

## Mustapha Azeroual: Observation and experimentation.

*And at the start of it all, there was light, there was colour, there was form*

Much of Mustapha Azeroual's work rests in the poetic space between opposites. Indeed, Azeroual works in a way that is at once representational and abstract, technical and organic, deliberate and accidental, and referential and forward thinking. Simultaneously activating dichotomies in both method and concept, the artist has succeeded in developing a photographic practise that deeply satisfies aesthetically and technically.

Azeroual trained as a scientist, and therefore he brings into his art practise an approach to image making that is substantially based in observation and experimentation. Much of his work gives the impression of being born out of scientific method, one that involves careful measures, planning, testing, and the formulation of theories and hypotheses that will likely inform a next approach. Tracing the artist's work since 2010, for example, shows how ideas are experimented with, new life is breathed into traditional methods, and elements from one project are carried, in new form, into the next. The result is a methodological and aesthetic evolution that fluidly permeates the artist's total oeuvre.

One very obvious point can be made about Mustapha Azeroual as a photographer: nature, and most distinctly considerations of light, colour, and form, are nearly always at the point of creative departure. Earlier series, such as *Variations*, 2012, focus on deconstructing the photographic image - reducing it to its most essential natural elements of colour, value, and degree of lightness and darkness. In *Variations*, the process of deconstruction is not

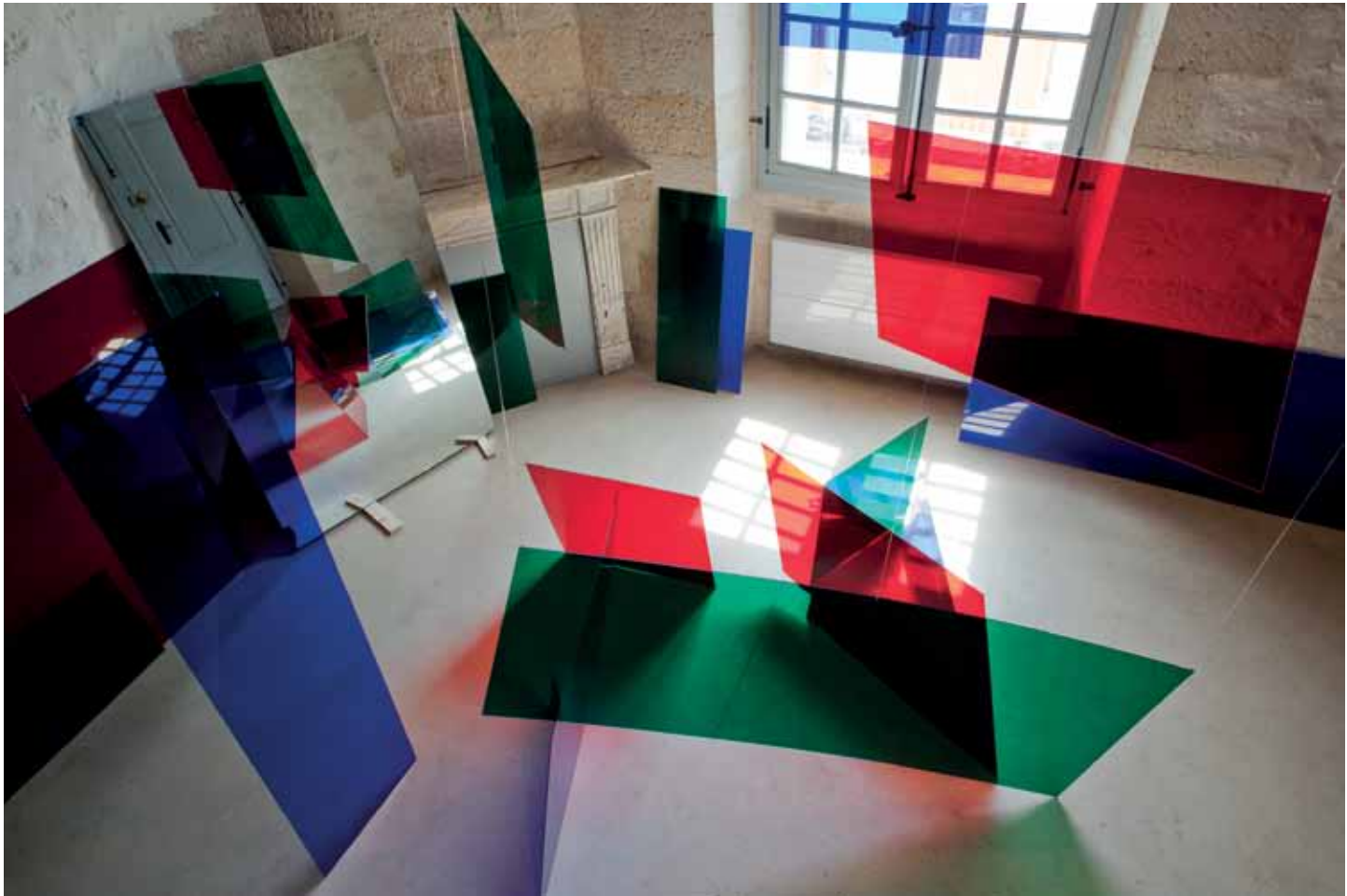
only technical and theoretical, but physical as well; the piece is actually not a conventional image, but rather an installation of large colourful sheets of translucent acrylic forming a landscape one can physically move through. The work presents the concept of an image as a environment, and as such, the visual landscape is subject to change with the passing of time, and the movements of the individual experiencing it.

