

Christian Hidaka
Raphaël Zarka

Duo shows & projects

June 20 - August 18, 2019
Koffler Center of the Arts - Toronto (CA)
Curator : Mona Filip



Raphaël Zarka
Peter Halt n°3, 2019
Painted solid poplar, painted birch plywood
59 × 34 × 34 cm (sculpture)

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Peter's Proscenium*, exhibition view, Koffler Center of the Arts, Toronto (CA) - 2019



Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Peter's Proscenium*, exhibition view, Koffler Center of the Arts, Toronto (CA) - 2019



Raphaël Zarka
Peter Halt n°2, 2019
Painted solid poplar, painted birch plywood
60,5 × 33 × 33 cm (sculpture), 210 × 80 × 150 cm (base)

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Peter's Proscenium*, exhibition view, Koffler Center of the Arts, Toronto (CA) - 2019



Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Peter's Proscenium*, exhibition view, Koffler Center of the Arts, Toronto (CA) - 2019



Christian Hidaka
Arch niche II (Well), 2018
 casein oil tempera on wood
 73 × 43 × 3 cm



Christian Hidaka
Hanging figure, 2019
 oil tempera on wood
 90 × 47 × 3 cm



Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Peter's Proscenium*, exhibition view, Koffler Center of the Arts, Toronto (CA) - 2019

Unhooked a Star

November 15, 2018 – March 17, 2019
MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art
Bucarest (RO)
Curator : Ioana Mandeal

Unhooked a Star, the artist's personal project for MNAC, further delves into the analogy between painting and the stage, proposing a theatrical exploration of the space which turns the white cube into an immersive tableau. This is the first part of a two-chapter project revolving around the points of confluence in the distinctive practices of two artists and close friends: Christian Hidaka and Raphaël Zarka.

> video : https://youtu.be/GBXM8kM_YkQ

Gnomonica

April 19 – August 18, 2019
MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art
Bucarest (RO)
Curator : Ioana Mandeal

The second chapter of a dialogically conceived exhibition format, Zarka's project feeds off the conceptual partnership with British painter Christian Hidaka and confronts the two artists' seminal research themes within an immersive spatial construct. In direct resonance with the mural tableau previously developed by Christian Hidaka for *Unhooked a Star*, Raphaël's oeuvre opens up towards a new field of potentialities and personal mythologies.

> video : <https://youtu.be/w945Vd0WE30>

Raphaël Zarka
Mount Melville, 2018
solid oak and concrete
192 × 50 × 50 cm

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka





Raphaël Zarka, *Gnomonica*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (RO) - 2019

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Raphaël Zarka, *Gnomonica*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (RO) - 2019

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Raphaël Zarka, *Gnomonica*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (RO) - 2019

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Christian Hidaka, *Unhooked a Star*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucarest (RO) - 2019



Christian Hidaka, *Unhooked a Star*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucarest (RO) - 2019



Christian Hidaka, *Unhooked a Star*, exhibition view, MNAC - National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucarest (RO) - 2019



Christian Hidaka
Trobairitz, 2015
oil tempera on linen
182 × 250 cm

2017 - 2018



Raphaël Zarka
Monument for a Scottish garden (after Joshua Kirby), 2018
13 polyhedra, pear wood
variable dimensions



Raphaël Zarka
Monument for a Scottish garden (after Joshua Kirby), 2018
13 polyhedra, pear wood
variable dimensions



Christian Hidaka
After Kirby (with Raphaël Zarka), 2017
oil tempera on linen
70 × 50 cm

September 7 – October 11, 2017
galerie Michel Rein - Paris (FR)



Raphaël Zarka
The Third Man (after Peter Hält), 2016
blown glass rhombicuboctahedra, demineralized water, oak,
Chauvigny stone
133,5 × 26,5 × 26,5 cm

Wall painting : Christian Hidaka



Christian Hidaka, *Players*, exhibition view, galerie Michel Rein, Paris (FR) - 2017

October 07, 2017 - April 04, 2018
Mudam - Musée d'Art Moderne Grand Duc Jean -
Luxembourg (LX)
Curators : Marianne Derrien & Sarah Ihler-Meyer

Raphaël Zarka
The Prismatics (p.11), 2013
Solid oak and concrete
165,5 × 74 × 36 cm

Wall painting : Christian Hidaka





Christian Hidaka & Raphaël Zarka, *Flatland Abstractions Narratives #2*, exhibition view, MUDAM -Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg - 2017

October 05 - November 13, 2016
Les Instants Chavirés - Montreuil (FR)
Curator : Guillaume Constantin



Raphaël Zarka & Christian Hidaka
La Famille Schoenflies
exhibition view, Les Instants Chavirés, Montreuil (FR) - 2016



Raphaël Zarka & Christian Hidaka, *La Famille Schoenflies*, exhibition view, Les Instants Chavirés, Montreuil (FR) - 2016



Raphaël Zarka & Christian Hidaka, *La Famille Schoenflies*, exhibition view, Les Instants Chavirés, Montreuil (FR) - 2016



Raphaël Zarka
Arthur Schoenflies, 2016
Solid cherry wood
60 × 75 × 75 cm

Wall painting: Christian Hidaka



Christian Hidaka
Niche IV (Schoenflies), 2016
casein oil tempera on wood
100 × 62 × 2,5 cm

May 24 - June 21, 2008
Galerie Michel Rein - Paris (FR)



Raphaël Zarka
Ratiocination
exhibition view, galerie Michel Rein, Paris (FR) - 2008



Raphaël Zarka, *Ratiocination*, exhibition view, galerie Michel Rein, Paris (FR) - 2008



Christian Hidaka
Houses at the Foot of a Mountain, 2008
oil tempera on linen
183 × 122 cm

