



JIM CAMPERS

Forward Escape into the Past

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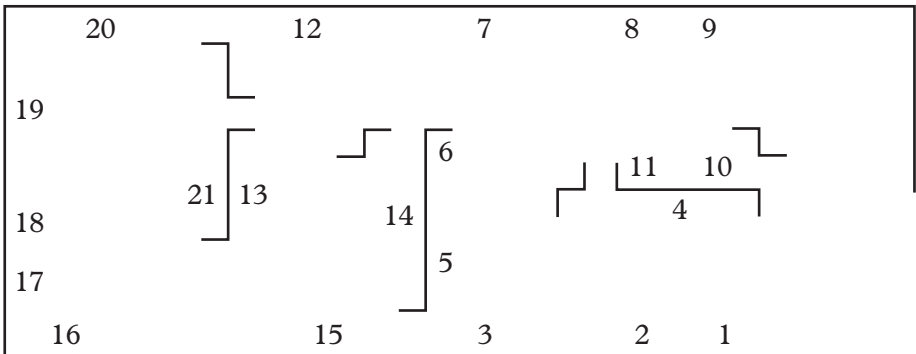
The photographic styles of the Belgian artist Jim Campers are highly varied: some of his images resemble scientific illustrations or travel journals, while others recall advertisements or experiments with avant-garde abstraction. Yet not a single work of his is non-committal. Research plays an essential part in the way he approaches his subjects and chooses the geographical locations for his photographs. Campers often immerses himself for months at a time, for instance, in highly specialized subjects via underground literature or online blogs.

In *Forward Escape into the Past*, the artist is showing photographs from his two most recent projects, which are situated at the intersection of nostalgia and visionary utopia. The title of the exhibition suggests an alternative future for humanity and in so doing links the two photographic series thematically. *Forward Escape into the Past* can be understood as a future far removed from technological progress, in which human beings seek a connection with their past and with nature.

EXHIBITED WORKS

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1. *Clear Light* – 2015
2. *Gazelle* – 2015
3. *Junker House* – 2014
4. *Sharktooth* – 2017
5. *Inside Out* – 2017
6. *Transformation* – 2014
7. *Earth Sinking Into Water* – 2014
8. *Sweat Lodge* – 2014
9. *Siloman* – 2017
10. *Barathrum* – 2014
11. *Throne* – 2015
12. *Liquid Light* – 2016
13. *Untitled* – 2015
14. *Cow* – 2015
15. *Psilocybin Cubensis* – 2017
16. *Hotspring Bunker Dave* – 2014
17. *No Place Like Zome* – 2014
18. *Storage Matrix* – 2013
19. *Salvation Mountain* – 2014
20. *Access to Tools II* – 2017
21. *The Sun Works* – 2017



LET'S KILL THE MOONLIGHT (FC) — 2016

The photographic series *Let's Kill the Moonlight (FC)* derives from the convictions of the American mathematician and terrorist Theodore Kaczynski (1942). From the 1970s onwards, the so-called *Unabomber* developed a critique of relentless technological advancement and championed a restoration of freedom in harmony with nature. Kaczynski signed the anonymous letters and manifestos he published in *The New York Times* and elsewhere in the 1990s with the initials 'FC' – short for 'Freedom Club'. The title of Campers' photographic series combines Kaczynski's ideas with those of the Italian Futurists: *Let's Kill the Moonlight* was one of the elements from the *Second Futurist Manifesto*, written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) in 1909. Unlike Kaczynski, Marinetti actively glorified the destructive power of technology.

It is highly significant that Campers brings together two opposing convictions in a single title: it illustrates the importance he attaches in his working process to association. Not only does Campers set different ideas against one another during his research, in one way or another, while shooting his photographs, he also systematically associates his images with the themes he has explored in that research. The exhibition is likewise conceived as an association of images. The photographs are fragments within an ever-shifting story. Each work stands on its own, but by allowing the images to engage one another in dialogue, an

open narrative emerges. The views that arise within the hemp-block setting, intensify the viewing experience: they invite you to look actively and to forge connections.

To create the images for *Let's Kill the Moonlight (FC)*, Campers travelled to various sites in France, Germany and the United States, including Arcosanti in Arizona and Slab City in California (*Salvation Mountain*, 2017). These are places where people continue to live, alone or in groups, in nature or in a utopian counter-culture, sequestered from Western society. The photographs show details of the buildings the residents have put up there (*Junker House*, 2017 and *No Place Like Zome*, 2017) or the technical ingenuity they display to be able to live and survive (*Access to Tools II*, 2017). The virtual absence of people in the images is striking (with the exception of *Hot Spring Bunker Dave*, 2016). It underscores Campers' photographic interest in landscapes, objects, textures and materials, rather than in documenting people in a certain time and space.

INTRANAUT — 2017

Campers' second series of photographs, *Intranaut* (2017), draws on the theories of the American writer, philosopher and anthropologist Terence McKenna (1946–2000). The latter set out in his *Stoned Ape* hypothesis to modify the process described by standard evolutionary theory, by ascribing a crucial role to the use of the psychedelic mushroom *Psilocybin cubensis* by prehistoric humans. According to McKenna, consumption of this fungus and its hallucinogenic powers played an important role in the formation of the brain, more specifically in the creation of what distinguishes people from other creatures: human self-reflection.

The references to McKenna's ideas prompted Campers to take studio shots of these mushrooms (*Psilocybin cubensis*, 2017) and to travel to the Tassili plateau in South Algeria. There he photographed details of rock carvings of cattle, whose manure created fertile soil for the mushrooms (*Cow*, 2017 and *Gazelle*, 2017). McKenna used these rock carvings to support his hypothesis in the book *Food of the Gods* (1992). This same theory also forms the starting point for Campers to make indirect contentual links and to experiment with abstraction. Following on from the psychedelic light shows of the early 1960s, which accompanied electronic music or avant-garde theatre, he photographed objects such as clock glasses on a lightbox projector filled with oil, pigment and alcohol (*Liquid Light*, 2017).

Campers has designed a setting for *Forward Escape into the Past* consisting of walls constructed from blocks of hemp. The building blocks have been made from a mixture of lime and hemp chips. Although mechanically produced, they are shaped and pressed according to a centuries-old principle. The material is durable and very light, making it ideal for building partition walls or as insulation. In this sense, the building material is in keeping with ecology, sustainability, technological ingenuity and a return to nature: all themes that form a thread running through the exhibition.

Art Paper Editions is marking *Forward Escape into the Past* with the first artist's book by Campers. The publication is available from the M Shop.

This exhibition is a joint initiative with De Brakke Grond, Amsterdam. | With thanks to Milo Profi.

BIOGRAPHY

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Jim Campers (1990, Antwerp) studied at Sint-Lukas in Brussels and at the academies of Leipzig and Antwerp. His work has previously been shown in group exhibitions at Extra City, Antwerp (2016) and Le Bal, Paris (2014). He also took part recently in *Plat(t)form* at the Swiss Photo Museum in Winterthur (2018).