

'The Ceremony and the Spirit' by Roe Ethridge & Zin Taylor

at La Loge, Brussels

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by Evelyn Simons



La Loge, an unconventional artistic platform that opened in September in a former freemason's temple in Ixelles, currently hosts 'The Ceremony and the Spirit'. The title of the exhibition was the starting point for a site-specific artistic dialogue between American photographer Roe Ethridge (° 1969) and Belgium-based Canadian artist Zin Taylor (° 1978) within the building's exceptional architecture.

Designed by Fernand Bodson and Louis Van Hooveld and built in 1934-35, the temple is characterised by its modernist architecture, a feature that normally wouldn't suit the typical Egyptian-inspired Masonic houses. The standard symbols are still present, but in a purified form, pared down to its essentials. As a gallery, La Loge invites contemporary artists to enter into dialogue with the building and its history. The artworks created

find their raison d'être in the specificity of La Loge. In 'The Ceremony and The Spirit', La Loge is conceived as a kind of client, being 'promoted' or 'advertised' by Taylor and Ethridge, who are working on commission. The triangular relation between La Loge, Zin Taylor and Roe Ethridge takes shape in the three steps of creation: the site-specific commission, the ceremonial object and the photograph that reveals the 'spirit'.

Zin Taylor, generally referred to as a 'narrator of forms', is an artist who works beyond the boundaries of the traditionally outlined art disciplines. Seemingly random, he places objects familiar to our collective memory in a new context, thus playing with our expectations and the absence of their original purpose. Roe Ethridge, well-known for his advertorial works in the fashion scene, is used to working on commission. In his own initiatives, he crosses the spectrum of photographic genres and creates portraits as well as landscapes and still lives. His straightforward visual language is the link that combines the large array of diverse subjects. The inspiration comes to both artists in a similar, arbitrary manner; Taylor's objects and Ethridge's subjects aren't chosen deliberately, but afterwards do gain their meaning in a broader context.

Months of email traffic between the two artists constitute the largest part of the creative process of the artistic dialogue that is 'The Ceremony and The Spirit'. Since Ethridge and Taylor have known each other for a while, the collaboration went naturally. Taking the title as starting point, Taylor created ceremonial objects (the 'Ceremony'), a reference to the ritual character of the freemasonry, which were then infused with a soul (the 'Spirit') by Ethridge.

Instead of paying a tribute to the building's historical significance, they play with the ceremonious and ritualistic notions that characterize the Masonic practices. The hexagram for example, Star of David and symbol for the temple of King Solomon is indispensable in the freemason's symbolism and is depicted in the building in the form of a grid in the wall of the main hall. Behind the grid runs a corridor which makes it possible for outsiders to oversee the ritual practices in the main hall of the temple. Taylor and Ethridge took the symbol, but only to work with its stylistic and geometrical features as a leitmotif. The antechamber is conceived as a ritual bath, overprinted with the hexagram as an indoctrinating experience, immersing any visitor entering the exhibition. The main hall is taken up by what can be seen as a mood board, a snapshot in the discussion between Ethridge and Taylor. Ethridge's photos are displayed among coloured interpretations of the hexagram. At the end of the hall, Taylor's objects stand on a stage, exploring the tension between their sobriety and the exalted pedestal on which they are placed. The photographs by Ethridge capture these objects almost like a portrait in a very straightforward manner, which gives us an insight into their very existence, into their 'spirit'.