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*Jonas Žakaitis investigates the  
artist's relationship with logic,  
myth and the gaps between the two*

**ONE:** Some thinkers are judged not for the correctness of their reasoning, but solely for the effects of their thoughts. Philosophers and detectives are the best examples. A philosopher, rather than a detective, is the subject of this writing, but I will start with the latter anyway. The very first snoop, Voltaire's titular protagonist Zadig, gets into trouble because his reasoning obviously produces truth. Yet his logic is mysterious. In the beginning of his adventures, after running into a host of desperate hunters in search of the Royal family's missing animals, Zadig manages to describe these creatures in great detail without ever seeing them. Of course, his uncanny depiction causes his own imprisonment, since how could anyone know exactly what the King's horse looks like without having seen it before? The common man does not understand that Zadig simply reads the signs of nature. But what then are these signs? A heap of fallen leaves that Zadig links with the horse's back; a patch in the sand which signifies the presence of a dog. This kind of logic is outrageous and refuses to follow common sense. Where people see a stone, Zadig encounters an idea; while they look at a leaf, Zadig reads it as a letter. He opens a 'black hole' in the existing structure of reason. His thinking works, but at the same time it is completely illegitimate. The inferences make sense, but they seem to be deduced from God knows where.

Zadig's legacy is continued by Edgar Allen Poe's recurring character Auguste Dupin, who develops something akin to a general theory of detective reason. The main postulate of this theory is that a true detective is allowed to do just about anything to discover (or create) the 'plane of sense' and to grasp how the effects of truth and meaning are generated. Just like Zadig, a real snoop does not merely follow the signs. First of all, he has to decide what is to be treated as a sign and where do signs come from. And here starts the abyss. A detective's mind can be compared to a well-functioning space satellite, floating outside the solar system, and making perfect



sense without having any coordinates. For a snoop (and for a philosopher at that, and maybe also a psychoanalyst) there can be no guidebook on reading signs. Nor is there a chance to rely upon a preexisting structure of meaning. All these things are always established in the process – a bizarre process.

**TWO:** When you enter an exhibition by Benoît Maire, everything makes sense right away. There is something immediately recognisable in all the pieces displayed. Here is a typical museum vitrine with a couple of well-worn shoes inside, there hangs an abstract painting, on the side sits a bronze sculpture and several iron plates with repetitive 'pop art' styled prints. There are also some furniture and books in the middle. Everything is displayed almost impersonally, only for the sake of precise demonstration. The distances between all these objects and their display feels very natural, suggesting some kind of a common background. No unexpected confrontations, no paradoxes, no tricks.

What are these works then? First, there is 'Head of Medusa', 2008-2009, a work comprising of a roughly made bronze head and an abstract canvas suspended from the ceiling. Both elements seem to represent Medusa, the mythical Gorgon that turns into stone whoever dares look at her face. This 'black sun of death', as classicist Jean-Pierre Vernant named her, is an enigma of Western imagination – something that is outside of experience, yet has a forceful existence of a mysterious kind. Medusa is the unbearable truth that can only enter human consciousness as a representation. When Perseus, the messenger of civilisation, attempted to fight this Gorgon, he had to look at her reflection in his shield – this was his trick to avoid facing Medusa and to still know where to

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direct the sword. But looking at Benoît Maire's work another thing comes to mind: there must have been a curious moment when Medusa caught a glimpse of her own face in the screen of Perseus' shield. A loop must have happened then; a void faced itself through its own image. A 'threshold-image' in a way, coming as close to its own source as possible, but at the same time almost disintegrating. I guess this is what is happening between the sculpture and the painting in the exhibition – each is simultaneously the source and the mask of the other. A true loop of echoes.

