

ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

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Xavier Veilhan

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Xavier Veilhan's new exhibition bears the title of his film *Furtivo* (Stealth, 2008), recently made by the artist but not on view in the show. Yet the works included here are all linked to the dreamlike world of this thirty-minute piece, in which we follow the singer and musician Sébastien Tellier (with whom Veilhan has collaborated frequently) on an enigmatic voyage from the earth to the sea, from the Fiat factory in Turin to a sumptuous sailboat christened *Stealth*. The gallery's two separate spaces were secretly linked by this absent filmic narrative, which lent coherence and atmosphere to what was conceived not as the gallery remake of *Furtivo* but as its oneiric continuation—the “*épanchement du songe dans la vie réelle*” (overflow of

the dream into real life), as the Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval put it.

A technical detail extended this visionary experience: The works here were not illuminated by any electric light, only by the natural light of day and candles—such as those adorning a vast chandelier of solid wood in the shape of a wagon wheel suspended from the ceiling, or those that backlit a series of resin screens depicting cloudy landscapes, part of Veilhan's “*Litophanies*” series, 2005–. In these sculptures and apparatuses, the interplay of illusion, the appearance and disappearance of the image, showed Veilhan's body of work to be a vast engineering of vision. Particularly evident was the artist's fascination with the late-nineteenth-century chronophotographs of Étienne-Jules Marey, especially his studies of the movement of smoke and fluids, echoed here in Veilhan's large, breathtaking sculpture *Air Hockey Table*, 2008, on which black cylinders slide slowly and furtively. As if it were a matter of finding the lost aura of the image—but without nostalgia—Veilhan aims to go back in time, to revisit the origins of modernity with the technical means of today, in order to imagine other possible evolutions and compare the present to the projections of the first moderns. Hence his interest in Italian Futurism, evoked in *Vibration Amish*, 2008, a small resin sculpture of a horse and its cart in shimmering, Boccioni-like forms. In these anachronistic games, what interests Veilhan is the disturbance of the eye, the invention of new “vision-machines,” and the captivation of the viewer—seen above all in his most high-tech and futuristic work and the masterpiece of the show, *Le Requin* (Shark), 2008.

In my imaginary museum, I would place this piece next to Jeff Koons's chrome rabbit and Damien Hirst's shark immersed in formaldehyde—except Veilhan's work aims at visual dynamism rather than stasis: With its angular forms, its furtive submarine design, and the effects of movement produced by its aerodynamic shape and the gleaming play of its chromed surface, Veilhan's life-size shark moves between illusion and sculpture, between digital image and real object, as if the eye of the viewer were engaged in a constant morphing—an ultracontemporary version of the metamorphoses of myth.

—Jean-Max Colard

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

Xavier Veilhan, *Le Requin* (Shark), 2008, polished stainless steel, steel, and epoxy paint, 6' 6 3/4" x 16' 4 1/4" x 7' 2 3/4".

