



LE
GRAND
CAFÉ

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN
D'INTERET NATIONAL

POWER UP
ON REMOD

TECHNICAL IMAGINARIES
AND SOCIAL UTOPIAS

EXHIBITION
FROM FEBRUARY 9TH
TO MAY 12TH, 2024

PRESS RELEASE

POWER UP

TECHNICAL IMAGINARIES AND SOCIAL UTOPIAS

JEANNE-MARIE & GEORGES ALEXANDROFF, MARIELLE CHABAL,
LE CORBUSIER, JACQUES DOMMÉE, YONA FRIEDMAN,
VÉRONIQUE JOUMARD, MIERLE LADERMAN UKELES, LAURA LAMIEL,
BASIM MAGDY, LOU MASDURAUD, MAYA MIHINDOU, GINA PANE,
CLAUDE PARENT, JEAN PICART LE DOUX, TATIANA TROUVÉ

WITH THE GRAPHIC CONTRIBUTION OF CHARLOTTE VINOUBE

Exhibition from 9 February to 12 May 2024

Le Grand Café - contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire in France, has invited two curators to design an exhibition project that is both societal and artistic. Amid an ecological crisis, *Power Up* dives into the universe of energy infrastructure; a sprawling invisible subterranean world that nevertheless structures our way of life and determines our view of the world.

Curators :

Géraldine Gourbe, philosopher, author and curator,

Fanny Lopez, historian of architecture and technology, professor at Ensa Paris-Malaquais, Université Paris Sciences et lettres,

Sophie Legrandjacques, director of Le Grand Café - contemporary art centre

This exhibition is supported by Pro Helvetia.

The *Power Up, Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* exhibition is a collaborative artistic project initiated by Géraldine Gourbe and Fanny Lopez, which will be presented in two simultaneous exhibitions in 2024 at Le Grand Café, Saint-Nazaire and La Kunsthalle, Mulhouse.

Power Up, Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias will be on show in Mulhouse from 16 February to 28 April 2024, curated by Géraldine Gourbe, Fanny Lopez and Sandrine Wymann, director of La Kunsthalle. This part of the exhibition brings together ten artists: Carla Adra, Jessica Arseneau, Marjolijn Dijkman, Hilary Galbreath, Maya Mihindou, Jürgen Nefzger, Claude Parent, Liv Schulman, Suzanne Treister and Tomi Ungerer.

THE EXHIBITION

The large-scale collective infrastructures that serve us are everywhere falling into disrepair: water, sanitation, refuse, electricity, gas. The causes are diverse and interrelated: material degradation (wear or aging of structures) and the reduction of state investment in the maintenance and management of legacy networks, but also the lack of resilience of these extensive technological systems, weakened and threatened by the catastrophic arrival of energy and climate crises. Despite this physical change, the myth and the social ideal of large infrastructures as pillars of public service persists, an alliance of economies of scale, technical performance and quality of service for the greatest number.

At a time of environmental collapse and a heating climate, what is our relationship with the technology and infrastructures that produce and distribute shared resources? How do we stop technology being solely connected to a history of modernity and progress? How can it be made to change direction, from a pursuit that associates permanent innovation with rentability to the rediscovery of care for resources that are accessible to and shared by all? How can we deconstruct – and act collectively for – an organisation of the essential services that impact on our environments and our connection to the world?

Can we reappropriate the culture of technology? Shutting down, dismantling or transforming infrastructure means looking again at technological choices and their structural and social history. Considering questions of its maintenance and repair means taking stock of its possible alternatives. Bifurcation, deviation, divergence also mean re-establishing its controversies.

The connective tissue of technological culture is, let's not forget, made of representations that fertilise, form and act upon movements of liberation related to the history of social utopias. It takes in a rich imaginary realm, ranging from stories and science fiction films to the projects of architects, urbanists, engineers and artists.

