

BENJAMIN RENOUX  
Miroirs et Crépuscules



Benjamin Renoux  
Miroirs et Crépuscules

2015  
Institut français du Royaume-Uni  
European Commission Representation in the UK



Entering the studio of Benjamin Renoux is to be bombarded by a flurry of ideas, existential thoughts and feverish production, and at the same time, there is a calm and measured atmosphere. His sophistication and confidence mean that everything is considered and executed with a purpose, beyond what one would normally encounter from such a young artist. Through layering living histories he creates dialogues between contradicting ideas to explore notions of identity, temporality, and nostalgia. As an admirer of the 19th century, and specifically how it informs our present, he references the writings of the controversial French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, and the English psychoanalyst and pediatrician Donald Winnicott. Their collective writings on 'the mirror stage', which explain the emergence of self-identification and the construction of personal identity, inform Renoux's latest body of work in *Miroirs et Crépuscules (Mirrors and Twilights)*, exhibited at the 12 Star Gallery in a show organised by the Institut français.

The dichotomy that beats at the core of Renoux's practice imbues the work with its multiple meanings - all of which are paramount when understanding his art, and simultaneously, not at all. Knowing the backstory about a piece or where the source image came from does not necessarily connect to the larger concepts within the work, although it may influence the direction or path of certain ideas. His energy is astonishing - engaging in extended processes of research and working relentlessly without stopping, almost to the point of collapse. Even the decision to leave his comfortable home in Paris and move to London for what he refers to as "the survival life" was to fuel his creativity and productivity by feeding off the urgency and passion; specifically, the precarious nature of life in London for a young artist. It is therefore interesting to find that from all this seeming chaos and intense activity, the completed works are highly developed, alluring and tender - sometimes romantic, sometimes unnerving.

Born in the Ivory Coast in 1986, Renoux read Cinema and History of Art in San Francisco and Paris, and received his Masters in Fine Art with Distinction from the Central Saint Martins – University of the Arts London. On the back of his first international solo show outside of France at Galerie Hervé Lancelin in Luxembourg earlier this year, he was selected for the most prestigious art competition in France for young artists the *60ème Salon de Montrouge*. Remaining true to his prolific output, he is also presently preparing for a further solo show in Paris, and four group shows later this year.

Photography is the single most important starting point for his works: what it means, how it's included in our daily life, and specifically, in the construction of personal identity. He contemplates on reflections and mirrors, relating to self-awareness, whilst unafraid to experiment with materials. His media ranges from painting on photographs and imbedding them in concrete, to animating archival photographs in his digital moving images.

**Crépuscule Bleu (#3)**

Photography and black oil on canvas

160 x 117 cm

2015

Of the photographs he uses, some are found and anonymous, while others are drawn from a rich source of personal family photos taken by his grandfather who was an avid photographer driven by the love of the craft. When questioned about the delineation, Renoux explains there is a lack of post-1950s photographs available in antique shops as they are “not yet abandoned”, so working with his grandfather’s collection is as much out of necessity, as it is about developing the work conceptually. On using personal family photos, the artist declares appreciatively that once an image enters one of his works, the person in the photograph will always remain and continue surviving. This endurance of existence in *Miroirs et Crépuscules (Mirrors and Twilights)* brings together three strands of new work: framed video installations (*Conversations*), photo-paintings (*Twilights*), and sculptures (*Amphorae*).

### **Conversations - The framed video installations**

The framed digital moving images, or *Conversations*, are constructed instances based on a single photograph that show the reflection of a certain environment no longer present. These silent videos gently fluctuate focus back and forth between the photograph and a reflected environment where the image once inhabited subverting the audience’s expectation by reflecting a different environment to that of where the viewer is physically standing.

