



**TANIA MOURAUD**

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EVERYDAY  
OGRES



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**September 23 – December 10, 2016**

Visual Arts Center  
The University of Texas at Austin

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For one week in June, Tania Mouraud and I drove across Texas with the goal of filming oil refineries along the Gulf Coast—home to some of the largest and most historic sites of the global oil industry. Despite months of phone calls and emails, we had secured no permissions; it turns out it's easier to film military bases than refineries.

Our attempts at filming those sites were momentous. We were stopped by the police, as well as vigilant citizens. We drove for hours. We made gallery plans out of diner french fries. We trespassed. From Pasadena to Port Arthur, we stood continuously in awe of the monstrous metal cities that surrounded us. Finally, with the help of an eight-story hotel, we found a rooftop from which to film.

As a curator I thought a lot about what it means to bring an artist from outside the community to film in a place as sensitive as the Houston Ship Channel. Many community groups, organizations and artists have been on the ground there for decades, working to document and change the toxic policies that allow the oil and chemical industries to pollute, year after year, the air, land and water of the surrounding neighborhoods. My decision to bring Tania to Texas was based on her long engagement with industrial sites around the world and her

own interest in understanding the tense relationships between our region's landscape and industries.

In many ways, Tania retains a modernist sensibility. Rather than working with data or documents, as some contemporary artists with politically charged material do, Tania endeavors to communicate political consciousness through sensory engagement. This exhibition shows the broad reach of these engagements in her work—from *Face to Face's* methodical pacing and tactile accumulation, to *Once Upon a Time's* gut wrenching speed and violence, to *Fata Morgana's* haunting, breath-like stillness. Her wallpaper in the gallery's bay window expands the videos' sensory focus to language and the action of reading. By ciphering powerful, pithy statements, Tania intends to slow viewers down and lead them to linger over meaningful words they otherwise might simply breeze by.

Through immersive videos and text, the exhibition pushes us to recognize our implicit presence in the powerful forces that shape the current social, ecological and political realities of energy production and industrial sites in Texas and the world at large.

Allison Myers, Curator





*Once Upon a Time* (still) / 2011–2012 / HD video / 9m16s loop



*Face to Face* (still) / 2009 / HD video / 9m17s loop

*I was dazzled by the open breach of a 75-millimeter gun in the sunlight, by the magic of the light on white metal.*

Fernand Léger (about World War I)

I've chosen to show four works in this exhibition—three videos and one wall piece—two of which are new commissions made especially for the Visual Arts Center. Several connecting threads link these works with my current research.

Each of the three videos feature three different topographical and industrial environments in which human beings fade into the rule of machines. They each reveal a global system in which erasure generates erasure in an endless cycle of destruction and dehumanization.

Mainly filmed in the French countryside and in Canada, *Once Upon a Time* (2011–2012) refers to the origins of this process. Deforestation was one of the basic means of early industrialization. While referencing this history, the video saturates the viewer's perception with the violence of industry's current high-speed process, inundating the exhibition space

with the frantic noise of chainsaws and the deadly crackling of trees. Here I mixed field recordings with other industrial sounds as well as a choir of sopranos, whose softness emphasizes the tragic situation of a defenseless nature against a relentless and depersonalized enemy.

*Face to Face* (2009) leads visitors into the very heart of European industrial growth and history. Schrottnisel, in Duisburg, is the largest European garbage dump for metal. The video opens with piles of debris and a huge train moving forward. In the European unconscious, these two elements are deeply related to images of the Holocaust. A slight visual shiver leads intentionally to a subjective camera that allows me to stress the importance of witnessing this striking analogy between past and present—human annihilation by industrial means and human disengagement through the industrial process.



*Fata Morgana* (still) / 2016 / one-channel 4K video with sound / 55m18s loop

In *Fata Morgana* (2016), which I created for this exhibition, I wanted to stress the core ambiguity of images. In front of the Texas Gulf Coast's industrial complex, where the largest oil refineries in the U.S. can be found, one can't help but be impressed. At night, the safety lights and flare fires create a strange and poetic atmosphere that I rendered with several static shots. While the monster keeps still, we hear only a low din; the flue gas moving in front of our eyes reminds us that industry never sleeps. This mesmerizing candling reminded me of a fata morgana mirage, in which imagined castles appear to float on the ocean's horizon.

Three different countries and three different cultures, but the same globalizing process is at work. These videos

show a common objective, whose aftermath drives our modern societies to obliterate consciousness.

The last work, a wallpaper I created for the Visual Arts Center, presents another aspect of the exhibition. It belongs to a series of text-based wall paintings I began at the end of the seventies and that I recreate each time according to a new geographical and historical context. By dint of false obviousness, a continuous glut of texts and images leads to an emptiness of meaning. The most striking words or speech can come to seem weak and powerless, as overstatement empties words of their meaning and impoverishes the signified. I work instead on the signifiant (as Michel Foucault theorized the political notion of interpellation). In this series, I

argue that the strongest expressions of our collective tragedies need to be ciphered in order to disrupt the common language.

As I was listening recently to Modest Mussorgsky's masterpiece, *Khovanshchina*, I encountered one of the simplest, yet deepest means to express the eternal feelings of love and pain—an expression peculiar to opera—along with the political and metaphysical issues I feel concerned with: "In this suffering, you will recognize all the truth of the world." This is the text I ciphered for the wallpaper at the Visual Arts Center.