Infrascopie

The approach to energy often adopts the point of view of the production source – nuclear, solar, wind, etc. – but rarely that of the networks and technical objects that conduct and distribute it: infrastructures. This distant and 'invisibilised' realm is nevertheless close to our bodies and our daily habits. These all take part in accessing essential shared resources. The interwar Nazarian architect Jacques Dommée grasped the importance of this idea; in 1941, during the

Occupation, Jacques Dommée responded to a public tender that was already looking at the reconstruction of towns and infrastructures. He imagined a watertower in homage to the wild Loire River. This utopian object, a kind of observation post on the scale of a New York high-rise, fulfilled several contradictory functions, being at the same time a defensive citadel, function rooms reproducing the atmosphere of mythical ocean liners such as the *Normandie* (1935), and a future project for a youth hostel. *Sphère panoramique : Hypothèse d'une rêverie* adds to the many projects and productions on the banks of the Loire that make it possible for dreamed, unrealised infrastructures to confront both those that were active and whose operations has been suspended, and those sites that still function. From these historical layers, Charlotte Vinouze gives us a cartographical universe that simultaneously steeps us in an atmosphere made up of elements of climate and cosmic symbols.

While hygiene may be the 'supreme act' of the Modern project, the conditions for producing energy flows from infrastructures to homes are very rarely represented. Le Corbusier and Yona Friedman, important figures in the history of 20th century architecture, offer radically different visions of infrastructure and the distribution of utilities. The concept drawing by Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse* (1933), unexpectedly reveals the importance of communal services – water, electricity and gas, telephone – established as the most indispensable facts of modern life and its landscape. Modernity is connected and, as the architect Adolf Loos wrote, "there would be no 19th century without the plumber!" In a different way, *Spatial City* (1956) by Yona Friedman, the great thinker of megastructures, interrogates the functionality as well as the visibility of infrastructure, playing on the possibility of it irrupting from the basement to become an architectural structure, movable component parts, or, on the contrary, dissimulated in the density of a nomadic territory.

In 1998, Claude Parent gave us *Habiter la vague*, a formal game playing with the power of the ocean and the possibility of its becoming infrastructure; a considerable distance away from the large construction sites and architectures of 1970s nuclear productivism.

Véronique Joumard ruptures with the imaginations of Le Corbusier and Claude Parent, and sabotages the codes of infrastructure's objects of technology. The projectors, mounted in series, in her work *Ligne de lumières (sensibles)* (2001-2003) deviate from their primary function, illuminating space, to make matter and the flow of electricity visible as it runs through them. Even at rest, an incandescent thread of electrical energy coming from the earth traverses the projectors.

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Ligne de lumières responds to the sound environment, it comes to life and pulsates with variations in the surrounding activity. Véronique Joumard reminds us that, firstly, electricity is a material with which we can interact, and makes a new otherness out of it.

In this, the infra-mince of the technological object that is given to us here is made visible as a close sensory experience. The work wins its wager of transforming the mass-produced technological object – literally and without aestheticism representing a network of distribution – into a world, a source for contemplation.

Ligne de lumières is also an implicit critique of Minimalism, an artistic movement of the 60s and 70s originating in the US which picked up on the aesthetics and process of industrial manufacturing – seriality, machine-made materials – applying the masculine codes of the industrial world to sculpture.

With a verve that is more critical of the myth of limitless productivity in the service of progress, Lou Masduraud uses the fittings required in the workings of dockworkers' communal showers. The installation, inspired by drawings of tools by the American artist Lee Lozano, and titled *Wet Men* (2022), appropriates the technical network; through a game of reassembly, it makes it into more organic forms that reveal dislocated figures and defective functions. *Wet Men*, a pun on infallible masculinity, critiques the virile representations associated with the world of work; the forces of production incarnated by working bodies prove to be more vulnerable than expected.