In *Conversation #15 (Diabolo, Window)*, 2015, a photo from the late 1950s depicts two little girls playing on a path, when the perspective is subtly cut by the layered reflection. When the focus transitions between the two, the viewer is transported between the inside (with the reflection of an interior window), and the outside (to the photograph of the girls on a path), ultimately creating a position of paradoxical abstraction on top of the photo. Selection of a photograph always starts with intuition and intrigue for Renoux, as seen in *Conversation #17 (Photo ID, Light Bulb)*, 2015 where the photo of a woman caught the artist’s attention because her eyes are both closed and open at the same time. This, paired with the reflection of a bulb carries an overriding foreboding feeling loaded with possible interpretations. The final *Conversation #16 (Girls in the forest, Neon lights)* juxtaposes a woodland photograph with the reflection of suspended clinical florescent lights providing two familiar scenes merged unexpectedly, yet connected compositionally.

*Face to Face (Father and Son)*, 2015 is a slight departure from the *Conversations* in that the focus does not shift away from the photograph, but instead a silhouette moves across the face of a young boy like a pendulum clock. The figure moves left to right in changing speeds echoing the distortion of time and posing a question of who is more present between the 8 year old boy in the photograph and the reflection of the figure. Sometimes it’s important to Renoux for the viewer to know it’s a reflection of him pacing in front of his father, (he jokes that they have the same ears), other times he’s happy for this fact to go unrecognised.

The aesthetic of the entire work is closely regarded and Renoux is not afraid to say he makes beautiful objects. He skilfully crafts every element, including the wooden carved frames that are an architectural simplification of a Renaissance frame typically used for icons; in this way, he hopes the works can become “little sacrifices.” Beyond hiding the technology, Renoux always creates a frame that answers to the photo or reflection. He plays with a viewer’s expectation that they should see their own reflection, when instead it brings confusion on seeing the reflection in the work.

### **Crépuscules (Twilights) - The painted photographs**

Here Renoux returns to painting for the first time since before his attendance at Central St. Martins, however he is adamant these are not ‘paintings’ in the pure sense as he is not attempting to hide the fact they begin as printed photographic images. The decision to use his fingers to painstakingly work a screen of black oil paint into the surface is not to obscure the image, but rather is an act of recovering the photograph. The intention is not to follow the light in the original photograph, but instead is about changing the context and environment of the image – seeing how much he can build up the black paint before the work loses connection to its original source. When discussing the light and voyeuristic quality of the works, he mentions Jean-Honoré Fragonard as his inspiration.



Jean-Honoré Fragonard  
*Le verrou*  
1774-1778  
Oil on canvas  
74 x 94 cm

Collection of Musée du Louvre  
Paris, France

Photographed by the artist in his studio, the subjects are seen in a state of disturbed sleep. A blade of light slits down the image to focus on the tensest point of the figure, while the blackness closes in like a curtain. Time here is suspended, yet fleeting and intangible at the same time. Renoux explains the vertical band of colour as a reference to Barnett Newman's zip, where the notion of the strip unites the two sides of the canvas, rather than dividing them. This method of abstraction with multiple references is a way of presenting to the viewer the multitude of possible meanings, and vitally, that it is one's own affinity with the image that completes the story; whether the light is comprehended as the opening or closing of a door, or a sexually curious awakening. Fundamentally, for Renoux, his works are about contemplation and he wants you to lose yourself in them; therefore he tries to reach the limit of what your eye can see in the photo in contrast to the blackness.