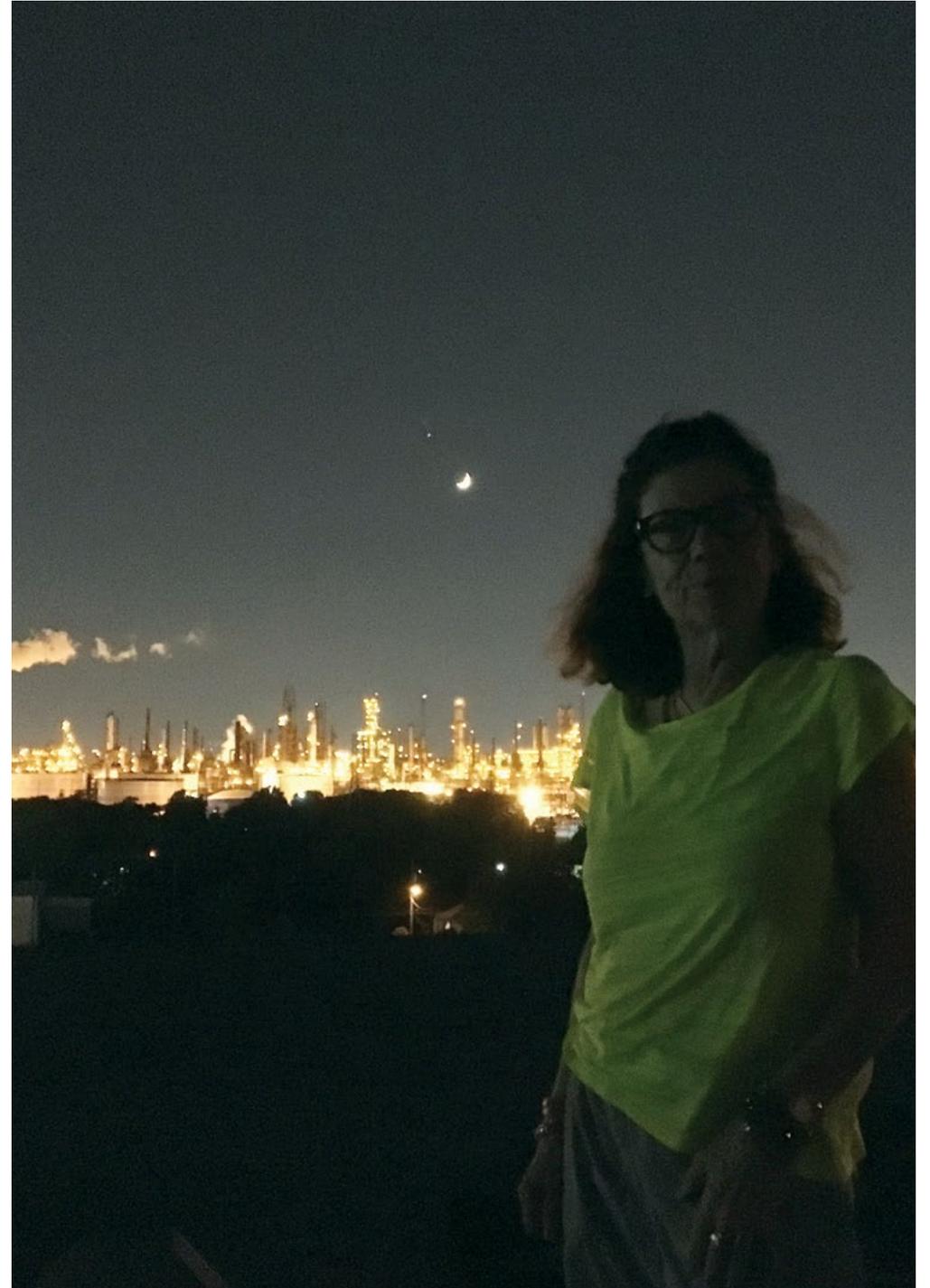
In this exhibition, recorded images are not to be seen as documentary evidence but as an "objective testimony."

Even if they refer to reality, images must be handled so they reach peak power and meaning if they are to achieve real emotional efficiency. Oftentimes, if we want to make a significant statement, images must even step aside. This is why I've always captured and remixed sounds in my video installations; sound allows me to reveal the reverse side of reality and language. Under this condition a work of art can reach an aesthetic scope, that is to say, a way to disclose a philosophical issue with "innocent" plastic means.

Tania Mouraud



*HCYS?* / 2005 / digital print on tarpaulin / 15 x 30 meters





**Tania Mouraud** is a celebrated conceptual artist working across media since the 1960s. Since the late-1990s she has focused primarily on video and sound-based installations that intertwine the conceptual and sensual while exploring relationships between art and society. Mouraud has exhibited widely, with solo exhibitions at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, among others. Her videos and typographic wall paintings were the focus of a recent multi-city retrospective based at the Centre Pompidou-Metz.

**Allison Myers** is the Visual Art Center's 2016–2017 Curatorial Fellow and a PhD candidate in Art History at The University of Texas at Austin, specializing in post-war art and critical theory. She also serves as co-director and editor of the publishing collective Pastelegram and is the founder and editor of Breach Press, a small press publishing translation work in the form of bilingual artists' books.



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