Beginning in 1969, gina pane, with *Table de lecture (terre-ciel)*, delivered a sensitive and poetic manifesto that connects the earth to the sky through an action of her body, performed in nature; at the same time, it reveals a non-idealised landscape already occupied by an electricity pylon. Regenerating the earth through her gesture of throwing earth into the sky to aerate it and make it breathe, this work recalls ancestral rituals without being nostalgic. gina pane reconnects us to the elements, tangibly and symbolically; simultaneously showing the relationship of scale between our bodies and the hitherto 'invisibilised' infrastructure.

Hit-and-run

Laura Lamiel's drain models evoke a forgotten part of everyday urban life, when drainage grates were surrounded by modest ordinary objects made from scrap, which allowed water to pass through and also filtered out possible obstructions. The artist collected them for several years, washing and mending them to give them a noble form worthy of our previously averted

attention. Each one wrapped and assembled with care, they form a kind of mattress, a surface for the body detached from the ground. The sculpture is mischievously named *Le Regard détourné* (2000-2022) [The averted gaze] and faces a drawing by Tatiana Trouvé, from the series *Intranquility* (2010). We are in an ordered world, where domestic space is both inhabited and invaded by elements of energy infrastructure. Visually, it references modernist interiors, freighted with a progressist, functionalist and disembodied ideal. The artist makes them appear to us as incongruous troublesome ghosts. Is this surrealist vision some nightmare? She is calling into question the dominance of a techno-modernist world over our intimacy. The bedroom, in its closeness to our bodies and as the site of our dreams, is electrified, an *intranquility* takes shape.

In an inverse movement, with *Touch Sanitation* (1979-1980), Mierle Laderman Ukeles transports us from our interiors into the labyrinth of New York City, where the collection and processing of domestic waste is organised into a hidden and tentacular network. A key feminist artist, Mierle Laderman Ukeles reveals the causal link between our daily actions and their incidence upon an entire social organisation embodied by men, a number of them racialised, who labour at a job that is both essential and denigrated. The performance consists in going to shake the hands of the refuse collectors every day for many years; its force lies in making an entire human chain reappear, the network that the smooth running of collective life requires.

In Saint-Nazaire, the forgotten figure of Marthe Barbance is essential to the history of the Reconstruction. Indeed, in 1948, in the wake of the war, she left a thesis entitled "La ville, le port, le travail", a story of the development of this industrial and working-class town prior to its destruction. Her approach to the social has made her an authentic standard bearer, continuing to enrich knowledge of Saint-Nazaire's singularity. *Marthe La Géante* (2024) appears, majestic, iconic, like a guardian figure, in the drawing by Maya Mihindou.

The Fires of Heaven

Maya Mihindou's mural work, created for the exhibition from the feminist essays and ideas of the writers and activists Cara New Daggett, Solange Fernex, Fatima Ouassak and Vandana Shiva, maps out what is at stake today in connection with the legacies of aging infrastructures and the supposed necessity for their renewal. Profoundly inspired by the concept of 'petro-masculinity', Maya Mihindou lays out

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all the possible ramifications and the underlying and implicit connections, all while insisting that we appropriate them as food for our thoughts and actions. She is contributing to the most accessible and most joyful dissemination possible, with a view to bringing about a raising of conscience and - why not? - a collective movement.

Al Qamar by Marielle Chabal is speculative fiction imagined in Jericho, Palestine, that begins with a group of people concerned with the issues of decolonisation, ecology, social justice and the fight for the rights of minorities. A time of renewal and experimentation with social models, that Marielle Chabal calls the Reset, has been made possible. The artist's installation replays the specific forms of utopia, an island with no fixed connection or precise temporality, immersing us in an environment of saturated colours that already introduces a form of distance in relation to the proposed ideal. At once phantasmagorical and macabre, *Al Qamar* questions our irrepressible need for a new world, a kind of deathly escape abandoning reality as a medium for the power of action.

