

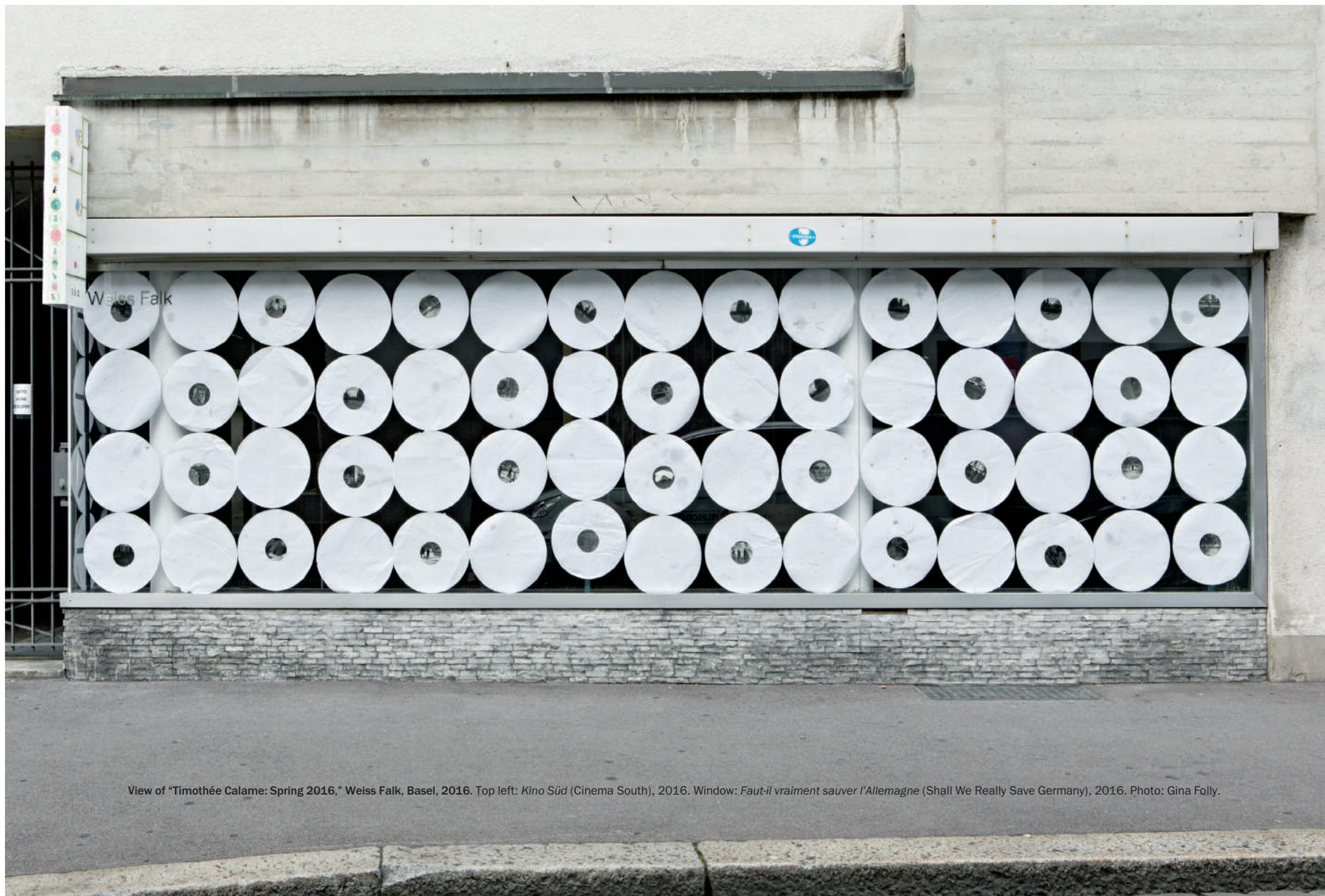
OPENINGS

# TIMOTHÉE CALAME

DANIEL HORN

**GENEVA PROFITS HANDSOMELY** from being perceived as a polished, impermeable entrepôt where global bureaucracy and anonymized assets serenely connect and collude, Gothic alleyways giving way to bland mirrored facades. If these juxtapositions have had any bearing on the art of Timothée Calame, who grew up in this city, they register in the manipulated dualisms around which his recent architectural interventions, sculptures, drawings, paintings, and videos are constructed. Given the backdrop of his youthful education in the local squatter scene, for him, transparency and opacity, exteriority and interiority, organization and corruption are conditions to negotiate as much as features to employ. This background “training” also perhaps explains Calame’s rough and resourceful material economy, as well as the frequently low-profile and disguised vantage points from which he probes the global chaos that his hometown so assiduously manages and conceals. After all, what constitutes urban squatting if not the transient but deft perforation of the here and now—the countersurveillance, as it were, of corporatized and monitored systems and territories?