Christian Hidaka and Raphaël Zarka met in England some twenty-odd years ago, whilst studying together at the Winchester School of Art. As so often happens between art school students, the friendship they formed was forged throughout discussions about artists discovered, books read, first intuitions and their first respective works. In a text referring to these years of learning, Raphaël Zarka uses Richard Hamilton's words: "It is often the case that the value of an education is derived from other students¹." However, it is less usual that the exchange they began during this period endured throughout the years, mostly in an informal manner - discussions being pursued in parallel to the fulfilment of their respective practices - sometimes in a more tangible manner. For instance, in 2008, Christian Hidaka included a pair of rhombicuboctahedra in one of his paintings², the semi-regular polyhedron around which an important part of Raphaël Zarka's work is developed. Then, in 2010 Raphaël Zarka wrote the text introducing Christian Hidaka's first personal exhibition in France³. Despite the very different allures denoting their works, they have the common point of being the crucible of shapes, of patterns, of techniques and sources of inspiration stemming from the most varied historical and geographical domains and contexts. Let's bring to mind, all jumbled, the deserted landscapes, the English physician and mystic, Robert Fludd, the art of memory, virtual spaces, painting of the Trecento, and cubism for Christian Hidaka; characters linked to the history of science such as Archimedes, Galileo and Abraham Sharp, skateboarding, Roger Caillois' concept of games, American sculpture and certain works from the Early Renaissance for Raphael Zarka.

The project that reunites them in this exhibition, in the form of a dialogue, includes as its starting point, an astonishing collection of mathematical objects from the 19th century. They are geometrical plaster models by a German mathematician

and crystallographer, Arthur Moritz Schoenflies (1853-1928), made during research he was carrying out at the time on space groups. This research resulted in his major work *Kristallsysteme und Kristallstruktur*, published in 1891. Whilst working on the question of paving space, Schoenflies came up with a certain number of geometrical modules, tri-dimensional "patterns" with more or less complex configurations, which when combined with other identical modules, deployed themselves in the space without leaving any gaps. Each of these plaster models, elaborated from a dozen modules, illustrate this principal.

On discovering these geometrical models during a visit to the collections of Göttingen University, where they were made, Raphaël Zarka immediately perceived the "sculptural potential" that they harboured. He then was able to study them in more detail at the Henri Poincaré Institute, which also possesses a set⁴. This discovery combined with those that he'd had with many scientific objects in the mid 2000's, whilst also foreshadowing other developments regarding the possibility of a "documentary sculpture", a term which he forged to show the manner in which some of his sculptures, beyond their abstract appearance, send us back to existing objects. He says that "The documentary notion helps to specify the fact that the choices made are not just formal. The 'object' of reference 'loads' the sculpture with its history. (...) Choosing is finding the thing with which I want my work to have a relation⁵..."

As Schoenflies' models are based on the repetition of a modular form, he also saw in them the possible prolongation of an ambitious group of works which he developed over the past years, The Prismatics, which were created on the principal of permutation from one same shape, like in a construction game.

Incarnating these different preoccupations, the seven cherry wood sculptures which make up the series *The Schoenflies Family* precisely replicate,

on a larger scale, seven of the eleven German scientist's models, those which the artist considers to be the most "sculptural". The title of the exhibition and the use of Schoenflies', his wife's and his five children's names for each of the sculptures, invites us to perceive this collection as if we were getting to know the members of a family whilst paying attention to the to the "air" that unites them, but also to the traits that distinguish them. It's also a way for the artist to discreetly highlight the interest he holds for the biography of the characters his work has him come across.

Made especially for this exhibition, Christian Hidaka's paintings display a series of pictorial niches around the sculptures, freely inspired by similar paintings from art history, those that we find for example in the art of the Trecento and Quattrocento, in artists such as Taddeo Gaddi and Antonello da Messina or in certain studioli: these spaces destined for study which foreshadowed the rise of curiosity cabinets in the following centuries. In its most illustrated manifestations, notably in Urbino and Gubbio, the studiolo was completely covered in decors, in marquetry, representing, in an optical illusion, lines of niches or closets occupied by objects symbolising the arts and virtues - books, music scores, scientific objects, musical instruments, weapons etc. - like a "portrait (...) of the innermost conscience⁶" of their sponsor.

Should we see here the "portrait" of the sculptures composing *The Schoenflies Family*? Or a portrait in negative of the two artists? In the niches painted by Christian Hidaka objects are revealed which draw a constellation around the sculptures; a constellation of links, shapes, resonances, paths to follow. We find the regular polyhedra, a curious geometrical "sculpture" discovered in an engraved portrait of the goldsmith Wenzel Jamnitzer from Nurnberg, dating from the 16th Century and a reproduction of a Giorgio Morandi painting⁷ representing a niche in which simple shapes are displayed. Christian Hidaka recalled that this artist had been impressed

by the marquetry of Bologna's cathedral - an influence which without a doubt contributed to his quest for flatness - and for which he used a chromatic principal dating back to antiquity⁸, the tetrachrome palette, which we also find in Picasso's work⁹.

Prolonging Christian Hidaka's recent research on stage areas¹⁰, these niches adhere to different pictorial plans, like different layers of a set. Four of them protrude from walls decorated with geometrical motifs, directly inspired by painted mosaics that can be found in the Great Cloister of the Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore in Tuscany. On the longest wall, at the back of the exhibition space - in theatrical terms, one would speak of "upstage" - the three other niches display an exterior decoration which evokes by its construction and perspective, the manner of spatial representation characteristic of Early Renaissance art. Around Raphael Zarka's sculptures, a space thus unfolds that like the practices of the two artists, is a result of both the studiolo and the stage, study and representation, thought and form. The visitor is invited to enter. "The viewers' experience," says Hidaka, "is to walk into such a space whose 'owner' has vanished or perhaps never existed in the first place."

1 Richard Hamilton, *Schooling, Collected Words*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1983, quoted by Raphaël Zarka in the text written for the exhibition « Balanced Rock » by Christian Hidaka, Galerie Michel Rein, Paris, 2010.

2 *Houses at the Foot of a Mountain*, 2008.

