

Pauline Bastard

GALERIE EVA HOBER

Many Conceptual artists, such as John Baldessari, who employed sign painters found in the telephone book, have let their fingers do the walking. Pauline Bastard, however, brought new meaning to that yellow-pages slogan with her exhibition “Like Jenga.” The video *Les États de la matière—le mur* (States of Matter—Wall; all works 2013) shows her nimbly breaking through the wall of an early-nineteenth-century stone house with her fingers, dislodging stones by picking away at the crumbling mortar. This house, located in a remote French village named Saint-Yaguen, was purchased by the artist through Le Bon Coin, the country’s online classifieds. The condition of sale was that she dismantle the house and remove it; such sales allow buyers to repurpose the parts for use elsewhere. But instead of taking the house away with her, Bastard scattered its pieces in the surrounding area, an undertaking that will be completed in January 2014. Together with a team of four female assistants, with additional help from two young men from the region, as well as that of some neighbors, she went about demolishing and dispersing the house by hand, using only tools made from materials found on-site.

The video *Les États de la matière* (States of Matter) presents carefully composed static shots of the landscape. Rain or shine, the artist and her team enter and exit the frame to scatter parts of the house across the terrain. Various-size irregular stones, sand ground down from stones and mortar, and broken pieces of wood, these materials now seem to transmute back toward the irregular geometry of their natural state. The women arrange them with the care of classical Chinese gardeners arranging scholars’ rocks. Yet the compositional transformations created signal that this work is foremost about the photographic eye. The handling of the debris as if it were something fragile is more akin to the process of making stop-motion animation than to gardening. This is most apparent in the close-up shots of the ground to which minuscule fragments of the house are delicately added in the video *Les États de la matière—recherche* (States of Matter—Research). Bastard also printed four stills from the videos and, to present them in the gallery, repurposed three window frames from the house in Saint-Yaguen as picture frames. A fourth frame was custom-made from a woodworm-eaten beam. Stones and beams from the house served as benches for watching her videos, and as a projector stand.

Pauline Bastard,
Les États de la matière
(States of Matter),
2013, video, color,
sound, 60 minutes.



The three other projects in the show also present procedures for apprehending a place that ultimately doesn’t belong to you. For *Hotel Rooms*, in the various hotels where Bastard is put up by art institutions, the artist videotapes herself in a newly made-up room, deftly making it look as if someone has since slept in it. Creasing the sheets and towels, dabbing water and soap around the sink, and planting hairs and a coin one would imagine had fallen out of a pocket, she depicts the condition of an occupied room. Replicating the continual disarrangement of these dreadfully anonymous spaces, *Hotel Rooms* oscillates between set dressing and sculptural social realism.

Two works were made during a stay in Los Angeles. For the photographic series *Thinning Out of Leaves*, she emptied her suitcase of all the clothes brought from Paris, discarding jackets, sweaters, and shoes under urban succulents or swinging them over leafless desert trees, thus entangling foreign items with local plant life. For the series “True Stories,” Bastard hired writers she found on Craigslist to concoct tales from small, crummy, often broken objects she found in the street. One story lends its title to the exhibition. Like that of a good player of Jenga—a game in which participants take turns moving a block from a stacked tower to place it on top of that tower, creating an increasingly unstable structure as the game progresses—Bastard’s touch is light and agile, and she doesn’t repurpose the pieces of the puzzle the way you might expect her to.

—Jian-Xing Too