Deception and camouflage were thus deployed up front in more than one of the artist’s exhibitions over the past year. At Weiss Falk in Basel in June, the gallery’s windows were covered with white paper circles punctuated here and there by snapshots of nondescript street life, creating a low-budget reticulated “retro” facade.



View of “Timothée Calame: Spring 2016,” Weiss Falk, Basel, 2016. Top left: *Kino Süd* (Cinema South), 2016. Window: *Faut-il vraiment sauver l’Allemagne* (Shall We Really Save Germany), 2016. Photo: Gina Folly.



From left: **Timothée Calame, *L'école Voltaire*, 2016**, wood, wheels, hair, plastic. Installation view, Marbriers 4, Geneva. **Timothée Calame, *Untitled* (detail), 2016**, wood, steel, concrete, 26 × 100¾ × 91". Photo: Gina Folly. **Timothée Calame, *Diyarbakir*, 2016**, oil on linoleum, 15¾ × 15¾". Below: **Timothée Calame and Arthur Fink, *Composition*, 2015**, HD video, color, sound, 225 minutes.

At Hard Hat in Geneva in March, the building's glass storefront was resolutely blocked out by collaged sheets of paper, with precise incisions that functioned as peepholes into what otherwise passed as just another foreclosed business. At Marbriers 4 in Geneva this past summer, Calame, in a two-person show with fellow Swiss artist Emanuel Rossetti, exhibited several small, cryptic "educational toy" sculptures on wheels, made from scrap wood, sundry detritus, and scalped toy globes from which grew unsightly black strands of possibly human hair. Titled "Galerie Putsch," the show was in part viewable only by climbing a ladder to a mezzanine assembled from rustic beams abstracted from the street. The exhibition seemed to propose this off-space as a site for withdrawal and obstruction.

Calame's Weiss Falk exhibition was, by contrast, generically titled "Spring 2016," but offered a rather more pointed aphorism: "Surveillance depends on the attention one pays; accords; brings to it." That ultra-reflexive observation captioned an image on the gallery's website depicting an outdoor pool on sunny Lake Geneva, the landmark Jet d'Eau visible in the distance. In the left foreground was a wooden sunbathing deck, essentially the prototype for the show's centerpiece twin sculptures: large pallet-like structures, each propped on four cartoonishly oversize concrete feet (both *Untitled*, 2016). One of these doubled as a lounge area from which to view films screened during the show, including Calame and Arthur Fink's video *Composition*, 2015, a largely wordless and aimless tour of the Swiss town La Chaux-de-Fonds. A rigorously planned, now gradually more depressed workers' enclave, summed up by Marx in a footnote

in *Capital* as simply "a huge watch manufactory," La Chaux-de-Fonds is the birthplace of Le Corbusier and of renowned luxury watchmakers from Omega to Rolex, none of them afforded further recognition here. In an adjacent room, arrayed around the second "deck" sculpture, sallow oil paintings from the same year showed wheeled suitcases bearing not contemporary art's IATA codes of LAX, JFK, LHR, TXL, or indeed GVA, but the legends VENTIMIGLIA, LE HAVRE, DIYARBAKIR, CALAIS, and LA PLAINE: place names lacking brisk abbreviations, instead cropping up in the news at laboriously full length, marking the coordinates of a continent in crisis, of unknown bodies in uncontrollable movement, migrating, trespassing, clashing, drowning, rotting. Mobility and expansion, conveniently vague signifiers of progress as such, figure in Calame's practice not as models of high-flying bourgeois liberty but as vehicles for anarchic illimitability and decay.

Also screened sporadically during the Basel show, Calame and artist Alan Schmalz's nearly unwatchable four-hour Cairo travelogue *Exil Antinal*, 2015, reflects such assaults on perspective by subjecting the exoticization of the Middle East to entropic parody. (The alluring title was in fact inspired by the name of an anti-diarrheal drug.) Initially intending to shoot the Sufi festival of Mawlid, a carnivalesque celebration drawing enormous crowds who enter ecstatic states, Calame and Schmalz wound up recording life in this loud capital mainly from the windows of some hostel or Airbnb flat, where fashion TV programs run on inexplicably heavy rotation. Ethnographic exploration largely begins and ends with visits to a barber, a coffeehouse, a tailor, and a jeweler, while passages from

Stefan Zweig's biography of the ruthless Joseph Fouché—a careerist of the French Revolution who went on to become Napoleon's feared minister of police—can be intermittently heard on the sound track. "If one does not see or hear anything of Fouché it is because he works beneath the surface, tenacious, methodical, like a mole," writes Zweig about this formidable snitch and pioneer of the governmental art of surveillance. The camera, meanwhile, as in *Composition*, remains largely fixated on parsing minutiae: dusty wiring, more hairs, insects crawling across grime and fine cracks, a verminous visuality pushing toward decomposition—another maneuver of a practice committed to deterritorialization. Against millennial aspirations to reclaim data-driven critical and creative "ownership" (of self, of movement), the stoppages Calame installs against social mapping and subjectivation are misaligned with the momentum of contemporary power. □

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