3 Christian Hidaka, « Balanced Rock », Galerie Michel Rein, Paris, 2010.

4 Manufactured by Schoenflies in Göttingen, the models were put on sale from 1891, for teaching purposes.

5 Christophe Gallois, "Interview with Raphaël Zarka", *Raphaël Zarka*, Editions B42, Paris, 2012, p. 207-208.

6 Daniel Arasse, *Le Sujet dans le tableau. Essais d'icônographie analytique (The subject in the painting. Attempts at analytical iconography)*, Flammarion, Paris, 1997.

7 *Natura morta con palla*, 1918.

8 Appelle, Nicomaque or the painters who painted the portraits of Fayoum used this technique.

9 See on this subject, the speech entitled « Cubism and Non-Linearity », that Christian Hidaka held at the Picasso Museum, Paris 25th March 2015 for the conference « Revoir Picasso »

10 See notably his exhibition *Desert Stage*, presented at the Grand Café in Saint-Nazaire from May to September 2016, for which all of the elements which make up one of his paintings, *Trobairitz*, were re-used in the exhibition space.

The respective practices of Christian Hidaka, a painter, and Raphaël Zarka, a sculptor, are distinct; in broad terms, between image and form. What they share is an interest in the inventions of the mind. The connective tissue is the geometric impulse, which has been expressed in the applied and decorative arts for millennia across cultures and is “a primary expression of the shaping will,” as Dr. Willy Rotzler wrote in *Constructive Concepts*¹. Although the two artists met at the Winchester School of Art in England twenty years ago and maintained an ongoing dialogue, *Peter's Proscenium* is only their third full-scale project created together². Rather than a collaboration in the strict sense of a blended objective and singular message, the installation is a dialogue in which neither artist imposes form or images on the other. Zarka notes that Hidaka was “the architect of [their] ‘virtual’ or painted space” but there is a reciprocal spirit whether decisions are reached jointly or individually³.

A starting point for the artists' inquiry is the Alexandrian Hellenistic mathematician Euclid, who established the fundamental principles of geometry in the 3rd century BC, and which re-emerged in the zeitgeist of the European Renaissance. Zarka notes a key figure and primary source for his studies was the work of mathematician and Franciscan friar Luca Pacioli (c.1447–1517), who was an early collaborator with Leonardo da Vinci. During the 15th century, artists of the south, including Paolo Uccello, Piero della Francesca and Da Vinci, opened up the flood gates to the registration of deep space through the application of geometry and perspective. This was followed quickly in the Northern Renaissance by Netherlandish, Flemish and Dutch artists, and equally embraced and applied by a small legion of now underknown artist-craftsmen of Northern and Southern Europe⁴.

1 Willy Rotzler, *Constructive Concepts: A History of Constructive Art from Cubism to the Present* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977/1989),

2 The first collaborative exhibition was at Instants Chavirés, Montreuil, France in 2016; the second at MNAC Bucharest, Romania in 2018–2019, though the latter took the form of two consecutive solo shows where Zarka's sculptures were installed within an existing mural environment previously created by Hidaka.

3 Email to the author, 2 July 2019.

4 The term craftsman now has a pejorative tone – the

There are two specific and distinct references in the title *Peter's Proscenium*. One is to the obscure Augsburg stonemason- draughtsman Peter Halt (1575–after 1634). He revived Wenzel Jamnitzer's (1507/08–1585, active in Nuremberg and a preeminent goldsmith) foundational mid-16th century work on polyhedral geometric form and perspective. Halt published his book *Perspectivische Reiß Kunst* in 1625. The other departure point in conceptualizing the installation is a proscenium stage with an arched masonry top in the Koffler Gallery exhibition space that was brought to the artists' attention during a preliminary site visit. The stage, part of the original library space in the former Shaw Street Public School, is now hidden behind the new gallery wall.

Hidaka and Zarka, however, are not engaged in historical recovery, homage or privileging ideas, as they draw from copious source- inspirations that extend into the 20th century. Hidaka has an equal interest in the oblique perspective used in Chinese painting in contrast to the vanishing point perspective favoured in European painting. Theirs is a philosophical and metaphysical inquiry in the slippage between realisms as registrations of the external world, and the abstract workings of the mind. Without going down the Alice in Wonderland rabbit hole of what is reality, Hidaka and Zarka oscillate between form and image – what we know or believe to be true, and what is unknowable. Yet the knowable and unknowable co-exist, activating our engine of curiosity.

Hidaka and several assistants painted the Koffler Gallery exhibition walls from top to bottom over a three-week period as a mural of space within the space; a resonance rather than an obliterating transformation. While the original stage feature was interpreted as a proscenium window, it is us who are now on a stage, a fabulation through the architecture of the past, yet played subtly, without over-saturation or “immersive” strategies of spectacle. There is no beginning point, nor an insistent

“servant” of a “master” concept – but in the Renaissance artists and artisans were often poly- maths. Paradoxically, geometricism in the early modern period returned flat space to art in the evacuation of image for the non-objective.

“aboutness.” The visitor enters and explores the space; an experience of the experience, as each position and vista reveals something else, forms forming as a hall of mirrors without a literal reflection. We know this is the present through the untouched gallery elements: doors, structural steel, conduits and plumbing. We recognize the pictorial elements from the past, as they too continue to exist in present time in heritage and ruins. Painters of the Renaissance also “mixed temporalities” – including both elements from their own time and their “antiquity⁵.”

The colours used in the installation are primarily earth tones derived from natural pigments, as was the case prior to the advent of commercially produced and synthetic-based paints. An arched window with a view of woods in the background is painted on the far end wall; portals with a hint of colonnade beyond are painted on the flanking sides. A *trompe l'oeil* playfulness slightly undermined by the use of oblique perspective offers a door convincingly painted in proximity to a gallery exit door, yet it has no knob⁶. Three free-standing structures occupy the floor space as architectural supports, one for each of Zarka's geometric- polyhedron sculptures. The arched tops and angular elements of these supports echo the painted portals and planar geometric compositions in the murals. The “fourth” Zarka sculpture is represented as a painted image in the proscenium wall element. The installation includes six small Hidaka paintings, made with casein on MDF panels.⁷ Four were extant, and two finished on site.⁸ The studio works discreetly populate the mural walls and some serve

5 See Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, “Towards a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (September 2005): 403–415.