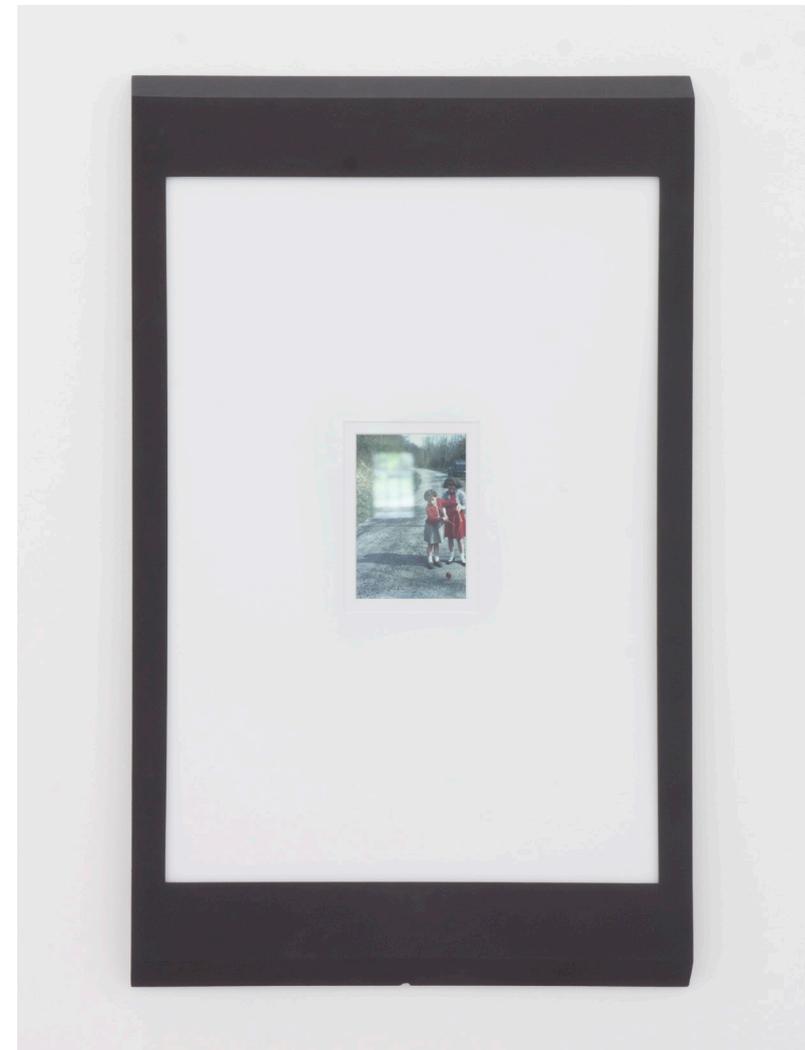
Barnett Newman  
Voice of Fire  
1967  
Oil on canvas

## Amphorae - The sculptures

Renoux presents three freestanding sculptures in *Miroirs et Crépuscules (Mirrors and Twilights)*. The first sculpture *Self-portrait united in struggle* shows a cast of two faces placed on top of each other at the top of a vertiginous plinth. In creating the casts, he likens the experience to a Marina Abramović endurance performance in that he fought to hold his breath until the mould set for the sake of achieving an authentic moment of desperation. The two ceramic jars, titled *Amphora*, evoke a feeling that they were recovered from the wreckage at sea, through the surface texture that is reminiscent of corroded bronze. Peering down inside the jars the viewer finds a video of a figure looking down into water and staring back. The figure mixes the water, abstracting the image until the pond settles, but what's surprising is the depth depicted in the films. Beyond the conceptual links, Renoux creates a physical connection between the photo-paintings' band of light and the verticality of the sculptures – formulating a very physical experience when engaging with the collection of work.

The enigmatic dialogues in Renoux's work, where the physical versus the abstract, the past challenges the present, and effort faces equilibrium, invites the viewer to meditate on the meaning of identity. Even the words of the exhibition title, *Miroirs et Crépuscules (Mirrors and Twilights)*, were placed next to each other to investigate the common points. In mirrors there is the symmetry of two worlds facing each other (the real world, and the illusion of the real world), whereas, in twilight, two worlds are facing each other but separated by different times (day and night). Renoux believes we all fetishise images in some way – the same notion that prevents someone from tearing a photograph of a loved one in half, although it is essentially just a piece of paper. He is interested in how this illusion of reality confuses us and makes us think that we are attached to someone through a piece of paper. To consider the individuality of the subjects in the work is also to confront a viewer's own awareness of self.

