 Greek artist (anonymous)
Palmyre (2018)
19th century icon and Palmyre
inscription
Wood, gold leaf, tempera on wood
- 27 Benoît Maire
Horse Universe (2018)
Video animation
1'50"
- 28 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 10, Series A (2014)
Oil on elm wood
- 29 Benoît Maire
Waste Indexed « itself » (2018)
Perspex, plastic
- 30 Benoît Maire
Waste Indexed « other » (2018)
Vintage (1970s) print on paper
- 31 Benoît Maire
Thank you (2008)
Paper, oil, inkjet print
- 32 Anonymous
Tract PSU (1970)
Socialist document
- 33 Lito S. Freeman
Painting 4, Series B (2014)
Acrylic on plywood panel, aging
process, marine varnish
- 34 Benoît Maire
Waste Indexed « either » (2018)
Oil paint on cardboard
- 35 Benoît Maire
Fading Away (2018)
Letraset on fossilized ammonite
block
- 36 Robert Mallet-Stevens
Dining chair (1980s re-edition)
Metal
- 37 Pierre Dariel
Hendaye chair (c.1930)
Wood, cane
- 38 Benoît Maire
Hand (2015/18)
Wood and rock crystal
- 39 Benoît Maire
Horse (2018)
Crystal and shell
- 40 Benoît Maire
Castle (2018)
Brass, iron, plastic, butterfly
- 41 Benoît Maire
Evening chair (2018)
Charm, walnut, lacquered plywood