

ATHANOR

Alchemical sequel #1

22.10.2016 > 15.01.2017

Curator: Pascal Pique



LE MUSÉE DE L'INVISIBLE



Johan Daniel Mylius, Sublimation, engraving from the treaty of alchemy Philosophia Reformata, 1622

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With the participation of the following artists:

Halldór Ásgeirsson, Art Orienté Objet, Basserode, Caroline Corbasson, Johan Creten, Philippe Deloison, Damien Deroubaix, Paul-Armand Gette, Bertrand Lamarche, Julie Legrand, Sandra Lorenzi, Myriam Mechita, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Yan Pei-Ming, Olivier Raud, Jean-Jacques Rullier, Lionel Sabatté, Elsa Sahal, Erik Samakh, Vladimir Skoda, Tunga.

Also present: Rembrandt van Rijn, Brueghel l'Ancien, Annibal Barlet, Basile Valentin, Manget, David Teniers, Elie Ashmole, Heinrich Khunrath, Barckhausen, Michael Maier, Paulus Ricius, Johan Daniel Mylius, Josiane Capelle.

Human beings, artists in particular, have always had a unique relationship with stones, crystals and the mineral world as a whole. Long before cave art, from the appearance of the first lithic tools to the present day, they continue to animate a mineral kingdom now regarded as inert and inorganic. What is the reason for this? What has it got to do with the profound alchemy of artistic creation?

The Académérale at the Musée de l'Invisible focuses on these questions. It opened in June 2015 at the Institut d'Art Contemporain in Villeurbanne and at the Musée National des Arts & Métiers in Paris with the exhibition De Mineralis. Its aim is to explore the relationship between human beings, art and minerals through a creative research project combining artistic and scientific cultures with those of the invisible. It is also a transhistorical and transcultural project that forms part of a larger enterprise reinventing our relationship with nature, living things and the environment with which the Musée de l'Invisible is involved.

The proposal for the Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain in Sète signifies an important milestone for the Académérale, as well as an indispensable step. This involves revisiting experiences as well as mythical dimensions related to stones and minerals through the poetics of alchemy. Interestingly, this particular field captivates a growing number of contemporary artists. The project focuses on this unique nature in combination with the notable and recent return of stone to contemporary creation.

The exhibition has therefore been conceived based on the motif and symbolism of the athanor, the famous furnace used by alchemists. The athanor is the main tool and the very crucible of the search for the "illustrious stone", one of many other names for the philosopher's stone: magnum opus, Panacea, elixir of life, cornerstone, immortality, the philosopher's tree etc. Alchemists let the main components of the mineral materia prima work at the heart of the athanor to unveil the secrets of matter, living things and the cosmogenesis. In literature, the famous Lapis Philosophorum is often associated with the notion of "great work" or "masterpiece" whereas the alchemist is referred to as an "artist".

The philosopher's stone and alchemy also refer to esoteric worlds imbued with mystery, secrets and magic, from which our culture has become distanced. In order to overcome this "epistemological obstacle", the inspiration for the exhibition is provided by an alchemist's laboratory where visitors can experience certain little-known and seldom mentioned aspects of the minerals and works of art, perhaps in the hope of better grasping certain subtle realities of their creation.

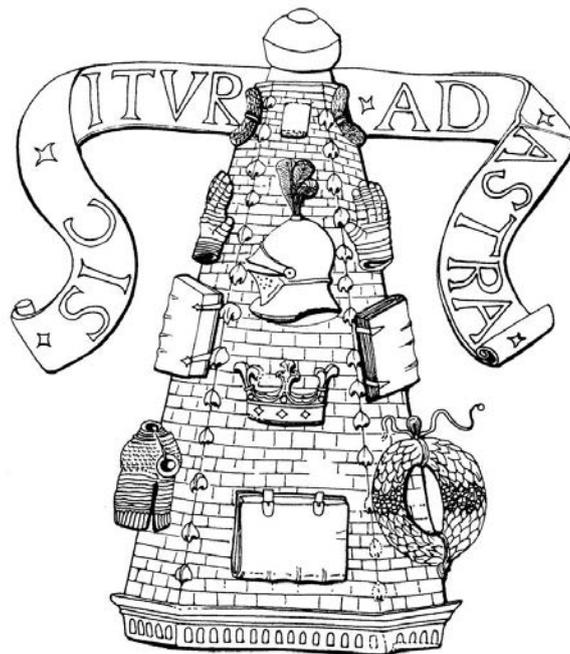
To this effect, the Athanor exhibition offers a two-stage journey of discovery on the first floor of the art centre:
- the first part of the diptych, in the large square room, assembles works formulated with various minerals (sulphur, mercury, copper etc.) and symbolic (unicorn, Ouroboros (tail-devouring serpent etc.), referring to certain stages of the alchemical process. They are set out according to a special dynamic and geometrical configuration.
- "the mineral room", the second part of the diptych, incorporates both the alchemist's refuge and the amateur's

cabinet. It consists of a type of laboratory where works and minerals are combined with different documents from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, creating a better understanding of the cosmological dimension and the significance of the relationship to the mineral world. Hence the motto "sic itur ad Astra": thus one journeys to the stars.

In this space, visitors are invited to test certain energy properties of the minerals that can in fact be felt. It is also a place for documentation and research where workshops can be conducted with the public.

Through this journey and the motif of the crucible, the Athanor exhibition could be considered a rediscovery, an attempt to crystallise the workshop as a tangible and immaterial place for the transmission of art. This visit to the very heart of the artistic matrix perhaps enables some poetics to be redeployed, such as transmutation, metamorphosis and revival. Given that there are so many dynamics it is more important than ever to reinvent in the current, constantly changing world.

Please note that the Athanor exhibition complements the monographic exhibition of Johan Creten — who also uses firing kilns for his ceramic works— taking place at the same time in the other rooms of the art centre.



Athanor

petite suite alchimique # 1