

Randian: «Crime and Production - A journey around Brussels and its galleries», by Christopher Moore, April 30, 2015.

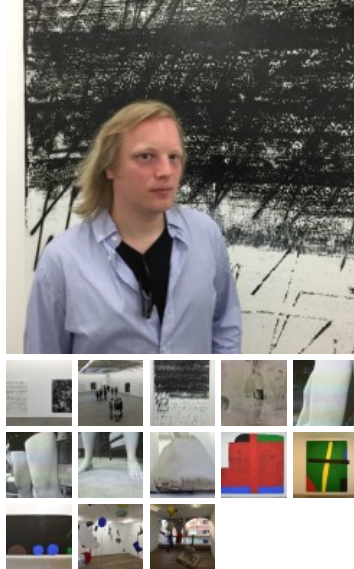
## Crime and Production—A journey around Brussels and its galleries

[>> print](#)

We begin at the Courts of Justice, which were built on the hill overlooking The Marolles district to intimidate the poor who lived there. Now there is a lift to take you straight down, or up, depending on your inclination.

Nearby is Rue de la Régence / Regentschapsstraat 67, previously the home of a legal publishing firm. The owners had planned to use the building as a museum. When that did not eventuate, they decided to use it for “creative industries”. Leading Belgian gallerists Jan Mot, Micheline Szwajcer and Catherine Bastide were invited to move their galleries there, and they in turn invited some younger galleries to join them in the old printery at the back of the courtyard, industrial shells to be painted white. The lift does not work. Suddenly Brussels had a cluster of galleries only 100 meters from the elite shopping precinct of Louise and antique shops of Sablon. Public buildings are guarded with soldiers holding automatic firearms.

Jan Mot is showing Pierre Bismuth's videos “Where is Rocky II? Trailer” (2014) and “Where is Rocky II? Teaser” (2015), documenting the commissioning of a private detective to find a fake rock that Ed Ruscha hid in the Mohave Desert outside L.A. in 1980.



[See all photos \(14\)](#)



Sterling Ruby “Eclipse” at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels (photo: Chris Moore)

The films play to current commercial cinema marketing norms, issued in two versions, as a Trailer and a Teaser (the latter featuring artist Lawrence Weiner). It is part of a fund-raising campaign to make a full-length documentary. The interview conducted by the private investigator engaged to find the rock is bliss, combining increasing incredulity with professional politeness.



Sterling Ruby "Scales" at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels (photo: Chris Moore)

Upstairs, Micheline Schwajcer is showing three films by David Claerbout. The "*KING (after Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture of a young man named Elvis Presley)*", 2015" presents a beguiling black & white tableaux of Elvis Presley, "The King", in an American domestic sitting room of the era. While the actors stand perfectly still the camera tracks slowly into the scene and around and up the naked torso of Elvis, who's milky-white skin with a marble-like texture recalls classical figurative sculpture. The artist's preparatory drawings are displayed in the office. On one is pasted a photo of Donatello's "David (1430-1440).



David Claerbout, "*KING (after Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture of a young man named Elvis Presley)*",  
duration: 10 min. HD animation, black & white, silent, 2015 (Galerie Micheline Schwajcer)



David Claerbout, "*KING (after Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture of a young man named Elvis Presley)*",  
duration: 10 min. HD animation, black & white, silent, 2015 (Galerie Micheline Schwajcer)



David Claerbout, "KING (after Alfred Wertheimer's 1956 picture of a young man named Elvis Presley)", preparatory drawing, 2015 (Galerie Micheline Szwajcer)

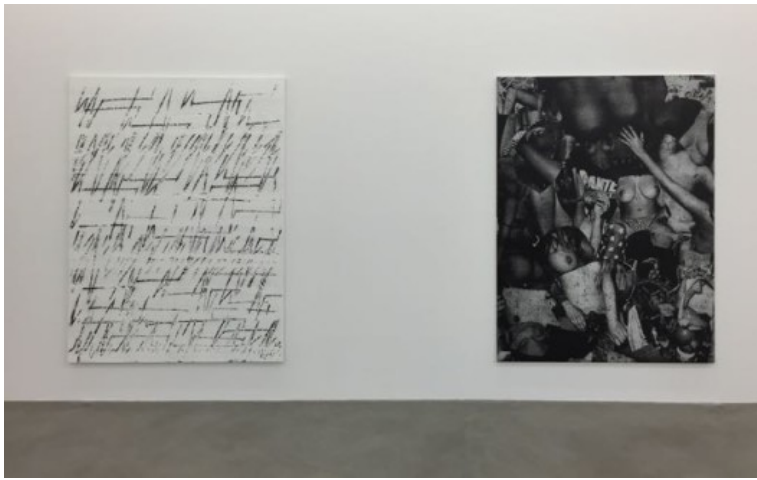
After driving through Brussel's asphyxiating traffic I arrived in the district of Ixelles and the gallery of Xavier Hufkens, arguably Belgium's premier gallerist, whose two spaces have been given over to Sterling Ruby. In the first are a series of largely primary colored cardboard packaging collages that play on abstraction's Bauhaus origins and regression/commodification—its *eclipse*—as recyclable packaging. It is an exhibition about the twilight of the gods.