6 Hidaka's door is based on the door to artist Giorgio Morandi's (1890–1964) apartment in Bologna. The panel painting *Niche 1* is subtitled *Moran- di/Pacioli*, for the painter and Luca Pacioli.

7 Casein is a milk-protein based medium that has been used since antiquity.

8 *Niche II (Sima)* was painted for the artists' first collaborative exhibition in 2016. One of the six – yet to be finished (or perhaps never to be finished) – is based on a cloth element from Antonello da Messina's *St. Jerome in His Study*, c. 1474–1475 (collection of the National Gallery, London).

as relay signals for both the perspectival mural passages and painted pattern elements.

Zarka describes himself as a “documentary sculptor,” bringing dimensionality to analytical geometric forms that were drawn out as instructional concept diagrams from the late 15th to 17th centuries, or artisan-fabricated as wood inlay decorative panels and objects:

The documentary sculpture stems both from a formal curiosity and a historical or theoretical interest in objects that don't necessarily come from the world of art. Needless to say, the artist isn't held to any scientific rigour and the original context of the objects in question can be considered in a fragmentary, anachronistic or even [in a] frankly biased way. To use musical vocabulary, we could talk in terms of a “standard,” of returning to a “simple” structure that still allows for interpretation.⁹

When realized, even though derived from historical sources, Zarka's sculptures feel modern because they are, fundamentally, theoretical conceptual models. Similarly, some of Hidaka's painted elements have a modern quality; one source is a linear perspective modelling by 18th century British artist-architect Joshua Kirby, yet they also bring to mind the reductive compositions of early-20th-century Constructivism and De Stijl¹⁰. The world at large also offers food for thought. Hidaka states that he used brick patterns from passing observation for a section of wall painting to “set about materialising the possibilities” of an abstraction from the material world.¹¹ Zarka recounts an epiphany example for himself, when by chance he came across prototypes of a breakwater structure abandoned outside of Sète, a port city on the Mediterranean:

They immediately reminded me of the regular solids which Plato used to illustrate the perfection of the world and

9 Christophe Gallois, *The Shapes of Science - Interview with Raphaël Zarka* (Paris: Musée des arts et métiers, 2016)

10 Email to the author, 28 June 2019.

11 Ibid.

which...in the late sixteenth century, would be used by Johannes Kepler to describe the organization of the cosmos. I was intrigued how such a polyhedron could end up being incarnated in such an ordinary material as concrete, and how the functionalism of the late twentieth century had tried to make a place for it before preferring other forms less difficult to produce.¹²

Thinking through form and image, and colour...

Hidaka has spoken of his interest in Picasso's use of colour, which led him to "locate the key to his colour logic and realizing that it was derived from the ancient Greek tetrachromatikon, a colour mixing system that underpinned...classical European painting... until the Impressionists."¹³ Working with Hidaka compelled Zarka to consider painting his sculptures. He finally made the decision to do so in *Peter's Proscenium*, though not to amplify the abstract as most commonly done in the modern-contemporary period. Instead of using bold primary colours, he has painted with a clay tone (which appears to be clear wood from a distance), drawing colour inspiration from Roman and Greek stone ruins, roof and floor tiles in the south of France. The choice and application of natural colour creates a contemplative scenario. There is no vibrant red; nothing is black (what appears to be, is very dark brown). Contemplative attention is also generated through forms and images in Hidaka's panel paintings, while also contributing to the paradoxical. One example is a seemingly incongruent figurative image depicting the Hanging Man from the tarot. It has been interpreted as self-sacrifice rather than punishment-by-hanging, though there are contested readings: seeing and embracing a new perspective, as well as paying too much attention to a wasted effort. Tarot, which originated as a card game with regional- cultural differences, has also been used for the esoteric, fortune-telling and

divination. What secrets reside in the tarot figure, behind Hidaka's painting of a timber door, or in the dark woods painted beyond the proscenium?

... painting in, shadows, in space

When American artist Robert Irwin was faced with an awkward gallery moulding that threw shadows on his work, his purported solution was to paint them out so the shadows would disappear when viewed straight on.¹⁴ This is reversed in *Peter's Proscenium*; shadows have been painted in. While some are emphatic, as in the wall murals, Hidaka has also painted cast shadows for his panel paintings, on which the gallery track lighting creates real shadows in precise harmony with the painted ones. Shadows from the free-standing arched structures fall on the walls with the painted portals. Shadows upon shadows are in the realm of the metaphysical, what we cannot know or verify, as in the much-studied *Allegory of the Cave* by Plato. In one passage from *In Praise of Shadows* (1933), Jun'ichirō Tanizaki wrote:

I marvel at our [Japanese] comprehension of the secrets of shadows, our sensitive use of shadow and light. For the beauty of the alcove is not the work of some clever device. An empty space is marked off with plain wood and plain walls, so that the light drawn into it forms dim shadows within emptiness.¹⁵

Similarly, Okakura Kakuzō wrote of the Japanese tea room in 1906: "Even in the daytime, the light in the room is subdued... everything is sober in tint from the ceilings to the floor...It is not intended for posterity and is therefore ephemeral. Art, to be fully appreciated, must be true to contemporaneous life."¹⁶ Okakura is speaking of a space for con-

templation, in which tea is the "ceremonial beverage" for an experience of the mind. Likewise, the murals of Peter's Proscenium are only temporary, as they will be painted over at the conclusion of the exhibition.

There is no shortage of the fantastic in *Peter's Proscenium* to activate perceptual knowledge, embrace abstractions and the mimetic, and underscore the remarkable "instrument" that is the brain. Artists can take back art, leave its history to the historians, and redirect us to the secular miracle of thinking. As American engineer Vannevar Bush wrote in 1945: "The human mind... operates by association [wherein] the speed of action, the intricacy of trails, the detail of mental pictures, is awe-inspiring beyond all else in nature."¹⁷

¹² Christophe Gallois, *The Shapes of Science: Interview with Raphaël Zarka* (Paris: Musée des arts et métiers, 2016),

¹³ Christian Hidaka, "Cubism and non-Linearity" (Revoir Picasso symposium, Musée national Picasso-Paris, 25 March 2015),

¹⁴ Walter Hopps, *The Dream Colony, A Life in Art*, ed. Deborah Treisman (New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 183. This 1965 exhibition organized by Hopps was mounted at the (then) National Collection of Fine Arts, originally housed in the Natural History building of the Smithsonian.