As one passes through the installation and shifts positions, colourful surfaces that once stood alone become suddenly layered in the spectator's frame of vision, and new shadows and highlights are cast where before there were none. Thus, the image, or visual landscape, is altered and experienced differently for each spectator. On the one hand, *Variations* as a photography work is conventional in its reference to landscape, colour, and shadow. However the physical and theoretical dissection of the photograph, and the process of experiencing an image as an enveloping environment, is fresh and revealing of the artist's scientific method.

Some of these same themes are carried into Azeroual's later projects, where they enter new evolutionary territory. Experimentations in the form and function of the image are maybe most palpable in the extensive series entitled *Résurgences*, 2010-2015, where the artist dramatically plays with the deconstruction of pictures, both physically and visually. Beginning with the motif of the tree as a subject of collective memory, Azeroual investigates the effects of appropriation and fragmentation on

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our ability to remember, or recognize, an image. The artist begins with traditional printing and shooting techniques, such as using pinholes and gum bichromate, to distort the image by stretching its exposure over time. This approach allows Azeroual to augment the image in stages, abstracting it with light streaks and shadows, and producing the effect of a multiplicity of viewpoints - similar to in cubism. The series then sees these images physically dissected and rearranged on multiple planes. *Arbre #1*, (2011 - 2015) for example, is a large-scale mobile that suspends from the ceiling, composed of 200



porcelain plates, each printed with an incomplete image of a tree. The mobile appears first as a sculpture rather than an image; it is three dimensional - a mock landscape to be experienced with the entirety of the body, and not solely with the eyes. However there is room for pictorial interpretation, as the mobile is not static, but rather is subject to change with subtle shifts in air flow and spectator behavior. With *Résurgences*, Azeroual takes this investigation into the properties of the image even further, eventually printing on three dimensional porcelain objects whose planes avoid being viewed all at once, due to the geometric structure of their forms.

