

Stephen Brandes
La Place des Grands Abysses



La Place des Grands Abysses, ink and acrylic on lino, 212 x 271cm, 2018-20

A superlative draughtsman who has exhibited internationally, Stephen Brandes explores the interplay of word and visual language as a vehicle for storytelling with particular reference to travel fiction, absurdism and satire. This exhibition at Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre is the culmination of ten years of research, observation and invention.

Three monumental, highly-detailed drawings combine with traditional collages and an animated slideshow to allow a multiplicity of readings. Central to this project is an hour-long video work and the story of a fictional character, Albert Sitzfleisch and the last few months of his life in 2069, as he travels and starts writing a book on optimism, to his after-life as an unwitting tour-guide of the ruins of the Place des Vosges a century later.

La Place des Grands Abysses offers both a meditation on the legacy of the Enlightenment and a speculative portrait of Europe. It also attempts to consider our shared histories and destinies with a balance of dark humour and poignance.

Stephen Brandes, *La Place des Grands Abysses* : conversation with writer and journalist Karl Whitney on [YouTube](#) for the opening of the exhibition at Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris on 30 September 2020.

Stephen Brandes' practice explores both word and visual language as vehicles for storytelling, with particular reference to travel fiction and European traditions of absurdism and satire.

For several years he embarked on a series of very large, highly detailed drawings on floor vinyl, which charted a perpetually expanding fictional universe – the genesis of which was a journey through contemporary Eastern and central Europe, following a route his grandmother had made in 1913, escaping pogroms in Romania.

More recently, he commenced a body of work which not only includes drawing and painting, but monumental posters, signage, collage, printed publications and animated slideshows.



Black Flag, acrylic on canvas, 30 x 35cm, 2020



Hat in Forest, acrylic on canvas, 23 x 29cm, 2020

The underlying theme of this work considers the legacies of European history, by viewing human endeavour within the landscape and the constructed world from oblique cultural and historical perspectives. It is fuelled by an interest in how visual and pictorial languages from the recent past have been adopted within particular social movements, from the avant-gardes and totalitarian aesthetics of the early 20th century to the graphic sensibilities of more recent years. These are often put into conflict with the subject matter: the landscapes, the monuments and architecture that have evolved throughout Europe over the past 400 years.

His re-engagement with this material is not out of nostalgia, but rather for the purpose of misappropriation, in order to reinvest fresh meaning to these subjects. The challenge is to create objects and images that present alternative views to commonly accepted standards of beauty and authority. It also attempts to consider our shared histories and future with a measured mixture of poignancy and humour.

Stephen Brandes was born in Wolverhampton, UK in 1966 and now lives and works in Cork after moving to Ireland in 1993. He represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale 2005 as part of 'Ireland at Venice', and has shown in numerous exhibitions both in Ireland and internationally.

<http://www.stephenbrandes.com/index.html>