Unlike *Al Qamar* the utopian settlement Auroville was created, in India by the French architect Roger Anger, student of Noël Le Maresquier, a key figure in the Reconstruction of Saint-Nazaire. It is an environmentalist township conceived and socially organised around the Sun, that claims to welcome and respect different beliefs. The town was born out of a counter-cultural narrative with a New Age feel, and the circulation of its image transmits these convictions around the world. For all that, what does its reality tell us? What is the practical use of its solar orientation? Every utopia is a test of a social reality.

The tapestry *Soleil de lune* by Jean Picart Le Doux is another solar promise that offers, with lyricism and poetry, a new world announcing the end of chaos (wars and famine in the world). Dedicated to European reconstruction, the symbols of sunlight and other natural elements (wind, water, earth) are central: cosmic and energetic agents of better tomorrows, and a sign of the social utopias that were also prevalent in Saint-Nazaire during the construction of the modern town. At the time, the workers involved in building the town hall offered a tapestry by Jean Picart Le Doux ruled over by the vital elements of sunlight, wind and water, and installed it in the mayoral office.

Behind *Soleil de lune* we find a film by Basim Magdy that shows his father among the ruins of an architectural complex in the suburbs of Cairo, *My Father Looks For An Honest City* (2010). Beneath a gathering storm, lantern in hand, the paternal figure roams the ruins of a massive project where only the abandoned infrastructure

remains. Put in perspective by the French architect couple Jeanne-Marie et Georges Alexandroff's representations of solar cities, the film relativises the social benefits of a source of energy that is always thought and rethought as benevolent, and points to the limit of models and plans. Utopia is not the ideal City.

The energy utopias of the Alexandroffs for France, Senegal or Mexico outline, in a series of city views, a new territorial order that develops the themes of the solar hemicycle, the sphere, the parabola, and the juxtaposition, mutualisation and densification of energy. The multiplication of technological objects and research into energy autonomy demonstrate the desire for performance and the formal renewal of technology. For the first time, renewable energies reach a large scale to rival nuclear. In a contest of imaginations, these megastructures bring to light a new vision of infrastructure and a form of provocation that questions the idea of a model and its productivism. Not all sources of energy are in themselves enviable and desirable models of production and distribution. This idea leads us to the need to rethink things, beginning with the models of infrastructure that we are offered.

Basim Magdy's canvas *Walt Disney Counting his Future Regrets* revisits the figure of Walt Disney in his dream world far from the contingencies of society, as he sings the praises of the atom and its civilian uses. Basim Magdy offers us an ironic portrait representing him as a man playing alone, brought to the brink of madness by his all-powerful will. Nevertheless, his imaginative capacity led him to build, for real, an empire that continues to feed our representations and rule over our imaginations. Basim Magdy delivers a contemporary vision of those systems that, fuelled by oversized megalomaniac thoughts, lead to inevitable collapse, including the Global South, as symbolised by this freefalling man in the canvas *Solar Panels and Other Tangled Devices Broadcasting the Demise of the Empire* (2023-2024).

In counterpoint, the painting *The Space Discotheque is an Underground Liberation Army*, 2023 heralds the joyous perspective of an army made up of women standing ready to do battle and open up a new horizon.

Géraldine Gourbe

Géraldine Gourbe is a philosopher, an author and a curator working on a historical repair: from feminist countercultures in Southern California to the minimalist canon to a history of European pop art (*Les Amazones du pop*, Mamac Nice, 2020); or a perspective on the relationship between art and industry in the context of a counter-narrative of the so-called "Trente glorieuses" (*Gigantisme, un trait d'esprit*, first Dunkerque's Triennial, 2019). Her publications include a monograph on Judy Chicago, *To Sustain the Vision* (Ed. Villa Arson and Shelter Press, 2020) and an essay on Simone de Beauvoir, *Beauvoir* (Ed. Pérégrines, 2022).