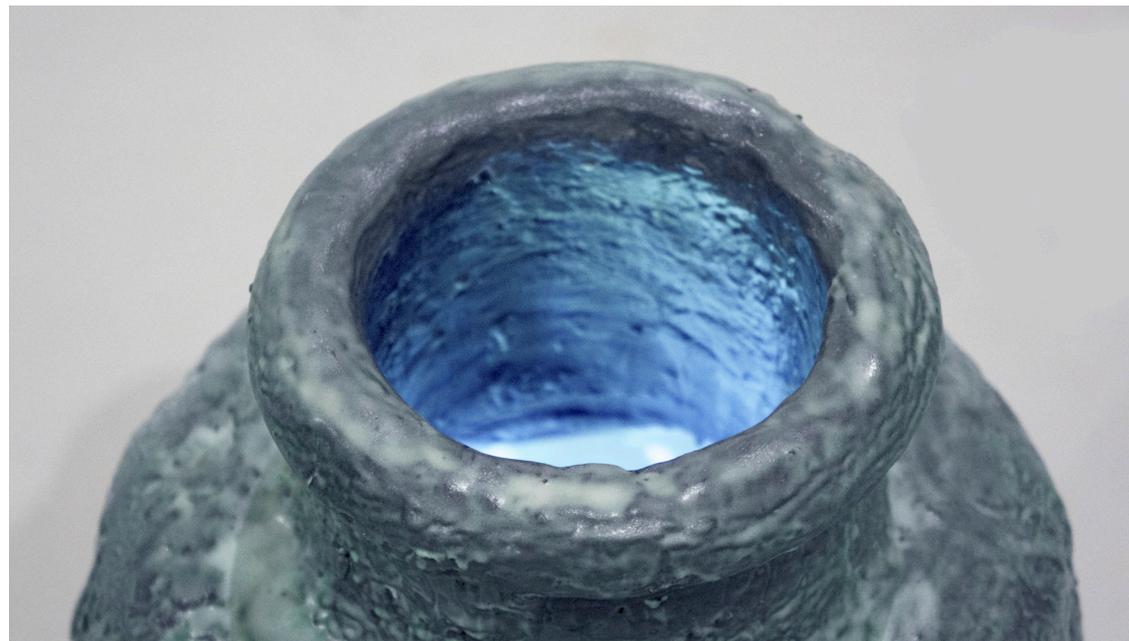
Dea Vanagan  
Curator

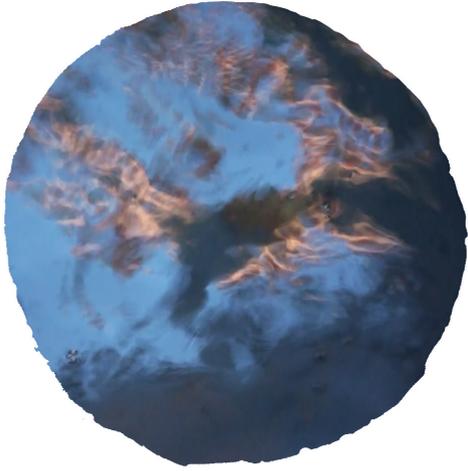


Conversation #15 (Diabolo, Window)  
Digital video (13 min 04 sec), screen, glass, passe partout, wood, acrylic, varnish  
76 x 47 x 3 cm  
2015



