

Communiqué / Press Release

For immediate release

THE MOUND OF VENDÔME REVISITS ONE KEY EPISODE OF FRENCH HISTORY WHEN THE COMMUNE DE PARIS IN 1871 DEVELOPED A RADICAL LANDSCAPE IN THE CENTRE OF THE CAPITAL.



The Mound of Vendôme, Paris. Image by David Gissen 2014. Original photograph by Gian Marco Valente
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Montréal, 18 June 2014 — On view at the CCA from 19 June to 14 September 2014 and curated by architectural historian David Gissen, ***The Mound of Vendôme*** revisits one key episode of French history when the *Commune de Paris* in 1871 voted to demolish the Vendôme Column, abolishing all allusions to the Napoleonic era. To protect the surrounding architecture during demolition, a radical landscape was erected on Place Vendôme. Informed by the methods of experimental history, Gissen's ongoing research

project and installation at the CCA traces the provocative history of the column and mound, while arguing for its historicisation and reconstruction.

The mound is a seemingly simple yet provocative artifact: an ephemeral earthwork that became a central part of a radical attempt to transform urban iconography during the two-month rule of the Paris Commune in 1871. In his research and contemporary architectural proposal, David Gissen recalls this lost structure and offers new ways of thinking about memorial landscapes and monumental forms. As mirrors of the past, architectural monuments are reminders of collective memories and socio-political powers. Yet monuments are also subject to changes in values, representations and social tensions overtime.

The exhibition contextualises the mound with the historical context of the Commune de Paris. On 12 April 1871 the Central Committee of the Paris Commune voted to demolish the Place Vendôme Column — a monument commissioned by Napoleon I in 1809 to represent his military victory at Austerlitz and renovated in 1863 by his nephew Napoleon III to celebrate Bonapartist rule. The Communards condemned the monument as a representation of “imperialism”, “barbarism” and “brute force” and constructed an enormous mound of sand, straw, branches, and manure to cushion the demolition and protect surrounding structures from the impact.

The dirt and debris was quickly cleared following the suppression of the Commune and nearly a century and a half later all traces of these events are absent from Place Vendôme. To plan for the reconstruction of the mound today is thus a striking reminder of the events of that year as well as the Commune’s strategies of spatial occupation.

Drawn from the CCA’s extensive collection of Commune-era holdings, the exhibition showcases a series of photographs and engravings that document the square before and after the destruction of the column: an unknown photographer captures a perspective of the Column in 1851, Bruno Braquehais photographs the fallen statue of Napoleon in Roman imperial garments in 1871 and Charles Marville documents the reconstruction of the column two years later. The exhibition contemporary proposal is supported by a series of new works including visual renderings, a model of the column and the mound, photographs and the petition addressed to city officials to reconstruct the Mound of Vendôme.

As CCA Director Mirko Zardini explains: “This exhibition is presented as part of a wider agenda of the Canadian Centre for Architecture to survey the political environments and social issues within which architecture operates. With CCA’s archive material projecting the reconstruction of the monumental earthwork, the exhibition suggests possibilities for transforming the iconography and landscapes of urban space. It is through this form of pioneering urban intervention that architecture not only acts as a means to commemorate but also reveals its political consciousness”.

THE CURATOR

David Gissen is a historian and theorist of architecture, His work focuses on developing a novel concept of nature in architectural thought and developing experimental forms of

architectural and urban historical practice. He is the author of the books *Subnature* (2009) and *Manhattan Atmospheres* (2014) and numerous essays and book chapters. He is an associate professor at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco. For the CCA, Gissen has contributed in the 2012 publication *Imperfect Health* accompanying the exhibition and has participated in the research seminar "Toolkit for today: Concept for Contemporary Architecture" that same year.

GRAPHIC AND EXHIBITION DESIGN

The CCA curatorial team developed the design of the exhibition. Graphic design was created by Maxime David from *Le Séisme*.

RELATED PUBLIC PROGRAMS

A **free public lecture** by curator David Gissen will take place the day of the opening on Thursday **19 June at 6 pm**. The celebration of the **vernissage** will follow from 7 pm to 9:30 pm and will feature a musical performance by **Hua Li**, a talented Montreal-based multi-disciplinary performing artist, whose practice is dedicated to expansion of genres and community building through lyrical and aesthetic content. As they arrive, guests will be greeted by pianist **Gregory Burton**, who will take the keys of the piano in Park Baile from 5 pm to 6 pm, while the invited Food Truck, **Quai Roulant**, will delight the palates of young and old.

THE CCA

Celebrating the 25th anniversary of its opening in 2014, the CCA is an international research centre and museum founded on the conviction that architecture is a public concern. Based on its extensive collection, exhibitions, public programs, publications and research opportunities, the CCA is a leading voice in advancing knowledge, promoting public understanding, and widening thought and debate on architecture, its history, theory, practice, and role in society today.

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Isabelle Huiban
Head of Press Relations
Canadian Centre for Architecture
Montréal, Canada
514 939-7001 ext. 2607
media@cca.qc.ca
www.cca.qc.ca