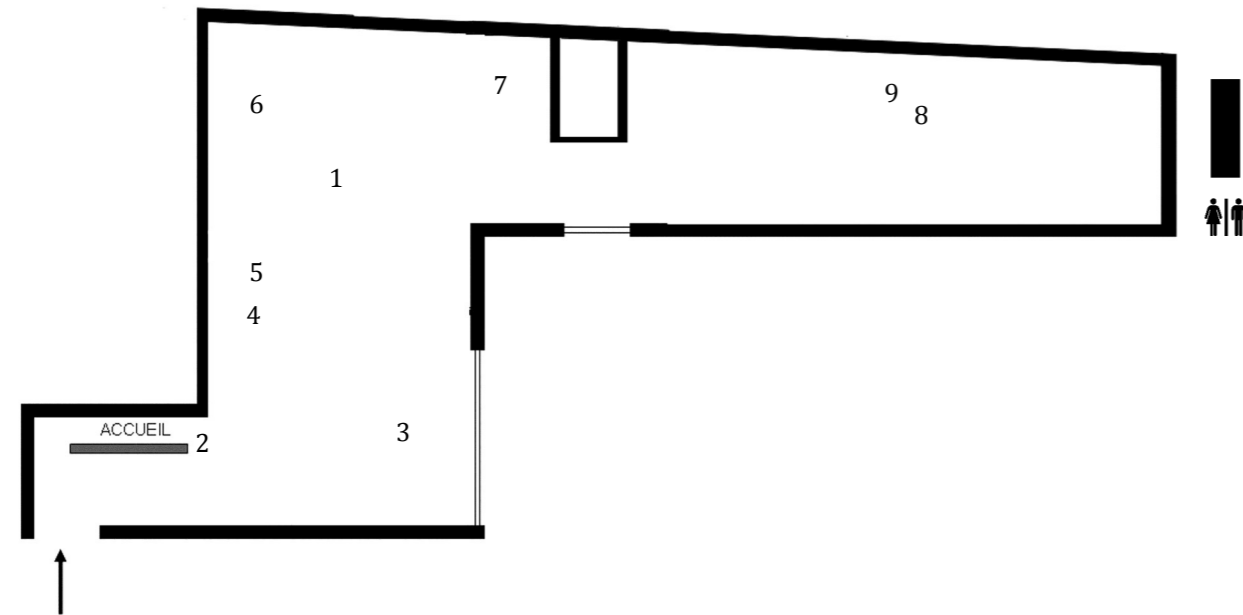


*Come, come, come of age.*

Tarik Kiswanson

Curator: Jesi Khadivi.

Map of the exhibition



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| 1) <i>Vadim</i> , 2018<br>Four channel sound installation    | 6) <i>Mother Form</i> , 2018<br>Stainless steel, Plexiglass                                |
| 2) <i>Come, come, come of age.</i> 2018<br>Poem, autocollant | 7) <i>Mother Form</i> , 2018<br>Stainless steel, Plexiglass                                |
| 3) <i>Mother Form</i> , 2018<br>Stainless steel              | 8) <i>Birth</i> , 2018<br>Bronze, Aluminum   |
| 4) <i>Mother Form</i> , 2018<br>Stainless steel, Plexiglass  | 9) <i>Vadim drawing Arabic</i> ,<br><i>Vadim drawing Swedish</i> , 2018<br>Ink on notebook |
| 5) <i>Mother Form</i> , 2018<br>Stainless steel, Plexiglass  |  |

A child is born. The culmination of a million presses, crunches, pulses. Or, he exits via incision, plucked from the womb by a doctor's gloved hand. Either way, he likely enters screaming. Expelled from a weightless, fluid world he encounters his own density, his own physical force and full weight in the world the second his body hits the cold, dry air. That first scream marks a rupture of sorts—everything gets turned around, inverted. The expulsion from the birth canal triggers independent breath and changes in the body's resistance. At birth, a reversal. Blood begins to flow in the opposite direction from the aorta to the pulmonary artery, supplying more oxygenated blood than before. Moments before his entry the room spun. There was no border between he and mother, mother and midwife, the walls and the sky. And then: a birth.

The question of what constitutes a life—moreover, what constitutes the fundamental borders of life: birth and death—stands at the core of Tarik Kiswanson's inquiry in his exhibition *Come, come, come of age* at Fondation Ricard. The work in the exhibition posits a break from the abstract, highly polished forms that the artist has been working with for some years now. Entering the exhibition space, one encounters a landscape of hyper-realistic sculptures that fuse medical and administrative aesthetics instead of the ambiguous, reflective forms that Kiswanson is known for. Five foreboding metal sculptures, entitled *Mother Forms*, take the shape of medical incubators. This mainstay of the neonatal unit protects premature or medically fragile infants by regulating temperature, providing oxygen, and shielding them from the noises of the outside world. Kiswanson reimagines infant incubators in steel, transforming these containers of warmth into cold, austere enclosures. *No rest will find you here*<sup>1</sup>. While the *Mother Forms* certainly don't appear capable of sustaining a human life, some of them nonetheless spawn unlikely protuberances and strange appendages: an imposing metal filing cabinet with each of its drawers soldered shut. The chance encounter of an incubator and a filing cabinet—at first thought, an improbable pairing. Yet, if we equate birth with personhood—a concept that encompasses philosophical, political, and legal ideas like citizenship, equality, and liberty—then perhaps this union doesn't seem so strange after all.