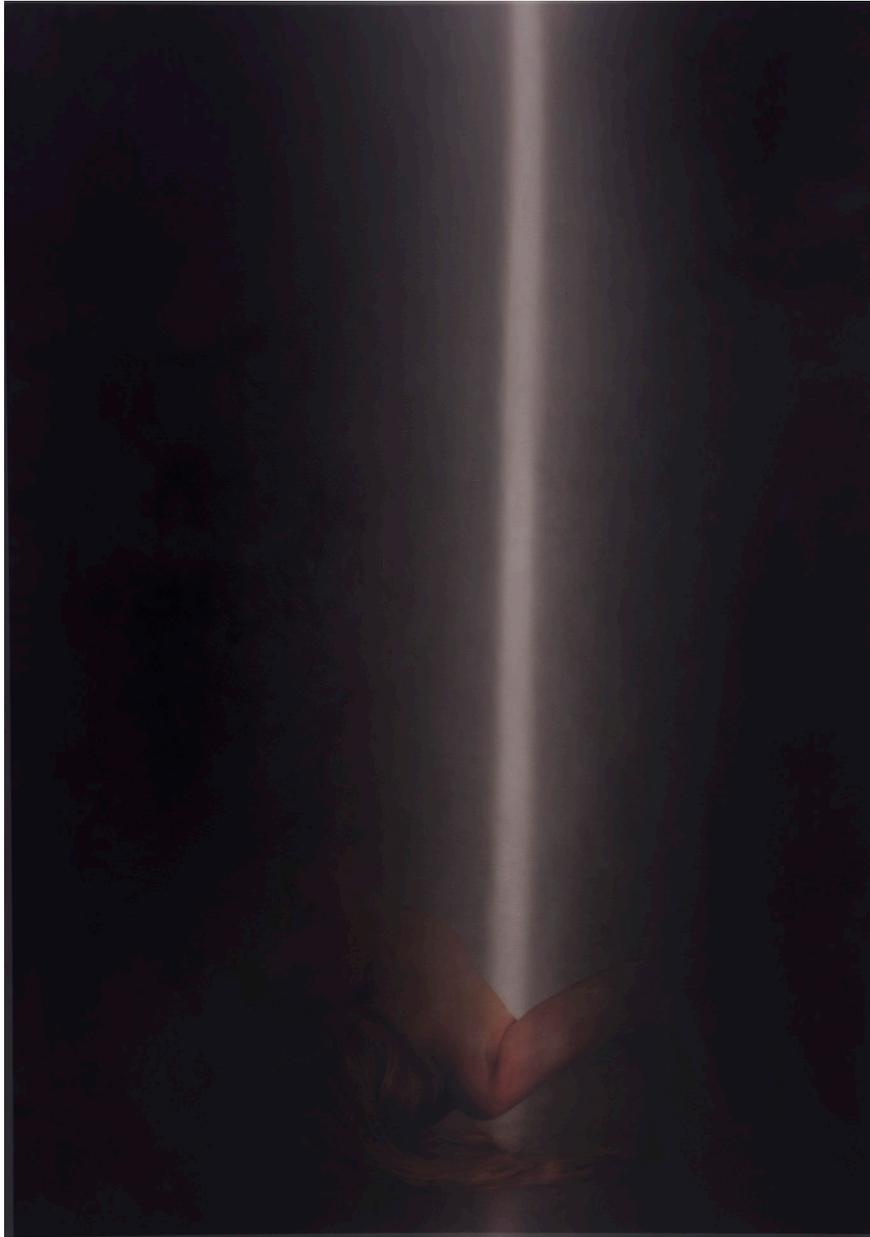
Amphora #2  
Digital video (23 min)  
Resin, pigments, plaster, wood, acrylic,  
retro-projection film, projector  
90 x 35 x 35 cm  
2015