Azeroual's interest in how images are created and interpreted has also inspired a number of works where the artist relinquishes control in the photographic process, rather than the very deliberate interception with images we see in other projects. The *Radiance* series, 2016, for instance, is based on a process for recording colours. The project is inspired by the idea that an artist has limited control over the colours that are recorded and restored while producing photographic positives. To create the *Radiance* series, Azeroual uses a camera to capture colour variations during sunrise and sunset, printing these colour patterns according to the proportions of a landscape where the general idea

of a horizon line - a suggested delineation between the heavens and the earth - is found in the gradations of hues. The final images are derived from purely photographic colours that exist nowhere else apart from the surface of the photosensitive film. Because these colour fields are photographically unique, each viewer may experience them differently. Additionally, each work in the series is printed using lenticular technology. This printing procedure gives the images an illusion of depth that further causes them to change in appearance depending on the position of the viewer. Here again we see how Azeroual is devoted to understanding the nature of the photographic image as not singular, but plural and multifaceted. *Radiance* demonstrates how photography is at once mechanical and natural, and while a photograph may be produced in a vacuum-like context, it can always be formally traced back to nature, memory and subjectivity.

Mustapha Azeroual's visual language is one formed from a unique hybridization of scientific and artistic vocabularies. Highly formal yet refreshingly experimental, Azeroual's work is a beautiful example of how old technologies are revitalised in modern contexts, and deep conceptual investigations find form in aesthetically exquisite ways.

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From the series *Résurgences #1* (2010)