Fanny Lopez

Fanny Lopez is a historian of architecture and technology (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne), Professor at ENSA Paris-Malaquais. Her research and teaching activities focus on the spatial, territorial and environmental impact of energy and digital infrastructures, as well as the associated technical imaginaries. Among her books: *Dream of a Disconnection, from the Autonomous House to the Auto-energetic City* (Ed. La Villette, 2014) translated by Manchester University Press, 2021), *The Electric Order, Energetic Infrastructures and Territory* (Ed. Métis Presses 2019 - AARHSE prize).

Sophie Legrandjacques

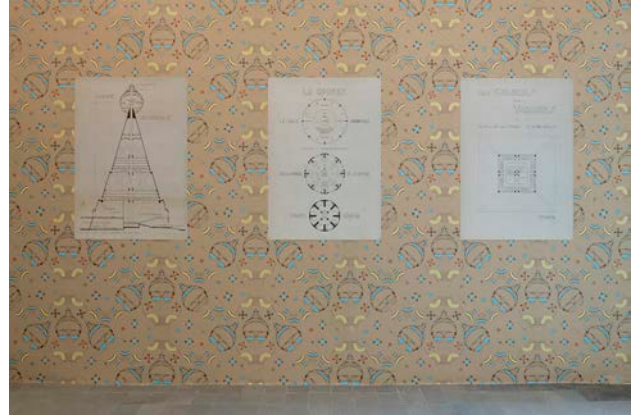
Sophie Legrandjacques is curator and the director of Le Grand Café - contemporary art center in Saint-Nazaire, where she develops an ambitious project linked to the territorial logic of a town of industrial modernity, through invitations to French and international artists. Accompanying artists over long periods of research and development, these invitations often constitute hinge or springboard projects, with significant works in the artists' careers.

AVAILABLE IMAGES

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Map *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias*, graphic design Charlotte Vinouze, 2024. Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage



Jacques Dommée, *Sphère panoramique*, 1941. Drawings on paper, reproduced on 170g matte Aquapaper, 75 x 107 cm each. Fonds Dommée, Saint-Nazaire municipal archives. Wallpaper pattern created from these drawings, graphic design by Charlotte Vinouze, 2024. Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage



Lou Masduraud, *Wet Men*, 2022-2024. Enamelled ceramics, steel, barrels, pumps, pipes, socks, stevedore, oyster pearl, water, dimensions variable (in the background: Véronique Joumard, *Ligne de lumières (sensibles)*, 2001-2003 © ADAGP, Paris, 2024). Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage



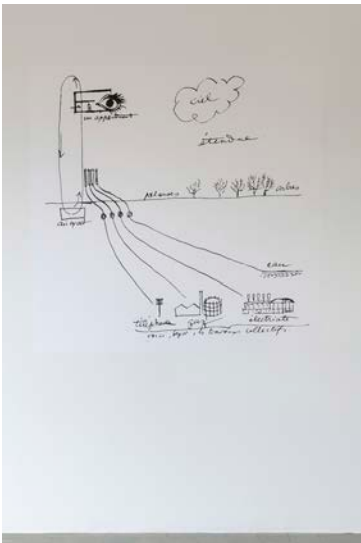
Véronique Joumard, *Ligne de lumières (sensibles)*, 2001-2003. Installation, halogen spotlights, electric modulators, variable dimensions © Fonds d'art contemporain - Paris Collections. Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage © ADAGP, Paris, 2024



Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage. With works by gina pane, *Table de lecture (terre-ciel)*, 1969 (private collection, on deposit at the Frac des Pays de la Loire © ADAGP, Paris, 2024), Claude Parent © ADAGP, Paris, 2024 and Yona Friedman, *Ville spatiale*, 1959-1960 © ADAGP, Paris, 2024)

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Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 1933. Drawing on paper. Reproduced from the book *La Ville radieuse*, published by Éditions de l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, Collection de l'équipement de la civilisation machiniste, Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1935, p.36. Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage © ADAGP, Paris, 2024