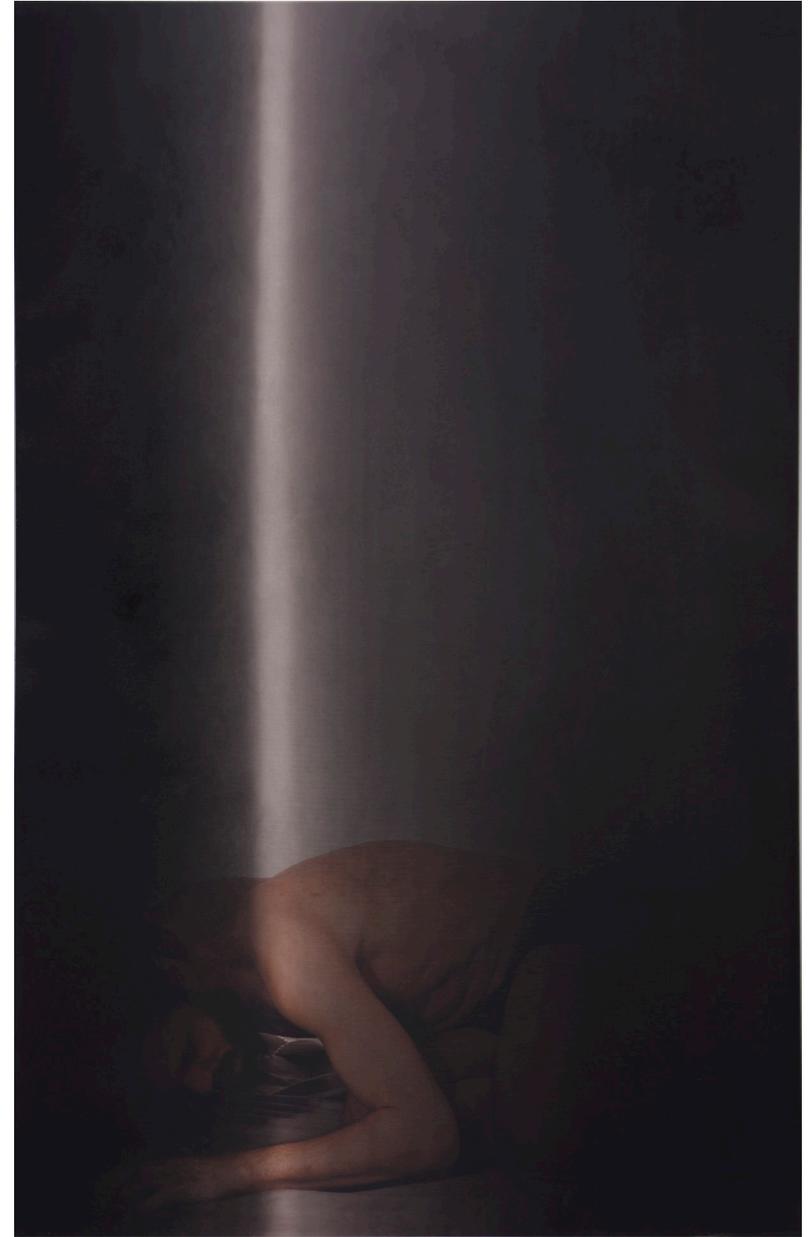


Amphora #2  
Screenshots

Amphora #2  
Screenshots



Crépuscule Rouge (#2)  
Photography and black oil on canvas  
170 x 121 cm  
2015



Crépuscule Rouge (#1)  
Photography and black oil on canvas  
170 x 109 cm  
2015



Conversation #17 (Photo ID, Light Bulb)

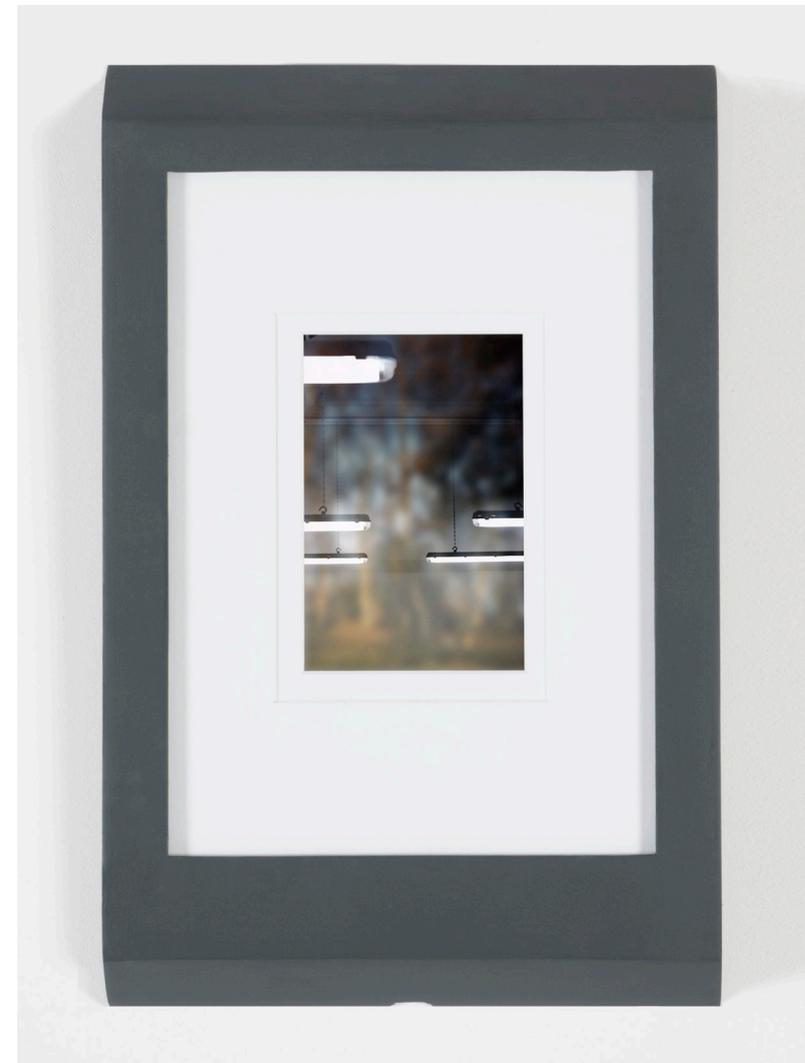
Digital video (13 min 04 sec), screen, glass, passe partout, wood, acrylic, varnish  
76 x 47 x 3 cm