¹⁵ Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows* (New Haven: Leete's Island Books, Inc., 1977),

¹⁶ Okakura Kakuzō, *The Book of Tea* (Rutland, Vermont & Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company,

1956; in order, from pages 63, 65, 67.

¹⁷ Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945

Over the past two decades since meeting at the Winchester School of Art, Christian Hidaka and Raphaël Zarka have been developing a distinctive practice, which—beyond the individual technique and subject matter—is fueled by the discussions the two artists have been maintaining around the notion and the possibilities of art in the 21st century.

Christian Hidaka is a painter with a rigorous studio practice who—in the manner of a theatre director bearing an overarching vision—is working both as a scene setter and a script writer for artworks. Raphaël Zarka defines himself primarily as sculptor, yet uses the medium of drawing, photography, film or essay like a performer of interchangeable languages. Taking on different forms, their incessant conceptual partnership has led to a synergy of reflections centered around significant questions of representation in the crossed traditions of art history, cultural theory, philosophy and science.

Driven by their interest in spatial investigations, the evolution of perspective and processes of geometric construction, Hidaka and Zarka make use of a particular sense of historical duration as well as a certain “sartorial” approach whereby different imaginative materials are stitched together and divergent layers of time are traversed in their synchronicity. Together, the artists address an infinitely subtle, yet consistently articulated universe of objects and mindscapes that seem to unveil the secrets enciphered within the hidden history of visibility. If Christian Hidaka is scrutinizing the interstices between theatre, painting and mnemonics with their respective spaces of expression; Raphaël Zarka is undertaking an extensive formal research on the threshold of mathematical discoveries and artistic invention.

Over the years, their creative friendship has evolved from exchanges of ideas through various stages of independent work and into full-scale artistic collaborations. After Christian Hidaka had realized a number of paintings at Raphaël Zarka’s instigation¹, in 2016 their ongoing conversation found its first

tangible expression at the Instants Chavirés space in Montreuil. Entitled *La Famille Schoenflies*, the exhibition was a large-scale environment combining murals and integrated paintings by Hidaka with a series of sculptural objects by Zarka, developed around the representational and early scientific history of the polyhedron as seen through the geometric modules created by the enlightened crystallographer Arthur Moritz Schoenflies.

Out of this common reservoir of visual syntax and concerns grew—between November 2018 and August 2019—the intertwining solo-shows at the Museum for Contemporary Art in Bucharest. As a result of the artists’ most ambitious collaboration to that date, the exhibitions *Unhooked a Star* and *Gnomonica* took the form of a two-sided diptych dialectically dissolving the *leitmotifs* which had long accompanied each author’s work into a unique spatial construct that kept morphing over the course of a year, investing the gallery in its entirety. “We are both fascinated by different aspects of geometry; generally speaking, for me it is the geometrical rendering of pictorial space and for Raphaël the geometry of objects. Being predominantly sculptural, Raphaël’s process offered itself to me in terms of translating it to a painting process. I hope this [duo] exhibition will show an interlacing of two sides of the same coin: the examination of geometric space and form from our perspectives as a sculptor and a painter, both through a very formal approach—with Raphaël—and with me through one that uses visual narrative”, wrote Christian Hidaka in February 2018.

If up to that point in their mutual history the artists’ collaborative process had always started from the sculpted medium and progressed towards the painted environment, this time it was Hidaka who initiated the dialogue. Like a true architect of images, the artist chose to go beyond conventions of the modernist idiom, reinventing the possibilities of exhibition-making anew. With diverse forms of expression merged into a vast three-dimensional painting, Hidaka was giving full body to an entire life-size world that the visitor was invited to enter. Notions of reality and illusion, absolute and constructed truth came under attack as pictorial objects were adhering to different architectural planes, like the mounted layers of a set. The

overwhelming sensorial experience enabled by *Unhooked a Star* undeniably became, for an image-maker like Hidaka, an ode to the compelling power of painting as an exercise of thought, in an era when artificially generated images are oftentimes privileged over the materiality of art.

Gnomonica (an allusion to a specific genre of astronomical treaties) was Raphaël Zarka’s response to the project of his friend. The landscaped patio created by Christian Hidaka’s murals now served as a framework for a plurality of conceptual pathways to unfold and intertextual depths to thrive. As Raphaël Zarka was working through accumulations of volumes and matter in order to tackle intriguing geometric compositions, time itself became the backbone of the exhibition. Like a living organism, the open skylight enveloping the gallery was allowing for the movements of the sun to pierce the contours of the works, slowly breathing through the space

as an all-encompassing sundial echoing the artist’s own reflection on time and memory. Caught in this constellated scenery of shadow play and reverie, the viewer was being transported towards that deep level of perception that connects meaning to the senses and the mysteries of knowledge to the cadence of the world.

With the gallery emerging in turn as an expanded virtual stage set, a studiolo and a suspended agora of sculptures, the artists managed to devise a multiverse of visual confrontation that propels a novel understanding of representation as a generative force within the bounds of immersive artistic practices.

¹ *Houses at the Foot of a Mountain* (2008) and *After Kirby (with Raphaël Zarka)* (2017)—included in both projects at MNAC Bucharest; as well as backdrops of wall painting for sculptures featured in group shows.

With a fascination for the history of pictorial space and the evolution of representational methods, British-Japanese artist Christian Hidaka produces enigmatic images. His complex mental landscapes are animated by an intimate associative logic through which disparate temporalities and spatial structures collide in the quest for new pictorial forms. In recent work, the artist's interest for perspective and figurative language were joined by a reflection on theatre and the art of memory, which Hidaka develops both in the realm of picture planes and beyond the physical margins of the pictorial frame.

