

Céleste Rogosin: surveying and burrowing oneself

Serpentine and layered, Céleste Rogosin's practice reflects her years of training. The artist first devoted herself to dance and theatre before opting for training at the crossroads of the moving image and installation. It is nothing less than one of the blind spots in current representation that the Franco-American is trying to unravel. How do we treat the individual and collective body, at the very moment when the image becomes suspect of commodification? How can we show without capturing, say without reducing, invent without escaping? The artist doesn't pretend to solve anything, and she tirelessly sets about multiplying the angles of approach. Since there is no single truth, we're going to have to weave together the disciplines and rely on collective creative methodologies: today's complexity demands it.

Céleste Rogosin joins Le Fresnoy - studio national des arts contemporains in 2019. A year earlier, James Bridle published the sum of his research on technological opacity. With *New Dark Age* (2019), the author started from a contemporary observation: we are entering a “new age of darkness”¹⁰. At the very moment when scientist ambitions are being achieved, everything seems abstract to us and dematerialised. Little by little, he explains, computation has come to co-produce our environment. In fact this invisible process has been perfected over centuries, preceding the invention of digital technologies and originating in fields such as meteorology and aviation. As such, we do not so much need “new technologies as we do new metaphors.” By an effect of synchronicity, Céleste Rogosin provides some of the possible answers to this urgent and vital task. By reconnecting mythology and new technologies, she rematerializes a reality that we feel is inexorably slipping out of our grasp.

At the start of her research, the artist follows in the footsteps of teenagers. Those still dare to believe in the margins: they drift through the suburban territories of the big cities : Madrid and New York (*The Paths*, 2020) or form a pack in the underground tunnels of Roubaix and Tourcoing in northern France (*Quartz*, 2020). If night-time was once upon a time when people could “live without witnesses”³, those days are long gone. Escaping surveillance has become a utopian quest, and Céleste Rogosin knows it intimately. Only children still play at escaping, and only a handful of teenagers still hold out this hope. As we already know, to light often means to want to survey. However, the means available to achieve this will to control have been transformed: they are ever more mobile, ever more imperceptible. The panopticon has given way to surveillance cameras, which in turn have become drones. It's easy to see why: images and representation are now suspect. Today, the desire to show implies ethical responsibility towards its subjects, all the more so when they might have a reason to want to live in the shadows.

¹ This is the title of the French translation of the book, published in 2022.

² James Bridle. *New Dark Age: Technology and the End of the Future*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018, p. 233. [T.d.A]

³ See : Michaël Foessel. *La nuit: vivre sans témoin*. Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2018.

A second body of work shifts the gaze toward the strategies of minority groups. Since hiding is no longer possible, the messages must be encrypted and the imaginary itself must be protected. *Clear Jail Minotaur* (2021-2023) finds its origins in a photograph published in the newspaper *The Guardian*. In it, an American house-prisoner under electronic surveillance is seen charging his GPS bracelet, a task he must perform every day or risk being sent back to prison. A correspondence ensues with Willard Birts, the African-American former prisoner featured in the image. The artist learns that he is from Palo Alto, the birthplace of Silicon Valley, and little by little, leads emerge. In the course of her investigation, she discovers the existence of “clear jail electronics”, a family of objects with transparent shells designed to prevent smuggling into prisons. In Greco-Roman mythology, the Minotaur is a half-human, half-bull creature whose animality seen as un-natural leads him to be shut away in the labyrinth. The myth meets the contemporary prison labyrinth, providing a contemporary reworking of its eternal themes.

The result is a glass bull's head inlaid with a tracking system. Heavy and oppressive, it is displayed on a wood pillar, and prisoners chants are triggered off as spectators approach. A modern curse: no one is locked up any more because everyone is condemned to be exhibited. To be banned from society is not so much to be put away as to be pilloried by ultra-detectability.

Presented on a wood pillar, the work will set off an activation resulting in the video *Untitled*. The bull's head/device is worn by Maëva Barthelot, a choreographer and performer and Antonin Monié, a dancer. They will come and engage in a slow, patient and laborious process of rehumanization, attempting to invent a new dissident bodily grammar. A dance to death against the desiccating powers of total detectability is triggered, that mobilises circumstantial cunning against total prediction. A second work in Céleste Rogosin's body of work uses a similar formal vocabulary. This is *Braid the Kinks from your mind* (2021), created by tying a chair in a jumble of cables, clamps and similarly translucent glass conches. In fact this apparent ornament harks back to a long history of sedition. During slavery, Afro-Colombian braids were used to convey messages through different braiding patterns, each of which corresponded to precise codes. In the series, the concealment changes scale. It's right up against the skin, a film of signs and symbols, of glass and cables, which is there for all to see, yet remains invisible to the uninitiated. Perhaps seeing has never been enough, because you still have to know how to decipher the signals.

