

## Samuel COISNE

### The Art of Using up Leftovers

*The artist of the new modernity appears as a test pilot and an author of micro-utopias that operate inside a delineated zone. Just as Michel Foucault's intellectual takes the place of Sartre's philosopher of totality, the fragmented and pragmatic micro-utopias replace the totalistic macro-utopias of yesteryear.*

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Le Magazine Littéraire*, May 2000.

The influence of a postmodernism sensibility can be seen in the artist's fascination with fragmentation and in his keen interest in mental landscapes of *discontinuity*, which are more vulnerable to disruptions, chaos, and the unexpected.<sup>1</sup> This young French artist Samuel Coisne, who grew-up and studied in Belgium, communicates sensitivity and creates a unique world in his art. He is a poetic "deconstructionist" and his work acts as a kind of polygraph that rejects simple linear narrative and strives for a plastic form of disorder, where memories are disassociated from historicity and then reinvented.

After obtaining his Masters in Visual Art at the École Supérieure des Arts Plastiques et Visuels in Mons in 2004, Coisne began his career in Belgium with a series of group exhibitions. His work was nominated for the Mediatine Prize<sup>2</sup> and the Young French and Belgian Sculptor Prize in 2011. At the core of his artistic practice are the notions of fragility, chance, and reappearance. By deconstructing and reorienting different topographical systems, Coisne shapes these fragments into an anti-narrative tool. The artist leaves behind the perfection of lines – instead he pulverizes them for a postmodern poetic of disassociation or "déliasion."

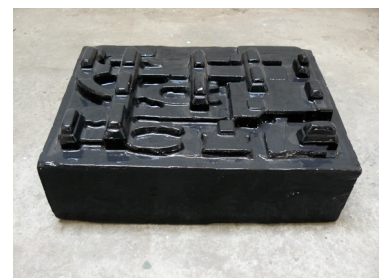
#### Materials and Cities Undergo Mutation

The city and its rhizomes are Samuel Coisne's playground. In his installations and compositions, which are often small scale and well-thought out, the artworks feed off residual objects. Coisne's works use collage, appropriation, and recuperation, to give a second life to materials: pieces of precut polystyrene, reliefs of negative space taken from a board game, mini ready-mades assembled and used to construct a fort (*Sans Titre*, 2010), a disco ball in the shape of a globe with whited-out oceans (*Discoworld*, 2008), and the mold of his toolbox turned upside down, giving form to negative space around the object (*Sans Titre*, 2010).

Having been invited to la malterie for an artist residency and a solo exhibition, the artist initially researched the disappearance and reappearance of water in the context of the exhibition and the mechanics of a given system. *Tours et Détours d'une Disparition Programmée* appears as a composition with a complex system. An automated micro-factory, which the artist regularly fuels with ice cubes, is composed of blocks of ice molded into the shapes of small buildings. These buildings slowly melt and the water, collected in pipes, feeds new forms of life. The disappearance of one element gives way to the appearance of another: the birth of a plant, aquatic life, sounds, or a simple mutation of the material (steam or condensation, for example). This installation – a joyous micro-utopia, industrial landscape, and an autotelic work – functions similarly to alkaloids and offers a new life to water, an element which is at once tenacious and fragile.



Discoworld



Sans titre

<sup>1</sup> Serge Doubrovky in *Textes en main*, Autofictions & Cie.

<sup>2</sup> Prix Médiatine began 20 years ago in the French and Belgian communities and its goal is to discover contemporary artists who are sensitive, active, innovative, and who are turned towards the future.

What first strikes you when you enter Samuel Coisne's studio is how delicately the works are arranged – each one occupies a precise and delineated space: wall-sized maps of paper doilies, threads, or stained glass. There are puzzles of broken bits painstakingly reassembled on the floor expressing his decorum with an artificially bright façade. These well-placed pieces are the axiom of an artist rooted in questions regarding the use of space and the reconstruction of empathy.

It is difficult not to see Samuel Coisne's work in terms of the fragile Belgian society, whose current governmental divide in certain regions and communities reveal a country in the process of rebuilding itself. This political, social, and economical crisis also takes a toll on the environment: the race for profits is responsible for recent natural disasters and most notably, global warming. The title of the installation *Tours et Détours d'une Disparition Programmée* can be understood in two ways: it can also suggest the evolution of our economy towards ecological and renewable resources. This equilibrium is built through a virtuous circle, where natural energy replaces both nuclear energy and the intense economic activity of production, which increases environmental wastes.

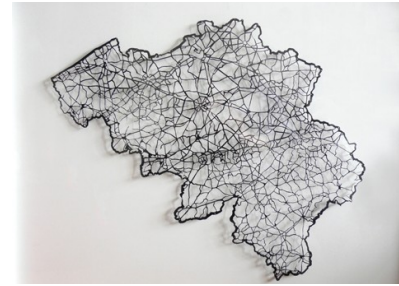
## Fragments and Shards

Fragmentary works can be distinguished from classic works because the latter are founded on coherence and the notion of an end product. Barthes considers an example of fragmentary practice as precarious writing that is continuously deferred. A key trait of postmodern sensitivity consists, according to Lyotard, of questioning notions of unity, sameness, and harmony. In Coisne's work, the broken glass participates not only in the fragmented aesthetic, but also in deconstructing the landscape behind the glass. Here, Coisne gives chance the reins.