A few steps away, the artist sits in front of an empty chair, waiting for a visitor to sit on it. As soon as this happens, Maire takes one of the books lying around (all of them have the word 'Medusa' in their titles), rips out a page and starts drawing the head of a person facing him. This performance, entitled 'Drawing Attention', 2008-2009, is curiously uncomfortable. Maire does not look at the drawing. Throughout the process he only stares at the subject in front of him without blinking and without showing any emotion. The movement of his hand is spasmodic and intense. After a while the visitor realises that Maire's hand reacts to the movements of the subject – every squirm, every twitch produces a sudden line. Maire is not a person anymore, he is a drawing machine. And the human being in front of him is caught in a trap: a police trap or a psychoanalytical trap. In both instances it is impossible to 'act natural', every statement and every movement is read as a symptom. A psychoanalyst is always paradoxically deaf-blind to his patient – he does not hear what the latter wants to say, only what is 'actually' being said (i.e. what the patient's words mean in terms of her neurosis). Just as in 'Head of Medusa' there is an interplay





Previous page: 'Tête de Méduse', 2009, bronze sculpture, oil painting

Left: 'Prolegomènes à toute image pliée (Introduction to all folded images)', 2009, screenprints on zinc sheets

Right: 'The History of Geometry No. 3', 2009, women's shoes, alabaster

between two voids: the artist-analyst who becomes an automaton of representation, and the viewer-analysand who is distanced from his or her own image.

Then there are some more heads in the exhibition. This time you see images of classical Greek busts, monotonously repeated in a Warholian manner on numerous sheets of zinc. The title of this work is 'Prolegomena to all folded images', 2009. Some of the sheets contain text, some are empty, but all of them possess a numb industrial feel. Nothing but empty forms are repeated here: pop art styled images without recognisable characters, fragments of texts without beginnings and ends, voiceless rectangles of zinc. Nothing is being said or shown here, but some sense is produced anyway by mere repetition. A thought about Pavlov's dog comes to mind: the animal would always salivate after hearing a bell, long after food stopped being presented together with the ring of this bell.

Further on, a large canvas covered in dripping black paint is hanging on the wall, 'La coulure Constance Mayer, encore', 2008. Constance was a painter and an unfortunate lover of Pierre-Paul Prud'hon. The two worked and lived together unmarried. Prud'hon was the master and Constance was the servant, looking after Pierre-Paul's children and his home, as well as making many paintings under the master's name. Finally, when Prud'hon explicitly refused to marry his mistress Constance took his razor and slit her throat. Maire's painting could be a portrait of Constance, linking her bleeding throat with the monochrome of a colour field painting. A poignant historical narrative clashing with a visual abstraction, two different orders of representation somehow intrude one another here.

Finally, 'The History of Geometry No. 3', 2009, is comprised of a glass vitrine with a pair of worn-out

women's shoes filled with blocks of alabaster. The display glows with precision. The vitrine is like a device of disembodiment, freeing the sign from its material contingencies. But what do we see in this pure form? Sharply cut pieces of alabaster squeezed into the shoes, as if trying to stand for the missing feet. Some kind of a mute logic is at work in this piece - the shapes and volumes are being juxtaposed according to a strict rule, but without a purpose. A Beckettian geometry, if there can be such a thing, where the answer 'Yes' always comes before the question.

**THREE:** There is no common theme in Maire's works, but there is certainly a rhythm. Every figure, every word and image appears several times. Or, from a more metaphysical perspective, there is a transcendent source of energy that empowers the art works and is overdetermined by them. A word is first heard as an utterance, then it is encountered as an image, then again as a body - each time a different register of signification is evoked. And then there is the game of echoes. A painting resonates with an idea, a raw piece of stone echoes the silhouette of a Greek bust, geometrical figures reverberate in the shapes of canvases and bodily organs. Everything is at once recognisable and without a proper place. In the end, if I was forced to use a single label to categorise Maire's works, it would be either THE GAPS OF CULTURE or THE CULTURE OF A GAP.

*Jonas Žakaitis is a director of Tulips and Roses, Vilnius*  
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