A fetus' separation from the maternal body marks not only tremendous physiological changes in the body of the infant, but also their entry into the world of administration, and by extension, of language. Or vice versa. As soon as a person enters the world—and even before—one begins to generate a paper trail: a birth certificate, health insurance, an identification card, citizenship

<sup>1</sup> Rest is a theme that appears frequently in Kiswanson's writing, as in the following poem:

A thousand days you have been asleep.  
You sleep where rest finds you.  
You smile when rest finds you.  
You scream where rest finds you.  
You twist and turn in agony, agonised not by what you have seen but what you missed, missing the mornings when you walked out of it all. Clean clear thoughts as this is all on the move.

papers, or a passport. In some countries, a personal tax number that will accompany the child over the course of its entire life is delivered to his or her parents' mailbox before the child can even speak, let alone file his or her taxes. For Kiswanson, this hybrid object, this incubator-archive, gestures towards a double helix of order and disorder: how are the lives, and by extension the memories, of people organized? What relation does lived experience have, if any, to the vital statistics contained in administrative filing cabinets—an object moving towards its own kind of death now that documents are increasingly being digitized? What about the mess that such an archive might refuse to contain? The artist's practice to date has taken up questions of displacement and interstitiality that specifically relate to the context of what is lost, and what is gained, in the first generation of migration. Traces of this discourse remain in two "narrative machines" that open the exhibition: one containing cast metal fragments and a hand, the other containing a floor plan of the Fondation Ricard, with the artist's childhood apartment and a Jericho rose superimposed in its spaces. However, in this exhibition, Kiswanson expands his inquiry into exile and memory to examine the human condition more broadly. While the artist's earlier works used optical reflection and refraction as a means to gesture towards the contingency and instability of experience and identity, his newer sculptures formally morph his conceptual engagement with questions of hybridity, borders, and polyphony into new configurations, literal containers of narrative that invite us to reflect upon the accretions of affect, corporality, administration, and politics that define a life.

While the *Mother Forms* possess a sculptural logic of accumulation that visually departs from earlier works, Kiswanson's ongoing engagement with notions of reflection and refraction nonetheless appears in a sound work, entitled *Vadim*. Running on a loop from four embedded speakers, it's almost as if the walls were speaking, the room becoming a living organism. The migrating sounds quite literally pull you in different directions, heightening a feeling of disorientation, displacement, and instability. In a poem that is loosely structured as a deconstructed interview, the voices of the artist and a young boy entwine, multiply, and at times cancel each other out. The sculpture provides a scenography of sorts for their rather oblique discussion, which veers between the fragility and urgency of some of the body's most basic and integral processes and reflections on uncanny spaces. The relationship between the two figures is unclear—no ties seem to bind them beyond a mutual engagement in teasing out the contours of a life: the line that extends from the body, to consciousness, to the spaces that enfold and unfold around them, to the systems that structure their existence. *Vadim* evokes elusive architectures and archives that evade capture. Kiswanson's writing—which he has directly drawn upon to create the sound work and has also influenced the genesis of the sculptures in the exhibition—teems with such places. Two particular spaces are relevant to the logic of the exhibition as a whole: the "human heart beat registry" and the rooms of resistance, each of which can be understood as a Mother Form. "There are five rooms of resistance in which everyone lives," the boy explains. "These rooms are suspended in a space only you, yourself, can access. They are not of physical nature. These rooms constantly change and transform in shape and size. They are not square, neither are they oval or round. When you move they unfold in unpredictable directions."

The boy speaks with a child's voice, yet oddly seems ageless. It's as if he were, to quote the artist, "thirteen and thirty at the same time." "A heart started to beat when no one expected it," he explains solemnly, "Arrived, through red light down the most tender neck. It hit you open, wiped your memory blank; it erased all your beliefs and made you drift on open ocean." Is he describing his own birth—or that of another? At times his utterances seem like a kind of incantation, as if he were calling a body into being. And he does. A small figure stands alone in the last room, as if he emerged from *Vadim*. The absent body has played a significant role in Kiswanson's practice to date, appearing in sculptures that appeared chimerical, unstable, and even slightly dangerous. His *Shifters and Drifters* seem like they are on the brink of disappearing, of slipping away<sup>2</sup>. To create

these earlier works, Kiswanson drew upon an incomplete family archive: the photographs, silverware and other objects that survived their exile from Palestine. Yet while the body and the archive were things that could never quite be attained or grasped in their entirety, were always, necessarily, incomplete, Kiswanson now quite literally invents his own poetic archive through the act of writing. The space of poetry and fiction opens up new worlds, and new bodies—no longer absent, but always hybrid.

Jesi Khadivi

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier works like the sculpture, *Ambiguous Me* from the series "Shifter" move beyond the so-called "universal" discourses of minimalism and abstraction to address how notions of exile and borders relate to questions of perception and materiality. Viewed from the front, it resembles a throne or a seated humanoid figure without arms. Walk around it, however, and the sculpture practically disappears.

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#### PRACTICAL INFORMATION

**Exhibition** from March 13, to April 21, 2018.

**Free entrance** from Tuesday to Saturday, 11 am - 7 pm

**Free guided tours:** Wednesday at 12:30 pm ; Saturday 12:30 pm and 4:00 pm

