

Nicolas Bernière
Journey through the Box-sphere

For the child who is fond of maps and engravings,
The universe is the size of his immense hunger.
Ah, how vast is the world in the light of a lamp!
In memory's eyes how small is the world!
Charles Baudelaire, "Le Voyage"

Nicolas Bernière's next exhibition, exclusively dedicated to his work around the concept of the "box-sphere," will be held in the Gallery Le Salon Vert from March 10th to May 7th in Geneva. This exhibit will be composed of two large installations, treating themes of trees and maps, and five smaller installations composed of boxes like little cabins, ecologically-oriented boxes, black-boxes, satellite boxes and mixed boxes...

These boxes are considered by Bernière above all as "works for wandering." This means that the viewer is not only invited to contemplate an image; he is invited into the work and urged to follow his own path according to his fancy. Each work, made up of several boxes held in place by small magnets, expresses a given theme with multiple variations. In this way, Bernière's works are not static, but rather dynamic, in that each single work is capable of generating an infinite number of others. Like a *Mnemonic Atlas*¹ in perpetual motion, the logic of their composition unlocks the creativity of the viewer, and in return denies the creator the last word on his own creation. In this sense, one might even say that Bernière's pieces implement the principle of Roland Barthes's famous text, "The Death of the Author."

In addition to this superficial, exterior plasticity, Bernière knew to add the subtlety of an interior, making the insides of his boxes a new room to play with. Because, as everyone knows, each box encloses a secret. And sometimes this secret, with Nicolas Bernière, is an "open-secret" (*secrete de polichenelle*): for example, a box that depicts a flower will contain the same flower inside it, although dried. And sometimes, the box will encase a secret from which it must be protected, like a box depicting a fruit will contain the threat of a bird who could eat it. Sometimes it is a purely poetic secret... a secret that must be kept. Or even, a secret that creates between what is shown and what is hidden a kind of tension, flirting with the obscene, giving the whole exposition that extra spark of mystique...

Finally, beyond each individual game of hide-and-seek, one must emphasize the subtle nuances connecting together the entirety of Bernière's *oeuvre*. Just as Russian dolls encase each other, going from largest to smallest, Bernière's pieces not only reference the microscopic elements of our world, but also the macroscopic, like the stars. In a way, it's almost as if these works frame each other, composing as a group a universe on a human-scale, a universe that restores to those of us who watch the world's decline in a state of powerless horror the sense of a planet of a manageable size, a human size. A planet that is at our disposal, just as a child possesses his maps and engravings...

Frederic Baitinger
Translated from the French

¹ The *Mnemonic Atlas* is the first "Atlas of Memory," created by the art historian Abby Warburg, in which each image could be moved according to the formal affinities that bound each part with the others.