In the sister gallery up the road, some of the gods who played with constellations—among them Picasso, Matisse, Miró and of course Calder—are put on trial. Not mobiles but scales, the sculptures weigh modernism and consumer and industrial products. The text by the artist is a list of items weighed by each scale (not in order)—"Scale (5410)" includes Rhino 7 Platinum 3000 Male Sexual Performance Enhancer Pill Box, "Scale (4586)" includes Red Heart Soft Yarn Really Red, Steel Chains, and "Scale (5409) B.R.G.B." includes Bullet Weights Anchor Mushroom Decoy 6 Oz. "Scale (5415) S.R.Clor. is a self-portrait, or parody thereof: Bleached Canvas Pants with Leather Sterling Ruby Studio Tag, Clorox Company 30790 Germicidal Concentrate Solution bottle 121 Oz.



Chris Succo at Almine Rech Gallery (photo: Chris Moore)

Around the corner in the airy spaces of Almine Rech Gallery, German artist Chris Succo (b. 1979) presented "Language of Elbow", new works in this ongoing series of ZigZag paintings paired with new collages of blown up black & white photographs taken from soft-core pornography, the female bodies—"nudes" in the lexicon of art history—dismembered but not disfigured, augmented with smudges of paint. The two series arranged sequentially equate the rhythmic gestural notations of the former (writing/music/electronic/scientific) with the zigzags of elbows, knees, feet and a lot of breasts. The artist (who is also a musician and poet) noted to me that he still painted each work himself, unlike some artists—but then why are his ZigZags so similar? The open sore of abstraction continues to be how it deals with mechanical reproduction, or fails to do so. The key to these works by Succo is the loss of data or precision in the reproduction process, such as in photocopying, regardless of it now approaching photographic levels of fidelity the human eye is unable to distinguish under normal conditions. The point is the loss of accuracy between representation and interpretation, whether in the printed word, musical recording or image multiplication. The paintings only look similar. Each is actually unique and in myriad ways.



Chris Succo, "Edge of Seventeen", Oil and lacquer on linen, 230 x 172,5 cm, 2015, with "Untitled", Silkscreen ink and oil on linen, 230 x 172,5 cm, 2015 at Almine Rech Gallery (photo: Chris Moore)



Chris Succo "Language of Elbow" at Almine Rech (installation view) (photo: Chris Moore)

English artist, Jonathan Callan (b.1961) has a solo show at Hopstreet Gallery. Callan is primarily a sculptor whose medium and matter are books. In "Vacation" he shows his "drawings", pages with images whose surrounding text has been sandpapered away and the remaining image augmented with pencil shading—the métier of sculpting (removal and construction) united with that of drawing (absence) united.



Jonathan Callan, "Waltz", Paper and plaster, 64 x 38 x 47 cm, 2012 at Hopstreet Gallery (photo: Chris Moore)

I meandered back through Ixelles contemplating how Brussels is like a eldritch version of Paris, the usual symbols missing, the language shifting, the grime worn like a familiar coat. For art it is an exciting landscape of possibility

existing landscape of possibility.

Note: Of interest for China readers, at Waldburger Wouters Gallery is a show of recent paintings by Ding Yi and Xu Zhen. I wrote the exhibition text, so no further comment.

**Pierre Bismuth “Where is Rocky II?”**

**Jan Mot** (Rue de la Régence / Regentschapsstraat 190, Brussels) 18 April – 30 May, 2015

**Jonathan Callan “Vacation”**

**Hopstreet Gallery** (109 Rue St-Georges, Brussels) **19 March – 9 May, 2015**

**David Claerbout**

**Galerie Micheline Sz wajcer** (Rue de la Régence / Regentschapsstraat 190, Brussels) **24 April – 30 May**

**Sterling Ruby “Eclipse” and “Scales”**

**Xavier Hufkens** (6 Rue St-Georges, and 107 Rue St-Georges, St-Jorisstraat, Brussels) **24 April – 23 May, 2015**

**Chris Succo “Language of Elbow”**

**Almine Rech Gallery** (20 Rue de L'abbaye Abdijstraat, Brussels) **24 April – 23 May, 2015**

**Ding Yi & Xu Zhen “Hidden Behind Appearances”**

**Waldburger Wouters** (Rue de la Régence / Regentschapsstraat 190, Brussels) **24 April – 30 May**