

*-j'ai entendu un bruit, je me suis sauvé*  
(I heard a noise and I ran)  
Or Gallery

Samuel Roy-Bois  
January 11 to February 8 2003



Taking "sunken architecture" at its word, Samuel Roy-Bois recreates Etienne Louis-Boullée's Cenotaph for Newton in his installation for the Or Gallery, *-j'ai entendu un bruit, je me suis sauvé*. Boullée drew on the ruins of ancient temples in his later designs for monuments that remained only designs.<sup>1</sup>

What results in Roy-Bois' actualization is an impoverished monument. Far from the gigantic perforated sphere of the 18<sup>th</sup> century original, a square room is masqued by a larger square contained in yet a larger square, namely, the gallery. The masque and interior room exist in a dilapidated, or unfinished form.

What Boullée saw as architectural realism, art imitating nature, Roy-Bois translates as the persistent use of the square both as modernist sensibility and in actual construction: as an unnatural form that seeks to defy gravity and time. Roy-Bois has created a porous piece of modernism (a pun perhaps, in it's full of holes), where, as Walter Benjamin describes in *Naples*:

**One can scarcely discern where building is still in progress  
and where dilapidation has already set in<sup>2</sup>**

Boullée cites Flaubert's *the more telescopes there are, the more stars will be in the sky* as inspiration. Upon entering Roy-Bois' *j'ai entendu un bruit, je me suis sauvé* one is first struck by the starry impression. However, once one's eyes adjust, the "science of construction" is slowly revealed, and the stars become drill holes, or peepholes. With the dissolution of the starry night sky, comes the reflexivity of constructed space. Roy-Bois uses the very construction that hampered Boullée's realization: electricity.

Boullée sought to reverse the order of things with his Cenotaph for Newton, wherein daylight would penetrate holes perforating the spherical dome and act as the clear night sky. He conceived of the reverse, but without the "science of construction" to aid him.

Benjamin cites Guy de Maupassant in "Modes of Lighting" in the *Arcades Project*,

**Everything was clear in the mild night air, from the planets down to the gas lamps. So much fire shone there above, just as in the town, that the shadows themselves seemed luminous. The glittering nights are merrier than the brightest of days<sup>3</sup>**

By literally illuminating the construction, Roy-Bois draws an analogy to conceptual art, the other side of architecture: **"we must conceive before building"**.<sup>4</sup>



Samuel Roy-Bois is an accomplished Montreal-based artist whose work explores the subject of utopian architecture.

Sydney Hermant is a Vancouver-based artist and writer, Director/Curator for the Or Gallery, and a woman of 31.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Marie Perouse de Montclos, *Etienne Louis-Boullée 1728-1799, Theoretician of Revolutionary Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1974, page 36.

<sup>2</sup> Alex Coles' "The Ruin and the House of Porosity", *The Optic of Walter Benjamin*, ed Alex Coles, Black Dog Volume 3 de-, dis, ex-, Publishing Limited, 1999, London.. page 157 (chapter *The Law of Porosity* investigates Dan Graham's *Alteration of a Suburban House* in a reading of Walter Benjamin's *Naples*.)

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England, 1999, page 570 citing Guy de Maupassant, *Claire de Lune*, Paris, 1909, p 121 "La Nuit Cauchemar".