The project *Unhooked a Star* further delves into the analogy between painting and the stage, advancing a theatrical exploration of the space that turns the white cube into an immersive tableau. By placing the architecture at the core of his artistic process, Christian Hidaka conceives the exhibition as an autonomous medium: a coherent, conceptually consistent object in which a large-scale fresco secco and constellations of integrated paintings respond to one another in a multi-layered network of references, symbols and geometric motifs, all multiplied as through a carefully staged mirror effect. Bearing the mark of the artist's personal memory, the project offers—alongside Hidaka's own imaginary constructs—an incursion into the history of art and ideas spanning from the Italian Renaissance and British cultural space to Picasso's legacy and the contemporary aesthetics of virtual spaces in digital culture.

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Using the gallery walls as if they were a blue screen, the artist explores new ways of understanding and creating space, thereby expanding the fictionality of his imagescapes onto the physical coordinates of the space. To this end, Hidaka takes *Players*—a painted collage of Italianate structures and performing characters—as a conceptual base for the mural design in order to deploy its components outwards, similar to the fabric of a scenic décor. Monumental architectural equations downscaled to fit human proportions—colonnades, arcades and *trompe l'oeil* niches—alternate planes of different depths; designing a space *beyond* space that doesn't hesitate to emphasize its aesthetic slight-of-hand and rigorously crafted illusionism.

Within this meta-pictorial dimension—at the crossroads between theatrical scenery and virtual environment—the allusions to the materiality of Piero della Francesca's marble plates and Henri Matisse's pure black coexist with Fra Angelico's still lifes and the flattened, vibrant optics of early video games in an all-surrounding continuum. Christian Hidaka renders the history of visibility with intuition; through leaps and hyperlinks granting transversal access to a multiplicity of overlapping moments that lay encoded within the folds of the space. In this imponderable montage, the frescoed membrane reveals itself both as connective tissue and a refined pictorial device with narrative potential.

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In his work, the artist addresses fundamental questions pertaining to the archeology of pictorial form. By analyzing—through a twofold movement—the *mise en scène* of painting as a *mise en scène* of the stage, Christian Hidaka traces back the aesthetic origins of Ancient classical scenography when perspective emerged as the privileged optical means for conveying reality. On this backdrop, the artist opens up a visual script which debates on the nature of painting's relationship with theatre, following the transformations of pictorial order from the Euclidian space up to its dissolution through the cubistic idiom.

Surrounded by a frieze of suspended castellations, a series of three depictions of deserted stages (*Stage I, Stage II, Stage III*) introduce the exhibition, reuniting issues of geometry with theatrical modes of representation through the lens of mnemonic arts. Hidaka's paintings are reproductions after the engravings published in *Utriusque Cosmi... Historia* (1617-21)—the work of hermetic philosopher Robert Fludd who first presented Vitruvius' and Euclid's principles to English speakers; and, consequently, the scientific dimension of one-point perspective to the construction of pictorial space. Neglected by art historians in their respective discourses around perspective, the engravings suggest a mnemonic “machine”—mirror of both universe and mind—potent enough to perceive and objectify the mystical communication channels between the micro- and the macrocosm. As with other classical and Renaissance practitioners, the

cultivation of artificial memory within Fludd's memory system resulted from the union between mnemonics (the performative practice of recollection) and theatre (the preferred vehicle for material visualization). The association of striking mental images (*imagines agentes*) with a fixed spatial arrangement (*loci*) was meant to produce an abstract edifice for organizing knowledge whose key was owned solely by its author. However, what distinguishes Fludd's memory theatre is the external position of the fictional author with regards to the stage: void of any predetermined content, the images reveal a provisionality that turns them into (inter)active means for constructing the viewer's imagination. Highly peculiar in the history of images and memory alike, these representations resonate with the visual syntax of early computer imagery and—to a certain extent—take on the role of basic virtual technologies.

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For Christian Hidaka, the art of memory is an “image generator”—a creative device which defines his own practice. By referencing Fludd's method in the preamble of the exhibition, the artist introduces a series of paintings which use the coordinates of theatrical space as a mind mapping tool for unfolding his own imaginary spaces. In this mnemonic web, each image becomes a *talisman*; a receptacle for an assemblage of emblematic places and figures whose symbolism remains impenetrable. Deepening the affinity with the art of memory even further, Hidaka forges his mindscapes through an intricate synthetic process which distills carefully considered historical sources in pursuit of innovations towards a new pictorial approach.

In the painting *Unhooked a Star* we find the protagonist echoing the posture of a minor figure found in Giotto's fresco *The Entry into Jerusalem*, reminding us of the narrative fluidity preceding the formalization of space through linear perspective. Masaccio's contribution to the geometrization of representation is evoked in *Players* through a retake of his famous self-portrait from the Brancacci Chapel—in this new version ambiguously depicted in a Moroccan djellaba. Departing from the Italian Quattrocento and the enclosed spatiality found in many of the “box”-type environments, such as *The Martyrdom of Saint Lucy* by Domenico Veneziano, and the advanced perspectival illusion

of Sabbioneta's Teatro all'Antica (which is recalled in *Scene with Clown and Bear*), Hidaka then projects us straight towards the radical emergence of the theatre play *Parade* in 1917. Through the confluence of dance, music and visual arts, Les Ballets Russes brought together Jean Cocteau, Eric Satie and Pablo Picasso towards a new form of avant-garde *gesamtkunstwerk*. Haunted by the world of spectacle throughout his entire oeuvre, for this first scenographic work Picasso chooses to juxtapose painting with sculpture by means of Synthetic Cubism in the treatment of the costumes, and to apply a more naturalistic, neoclassical style for the scenery designed for the drop curtain of the play.

For Christian Hidaka, this pivotal reference—a symptomatic moment of confrontation between painting and theatrical space—becomes a milestone and a metaphor for the “closing of the curtain” down on Cubism's revolutionary moment. By isolating and importing the contents of Cubism within his work, the artist aims to observe why it imploded along the trajectories of photorealism and expressionism. His answer offered to painting's current impasse is a fusion of two cultural traditions merged together in what the artist calls an “Eurasian” mode of crafting images: a hybrid spatial structure combining the *chiaroscuro* technique of Western tradition with the oblique perspective of Asian art.