Exhibition view *Power Up. Technical Imaginaries and Social Utopias* at Le Grand Café – contemporary art centre, Saint-Nazaire, France, 2024. Photo: Marc Domage. Left: Basim Magdy, *Solar Panels and Other Tangled Devices Broadcasting the Demise of the Empire*, 2023-2024. Courtesy the artist and Gypsum Gallery, Cairo, produced by Le Grand Café and right: Jean Picart Le Doux, *Soleil de lune*, 1969, collection Musées d'Angers © ADAGP, Paris, 2024



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EXHIBITION EVENTS

OUTREACH

Guided Tours

Every Saturday at 4pm
Except on 10 February

Family visits

Storytelling tour with the Fabelo association, for families with children aged 5 to 10.
Saturday 23 March at 11 a.m.

Groups welcome:

Le Grand Café welcomes groups, by reservation.

Informations and reservations:

Pôle des publics du Grand Café

T. 02 51 76 67 01

publicsgrandcafe@saintnazaire.fr

These appointments are free of charge.

TALKS

"Redefining the role of the human in relation to the machine" Cycle of lectures in art history 2023-2024 *Technical worlds: what machines do to creation*

In partnership with the École des Beaux-Arts Nantes - Saint-Nazaire, Saint-Nazaire site

Speaker: Ilan Michel, art critic

Thursday 15 February at 6.30pm at Bain Public: 24 rue des Halles

Admission €6; free for under-18s, jobseekers registered with Pôle emploi, RSA recipients and students at the École des Beaux-arts Nantes - Saint-Nazaire (upon presentation of proof of enrolment).

Bookings required on 02 51 76 67 01 or by email: publicsgrandcafe@saintnazaire.fr

"Energy futures in the Loire estuary (1945-2000)"

Meeting with Anaël Marrec (historian of contemporary technology, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Nantes) In dialogue with Michel Mahé (historian and president of the Nazaire association Aremors)

Tuesday 20 February at 6.30pm at Bain Public: 24 rue des Halles

Approx. 1.30 hrs, free, booking essential

One hour, one work "The master of threads"

Come and discover the tapestries of Jean Picart Le Doux (Aubusson tapestries, world heritage UNESCO in Saint-Nazaire) Rendez-vous heritage & contemporary creation with the Mission des Patrimoines, City of Saint-Nazaire

Thursday 7 March at 6.30pm at the Grand Café and the Hôtel de Ville (meeting starts at the art centre) Duration approx. 1h30, free of charge, booking required

Screening of films from the Centre national des arts plastiques (CNAP)

In the presence of Pascale Cassagnau (art critic and head of the audiovisual, video and new media collection at Cnap)

Wednesday 3 April at 8.30pm at the Jacques Tati cinema: Agora 1901, 2 bis avenue Albert de Mun

Mercredi 3 avril à 20h30 au cinéma Jacques Tati : Agora 1901, 2 bis avenue Albert de Mun

Tickets: full €7, reduced €4 to €6 (see details on the Internet)

The relationship between architecture, decolonisation and ecological practices in post-war France

With Paul Bouet (architectural and environmental historian)

In dialogue with Maya Mihindou (artist, illustrator, photographer and journalist)

Tuesday 9 April at 6.30pm at Bain Public: 24 rue des Halles

Duration approx. 1h30, free, booking required

PRACTICAL INFORMATION



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Opening days and times

From Tuesday to Sunday 2pm to 7 pm.

Closed on May 1st

Free entrance

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Le Grand Café, contemporary art centre of national interest of the City of Saint-Nazaire, is supported by the French Ministry of Culture (DRAC Pays de la Loire), the Regional Council of Pays de la Loire and the Departmental Council of Loire-Atlantique.

Le Grand Café is certified "Centre d'art contemporain d'intérêt national" by the French Ministry of Culture.

It is a member of d.c.a / Association française de développement des centres d'art contemporain (French Association for the Development of Contemporary Art Centres) and the Pôle arts Visuels Pays de la Loire (Pays de la Loire Visual Arts Centre).