Céleste Rogosin's residency at the Frac Grand Large - Hauts de France in 2023 marks a significant development. The artist breaks away from forms visible to the naked eye, from finished body envelopes and solidified materials. Little by little, all this will turn into a lace of dots, clouds of data, clay of pixels. Dive deeper, look beyond. Beyond individuality, beyond the here-and-now. When we met in early summer in Lens, Céleste Rogosin tells us that she arrived in the Calais area with the desire to start from fiction rather than observation. The genesis of her research, still in progress at the time of writing, is rooted in a play: *In the eyes of stonedogs*.

Written in 1998 by the Quebec playwright Daniel Danis, the artist discovered it during her passage through the world of the stage. Its survivalist poetry has stayed with her ever since. At the heart of this fable set on the fictional island of the St Lawrence, nine characters try to survive. Human beings and dogs of mixed bloodlines are at one with the elements. They exorcise their fears and stir up passions. Perhaps a way of feeling that they exist outside the joint forces of calculation and abstraction.

That same year, Céleste Rogosin begins a collaboration⁴ with Daniel Danis. In his writing, she rediscovers something of her personal cosmology: the collective alliances between beings and their environment, animality as a symbol of metamorphosis. The artist begins by examining the material: the earth, the fossils, the clay collected on the Opal Coast. And, because matter cannot be simply physical, at the same time she also decides to scan the elements around her, carrying out initial photogrammetry tests and learning the rudiments of computer-generated images. Initially, there was the idea of an immersive film, *Djoukie's Vertigo* : a great Wagnerian work that would update the memory of the play, of this imaginary and spectral life that she has come to take for the artist. The project, still in progress, is following the path to incarnation. In the process, the artist has built up a library of materials, which she links directly to the scenes in the play. This generated clay has a primordial quality: it is Epimetheus shaping the animals in clay, it is the origin of prehistoric life emerging from the silt and, indiscriminately, the extinction of post-nuclear civilisation turned to dust.

When we meet at the beginning of the summer in Lens ⁵, Céleste Rogosin is working on an independent video based on the film. The idea of textures, she explains, was beginning to take on too much importance. In this video, the "synthetic mud", as she calls it, will in itself constitute the narrative: it's a story of permanent mutations, beyond both will and chronology. In this work, *The Edge of eternity* (early 2025), three young people met in Calais are shown dozing off. In the image, they emerge in photogrammetry. For twelve minutes, the camera turns around them and seems to dance with them. It is a disembodied eye endowed with ubiquity, and yet predation is far away: there is no individual body to monitor, because what is in motion, what breathes, is matter itself. Here, nothing has a stable form; the skin-clay transforms and the mud-body breathes. For whoever can embrace the promises of randomness, technology itself can serve to thwart the perils of predation: after all, you cannot capture infinite change. We then find ourselves catapulted into an alternative time where everything is happening as if the human species had mutated. As in Greco-Roman mythology, human-beings are transformed into representatives of another kingdom, except that in lieu of laurel and bull⁶ we now find rock and clay.

⁴ he artist initiated the meeting when she invited him to write a text about her series of photographs *Des corps liminaux* (2024).

⁵ The artist then took part in the Pinault Collection residency programme.

⁶ These examples from Greek mythology refer to Daphne and Iphigenia.

The rock hounds ultimately represent all contemporary human beings who wish to escape. When she sculpts a clay-skin, Céleste Rogosin both rematerialises while deindividualizing, transforming matter into action and mutation into narrative. “Human history is infused into geological time”⁷, as Jussi Parikka has already proclaimed in *A Geology of Media* (2015). The professor of digital cultures adopts an unprecedented spectrum: the history of the media is millions of years old. To understand contemporary media, we need to start from the material realities that precede them and from which they logically flow. The history of the earth, geological formations, minerals and energies, as explored within a geology of the media, reverses the way in which we usually think about our media apparatus. Technology is no longer an “extension of the human”⁸; on the contrary, it is the sign of a paradigm shift: on a planetary scale, the gaze is directed towards a “geo-centric”⁹ perspective. The future will either be geological or will not be.

⁷ Jussi Parikka. *A Geology of Media*. Minneapolis, Minn. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015, p. 6. [T.d.A]

⁸ Voir : McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1994.

⁹ Rosi Braidotti. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge, CA: Polity, 2013, 81.