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With a devouring impulse, Hidaka thus absorbs the iconography of Picasso's *Curtain* in his work: addressing the question of post-cubistic image construction, he populates his spaces with acrobats, dancers and harlequins; volumetrically projecting fragments of décor, he objectifies painting in line with the future ready-made. The characters in *Indian Rope* and *Harlequin with Green Fans* become *doppelgängers* from the play, whereas single pictorial elements such as *the Ladder*, *Pixel Fire*, *Inigo Jones Clock* and *Celestial Ball* seem to partially recompose Picasso's stage set, revealing themselves both as theatrical props and artworks in their own right. Emphasizing their role as immersive story telling devices, Christian Hidaka playfully reflects on the nature of painting, as if aiming to conceptually reconstruct his own contemporary version of *Parade*.

As a final stratum of décor we discover the poet Guillaume Apollinaire—the legendary figure orbiting between Symbolism’s echoes and Surrealism’s break. As was the case with other modernists, it is the intellectual proximity to his poems that had fueled Picasso’s repertoire with the theatrics of pictorial space. In order to convey his role its full meaning, Hidaka portrays him as a *Pagan Wizard*, turning his gaze back to a famous sketch that Picasso dedicated to the poet in 1905.

Just across the space, and in direct contact with this figure, we find the painting of *Unhooked a Star*—yet another hidden homage to Apollinaire. The work inspiring the title of the exhibition is nourished by the diffuse atmosphere of the poem *Crépuscule* (1913), whose initial version—*Spectacle*—had been addressed to Picasso after their first encounter. Following a chain of magical events unravelling between the arm of a girl and the gaze of a hanged man, *a star has been unhooked*, inviting the idea of time and space being dissolved as a potentiality and a scenario for an unknown future.

Above all else, Raphaël Zarka is a collector of ideas and an archeologist of forms. The organic interchange of art and science is key to his adventure of knowledge residing in the notion of permanence and the “survival of forms” as a creative resource and *modus operandi*. Driven by his intimate relationship with geometrical abstraction and scientific methods of visual representation, Raphaël has systematically turned his gaze towards a repertoire of structures that derive from a progressive sedimentation of personal (re)discoveries and historical influences.

The second chapter of a dialogically conceived exhibition format, Zarka’s project feeds off the conceptual partnership with British painter Christian Hidaka and confronts the two artists’ seminal research themes within an immersive spatial construct. In direct resonance with the mural tableau previously developed by Christian Hidaka for *Unhooked a Star*, Raphaël’s oeuvre opens up towards a new field of potentialities and personal mythologies.

Taking the shape of a post-Renaissance study chamber, *Gnomonica* reunites a collection of axonometric exercises with quasi-totemic objects in a delicate web of correspondences that link aspects of artistic rendering to mathematical inquiries, techniques of geometric rationalization and early astronomical models drawn together as tools for measuring time and encompassing the world.

On one side a solo project in its own right, the exhibition *Gnomonica* represents the most ambitious artistic collaboration between Christian Hidaka and Raphaël Zarka to this date; uniting the leitmotives that have long accompanied both author’s works inside one eclectic environment which invests the gallery space in its entirety. The corpus of mural painting which was especially conceived by Hidaka for the first part of the exhibition narrative (*Unhooked a Star*) is being absorbed by Zarka as an architectural framework used to lay out a new body of “players”. Onto this background, the correlation of painting with drawing and sculpture reveals a particular form of progression; from two-dimensional space to volumes realized into space, the exhibition opens up towards a multitude of sensorial experiences and games of perception.

The Italianate scenography becomes the common denominator of the uninterrupted dialogue the two artists have been having around the genealogy of forms and the (de)construction of Euclidian space - in direct contact with a whole array of historical periods and intellectual horizons. In order to highlight the dialectical nature of the projects, Raphaël Zarka further integrates two paintings by Christian Hidaka - *Inigo Jones Clock* and *After Kirby (with Raphaël Zarka)* - and inserts the topos of time and cultural memory alongside that of the geometric investigation into the spatial fabric of the exhibition. “We both are fascinated by different aspects of geometry; generally speaking for me it is the geometrical rendering of pictorial space and for Raphaël the geometry of objects. Being predominantly sculptural, Raphaël’s process offered itself to me in terms of translating it to a painting process. I hope this exhibition will show an intertwining of two sides of the same coin: from our perspectives as a sculptor and a painter, the examination of geometrical space and form both through a very formal approach (with Raphaël) and with me through one that uses visual narrative” (Christian Hidaka, February 2018).

Not coincidentally, *After Kirby* - a piece which explicitly stemmed from an invitation Raphaël launched to his painter friend - serves as a key towards the understanding of *Gnomonica*’s exhibitional construct. Set in a romantic landscape, an array of diverse polyhedra silently dominate the foreground, unveiling a fictional monument turned into pure optical-geometrical exercise. At heart a retake of an engraving - found in a mid 18th century treaty on linear perspective by English painter John Joshua Kirby (*Dr. Brook Taylor’s Method of Perspective Made Easy, Both in Theory and Practice*) - it’s brought to life through color by Hidaka and concludes into bringing to fore the constellation of resources which Zarka calls upon.

Using a documentarian’s methodology, the artist enters a deeply affectionate conversation with the tangential fields of art, drawing a diffused narrative where the heroes of modernity walk side by side with obscured figures from the history of forms. Zarka’s work is inhabited by Brâncuși, Carl Andre, Tony Smith or Sol LeWitt in as much as it displays the ideatic traces of Luca Pacioli, Peter Halt, Ambroise

Bachot, Arthur Schoenflies, Abraham Sharp - mathematicians, engineers and astronomers of the 16th - 19th century. Through this transversal approach Zarka creates a journey through the scientific imaginarium and its representational history that finds itself refined, rigorous and sensual at the same time. “It is almost an insult to the mysteries of the world to think that we could invent anything or that we needed to invent anything”; this quote from an interview by Luis Borgès has long become the artist’s motto.