2015



Self portrait (*Masks from struggling performance*)  
Plaster, resin  
23 x 21 x 21 cm  
2015





Conversation #16 (Girls in the forest, neon lights)  
Digital video (13 min), screen, glass, passe partout, wood, acrylic, varnish  
48 x 37 x 3 cm  
2015

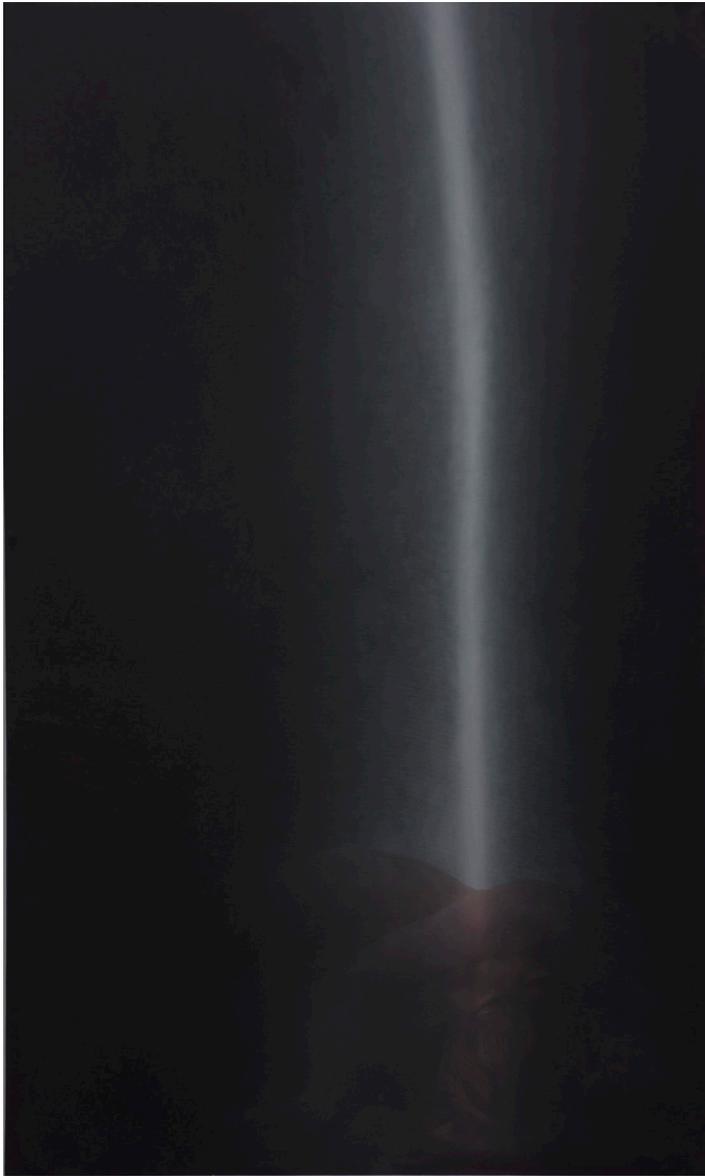


Face to Face (Father and Child)  
Digital video (9 min 02 sec), screen, glass, passe partout, wood, acrylic, varnish  
36 x 31 x 3 cm  
2015



Crépuscule Bleu (#1)  
Photography and black oil on canvas  
183 x 115 cm  
2015





Crépuscule Bleu (#2)  
Photography and black oil on canvas  
170 x 117 cm  
2015



Crépuscule Bleu (#4)  
Photography and black oil on canvas  
170 x 117 cm  
2015

# Benjamin Renoux

## Solo Exhibitions

2015: **Miroirs & Crépuscules**, 12 Star Gallery, Europe House with the French Institute (London, UK) / **Mémoires en mue**, Galerie Antoine Laurentin (Paris, France) / **Keep yourself from idols**, Galerie Hervé Lancelin (Luxembourg, Luxembourg)  
2012: **Anesthésies**, Galerie Quai Est, Ivry-sur-Seine, France)  
2011: **L'instant T**, curated by Juliette Giovannoni, Espace d'Art Contemporain Les Salaisons, (Romainville, France)  
2010: **Chapelle Pomme Z**, (Reims, France)

## Group Exhibitions

2016: 16 mars - 26 juin 2016, **Circulation(s)**, 104 (Paris, France)  
2015: 8 December - 12 December 2015, **Art is Hope 2015 en faveur de LINK pour AIDES**, PIASA (Paris, France) / 12 November - 19 December 2015, **Petits drames / Bonheur invisible**, Galerie Da-End (Paris, France) / 6-7 November 2015, **Vente aux enchères du 60ème Salon de Montrouge**, Beffroi (Montrouge, France) / **This new feeling**, Curation degree show at Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design (London, UK) / **60ème Salon de Montrouge**, Beffroi, (Montrouge, France) / **Opening Night**, Galerie Chabah Yelmani (Bruxelles, Belgium)  