Monochromatic gum bichromate print 52 x 42cm

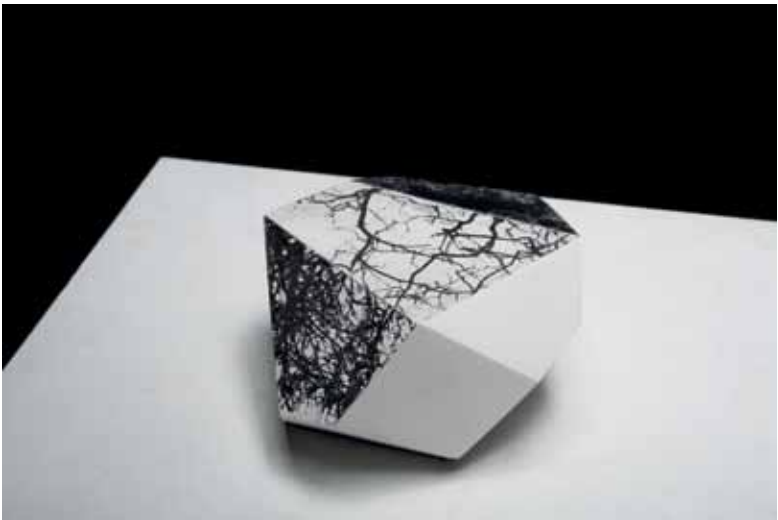




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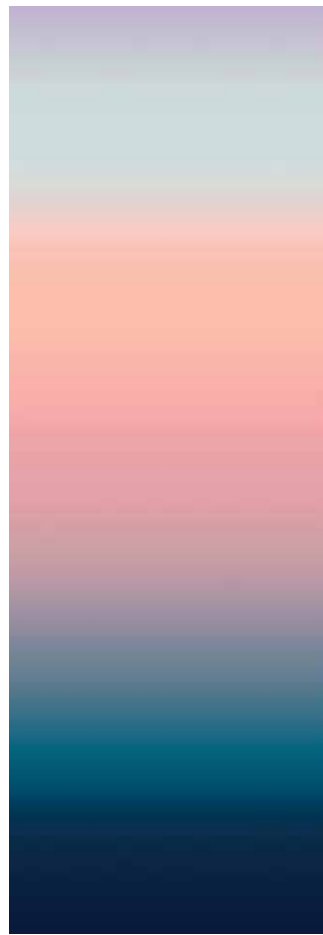
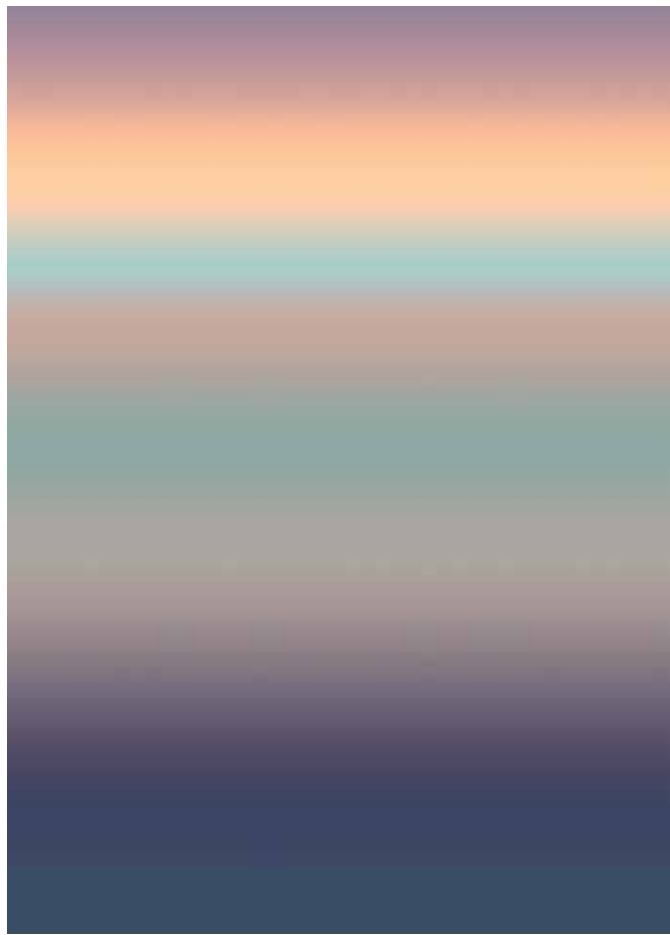
From the series *Résurgences* (2011-15) *Installation Arbre # 1* composed of 200 porcelain plates supports of gum bichromate prints, 150 x 150 x 300 cm

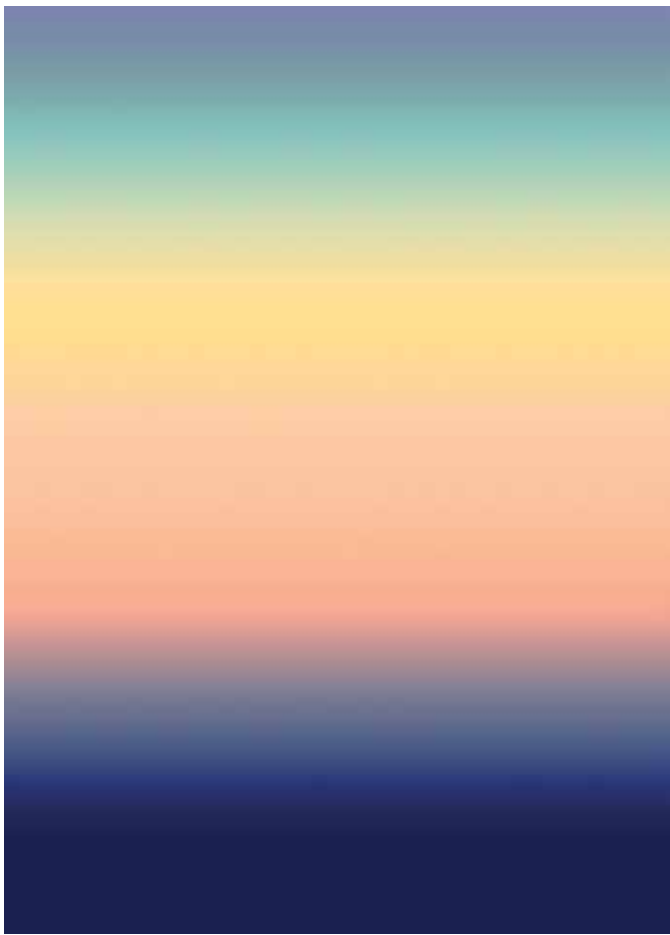




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From the series *Radiance #5* (2016) UV print on lenticular support 170 x 120 cm







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From the series *Radiance #4* (2016) Trichrome gum bichromate prints 38 x 58 cm (each)