His work is consistent with the vision of the puzzle, the game, and of reassembled pieces. The fragments don't demonstrate the constructivist determinism apparent in the ensemble of his works because the fragments themselves are neither linked to the previous pieces nor imply the following ones. But this game of *trompe l'œil* grants the image a certain autonomy as well as creates a framework and shape from destructuralization. Coisne surveys the cities he visits – an equally postmodern predilection for wandering and for the unexpected – and builds on their routes and detours, logical or absurd. Here we find at work the same systematic schema that was present in his repaired windows and his model scale works. The aesthetic of fragmentation and the accumulation of splinters in Samuel Coisne's work, which often relies on either a *mise en abîme* or infinitely small undertakings, undoes the systems associated with a logocentric truth, precisely and thoughtfully.<sup>3</sup>

## The Absurd, the Game, the Bait

Another key element of Samuel Coisne's polymorphic work is its self-deprecating character. Although the artist was born in France, he grew-up in Belgium where he developed a sense of the absurd particular to Belgian culture (let us remember Marcel Broodthaers, René Magritte, and Wim Delvoye) which must surely be a result of surrealism. This combines with his interest in materials (such as lace and thread) and his sense of a celebration: in *Discoworld* (2008) or *La Plus Petite Discothèque du Monde* (a disco set-up inside an elevator, 2010), or *Le Plus Petit Labyrinthe du Monde* (current project), the pieces are all fun, light and entertaining, but they are not free of cares, and we cannot help recalling the work of James Ensor and his system of



Belgique



Intervention sur une vitre de la malterie



Sans titre

<sup>3</sup> This principle is omnipresent in the work by the Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto, for example.

incertitude. His cramped spaces, disco balls with missing mirrors, paint cans forming a pattern impossible to hide or camouflage, glass badly repaired, all interrogate our perception of what is real, the importance of chance, and the time when celebrations must come to an end.

It is a time when nothing is impossible. It is the last gurgle, the last tremor of life. In this metaphor depicting a civilization that is drifting, Coisne synthesizes this society of the spectacle in his trompe l'œil.

In the artist's photographic production, we also find recurrent elements. In *Le Cri* (2009), the landscape of a lake is transformed by sound waves and in *Le ciel nous tombe sur la tête* (2009), war missiles are toppled by a simple turn of the image: the real is reshuffled and our gaze is startled.

## Threads of Time

Like a tightrope walker, Samuel Coisne finds the right footing between everyday fragility and the tenacity between chaos and poetry. He renders minuscule that which is monumental (a city, a disco, and a factory) and majestic the anecdotic and the invisible (a toolbox, embroidery, and sequences). Creating a fragmented vocabulary fractal in his numerous procedures (development of systems, simple forms, or self-existence) his *modus operandi* is based on a language dominated by time. "Man's condition is being," wrote Beckett. "To take pains for the little things is to accomplish great things in time."<sup>4</sup> He seems to revisit this approach in his project for la malterie.

It is truly a question of time that lingers in a city of melting ice, a growing plant, transforming objects, restructured rebus, and a celebration that drags on in an intermediary space.

His *memento mori* is provisionally and meticulously laid out on the floor, precarious lace maps of ephemeral materials that are almost invisible. Through mutation, layout, weaving, fracture, and reversals, Samuel Coisne gives materiality to these works of art. In this sense, he illustrates that "logic elevates a simple object to a work of art," which Arthur Danto described as an act of artistic identification.<sup>5</sup> His practice sheds light on a world where solitude and poetry meet.

Agnès Violeau, October 2011  
*translated by Ellen LeBlond-Schrader*

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## Samuel Coisne

Born in 1980, Samuel Coisne lives and works in Brussels (B).  
[www.samuelcoisne.com](http://www.samuelcoisne.com)

Samuel Coisne has been welcomed in residency at la malterie in the frame of the Landscape Cities People project.

**Landscape Cities People (LCP) is a three-year, European-funded ( EU - ERDF - Program Interreg IVA 2seas – "investing in your future") collaborative project of exhibitions, conferences, audience development and education activities, gathering 6 contemporary art organizations in France (la malterie & l'H du Siège), England (Fabrica & Aspex), and Belgium (Netwerk & Kunst en Zwalm).**

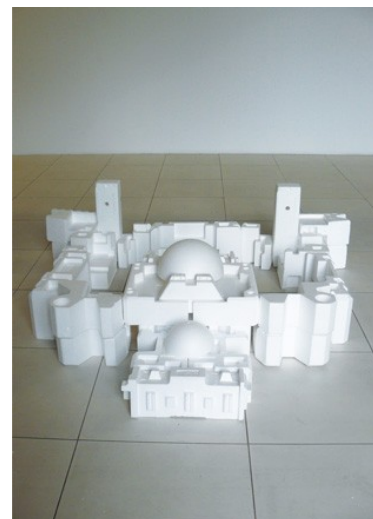
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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Beckett in *Malloy*, 1982

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Danto in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, 1981



Sans titre



Le Cri