At the core of his portfolio of aesthetic studies lies the *rhombicuboctahedron*; a semi-regular Archimedean solid whose recurrences, function and enigmatic reverberations have been examined by the artist throughout time and across disciplines by means of an ever-growing network of associations. This intriguing solid composed of 26 facets - of which 18 square and 8 triangular - has been consistently resurfacing in Raphaël Zarka’s oeuvre and led over time to an array of collected images and appropriated objects with similar geometric lines and structure.

Symptomatic for this stance of the artist as curator-of-forms is the ongoing work *Catalogue raisonné of the rhombicuboctaedra*. Reminiscent of a *Warburgian* atlas, the work traces back the origins and explores the evolution of the “rhombi”-migrations through a crystallization of visual materials that connect formal purity with aspects of usage and the history of art with fields of engineering and contemporary pop. From ancient sundials and Renaissance treaties on perspective (like da Vinci’s illustrations in Luca Pacioli’s *De Divina Proportione*) to *Deco Crystal* Philips light bulbs or the National Library of Belarus in Minsk (the largest man-made rhombicuboctahedron in the world), the *Catalogue raisonné* implies a progressive and self-referential trajectory that relentlessly fuels the artist’s oeuvre from within.

For Zarka recording, replicating, re-using and re-constructing defines a thinking structure that is drawn on pre-existing cultural forms, yet ultimately implies a transformative operation which inserts itself into a chain of material conversions, consuming one manifestation in order to give birth to another. In his passionate and uncompromising approach to images, Raphaël oftentimes translates

the two-dimensional abstractions into material incarnations or onto their digitally processed afterlives.

Sharp’s Omission and the pair of *The Third Man* sculptures are part of the conceptual category of “reconstructions”. In the first case Zarka has incised a massive block of wood with a network of pyrograved lines. The minimalistic lexicon retraces a complex mathematical procedure which British astronomer Abraham Sharp proposed for the construction of semi-regular polyhedra in his treaties *Geometry Improved* (1718). As the result of an applied research, Zarka verifies his theories, transferring them from the space of virtuality into three-dimensional space. In *The Third Man* the investigation of pictorial space as a platform for sculptural production entails an associative logic whereby carefully delineated strands of inspiration are condensed in new arrangements. The archeological impulse goes hand in hand with the visual ecology promoted by the artist’s aesthetic approach to sculpture, linking early geometric art to Modernism and post-Minimalism. In Jacopo de’Barbari 1495 portrait of Luca Pacioli (the author of *The Divine Proportion*) we encounter the remarkable depiction of a suspended rhombicuboctahedron half-filled with water. Sculpturally reinterpreting the “third character” in the painting, Zarka seats two different glass Archimedean solids on a multilayered plinth, applying the system of geometric deduction observed in the study of Peter Halt’s illustrations - an enlightened craftsman and mathematician of 17th century Germany.

In the newly produced series entitled *Translating Halt*, the artist continues to interrogate the possibilities of sculpture within the two-dimensional space embedded in drawing. Of great importance to the development of perspective and the science of optics, the drawings from *Perspectivische allen Bawleuten dienende Reißkunst* (1625) presented speculative geometric configurations generated through combinations of polyhedral modules. As a true collector of forms, Zarka conceptualizes Halt’s illustrations as “virtual”, unrealized sculptures. This potentiality is grasped by the artist who imbues them with new life; transferring them from one system of representation into another: from the field of linear perspective into that of isometry.

The same subtle operation is encountered in the two *Studies for Sundial*, in which Raphaël Zarka reinvents existing monuments and archival material through axonometric projections rendered in coloured ink. Sundial n°1 embodies a direct quotation to an engraving rendered by Ambroise Bachot (a French engineer known for the treatise *Le Timon*, 1587) – a rare volume found at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris. The second *Sundial* – and its sculptural pendant *Lavaur* – derives from a highly unusual archeological piece classified by the Musée du Pays Vaurais as one of the most developed specimens in the family of polyhedral sundials discovered on French territory.

Since 2018 the artist has been working towards an ambitious sculptural project exploring the massive sundial constructions of 17th and 18th century Scotland. Bearing a unique character in the history of gnomonics, the Scottish sundial forging technique led to a striking development both in the design and in the art of applied mathematics. Determined by advanced geometric equations, the monuments reveal themselves as time-telling astronomical devices intertwining scientific functions with magical symbolism and enhanced aesthetic flair. A stylistically reductive version of this new group of works is *Mynle and Cye*: an ingenious montage synthesizing four structural pillars which the artist borrowed from the obelisk typology instilled by sundial master mason John Mylne for the local pleasure gardens.

Rounding up the collection of replicas on display, the sculpture *Mount Melville* towers within the viewer's gaze with a refined and mysterious elegance. Commanding the inventiveness and erudition of a humanist, Raphaël Zarka reflects upon the purity and ambiguity of forms. Inside this timeless mental landscape of silent study and contemplation it becomes apparent the "rhombi's" latest embodiment; unchained from its representative function and transformed into a supreme example of formal vigor: a vessel containing the promise of enlightenment through light and ombres.

Christian Hidaka was born in 1977 in Noda, Japan and currently lives and works in London, UK. He studied Fine Art at Winchester School of Art, UK and the Royal Academy Schools, London, UK. Hidaka's paintings have been widely exhibited internationally, including solo and group shows at MNAC Bucharest (Romania), MAK Vienna (Austria), CAC Le Grand Café (St. Nazaire, France), Synagogue de Delme (France), MUDAM (Luxembourg), Torrance Art Museum (USA), The Weisman Art Museum (Minneapolis, USA), The Goss-Michael Foundation (Dallas, USA), Le Consortium (Dijon, France) and Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (Germany). His work is in numerous collections, including Centre National d'Art Plastique (Paris, France), MUDAM Collection (Luxembourg), The Israel Museum (Jerusalem), The Saatchi Gallery (London, UK), Sigg Collection (Switzerland), and many others.

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