2014: **Exposition d'Inauguration**, Galerie Hervé Lancelin (Luxembourg, Luxembourg) / **Central Saint Martins Degree Show**, Lethaby Gallery, (London, UK) / **Live in your dreams!**, curated by Stéphane Verlet-Bottéro, The Crypt Gallery (London, UK) / **Big Street Project**, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design (London, UK)  
2013: **Tomorrow**, I'll be Elsewhere (part 2), curated by Sonja Vrkatić and Noemi Niederhauser, Royal Academy of Art (London, UK) / **Auction Exhibition**, Lethaby Gallery (London, UK) / **Tomorrow**, I'll be Elsewhere (part 1), curated by Sonja Vrkatić and Noemi Niederhauser, Aside Bside Gallery (London, UK) / **Etchings and Screenprints**, Byam Shaw Building, Central Saint Martins (London, UK) / **In Transit**, V22, (London, UK)  
2011: **Body No / Body**, Galerie Bertrand Grimont, (Paris, France)

## Education

2012 - 2014: **Master of Fine Art** (with Distinction) at **Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design** (London, UK)  
2004 - 2010: Studied Cinema and History of Art in San Francisco and Paris

## Prizes

2015: Selected for **60ème Salon de Montrouge**  
2010: **Prix Chic Art Fair**  
Supported by Georges Rousse (Paris, France)

Born in 1986 in Abidjan (Ivory Coast).  
Live and work in Paris and London.

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## Miroirs et Crépuscules

October 27<sup>th</sup> - November 6<sup>th</sup> 2015  
12 Star Gallery

### Exhibition organised by

Institut français du Royaume-Uni & the European Commission Representation in the UK

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