

## &gt;&gt;EXHIBITION

**SOLEIL FROID**

Until 20 May

Palais de Tokyo, Paris

Review by Herbert Wright

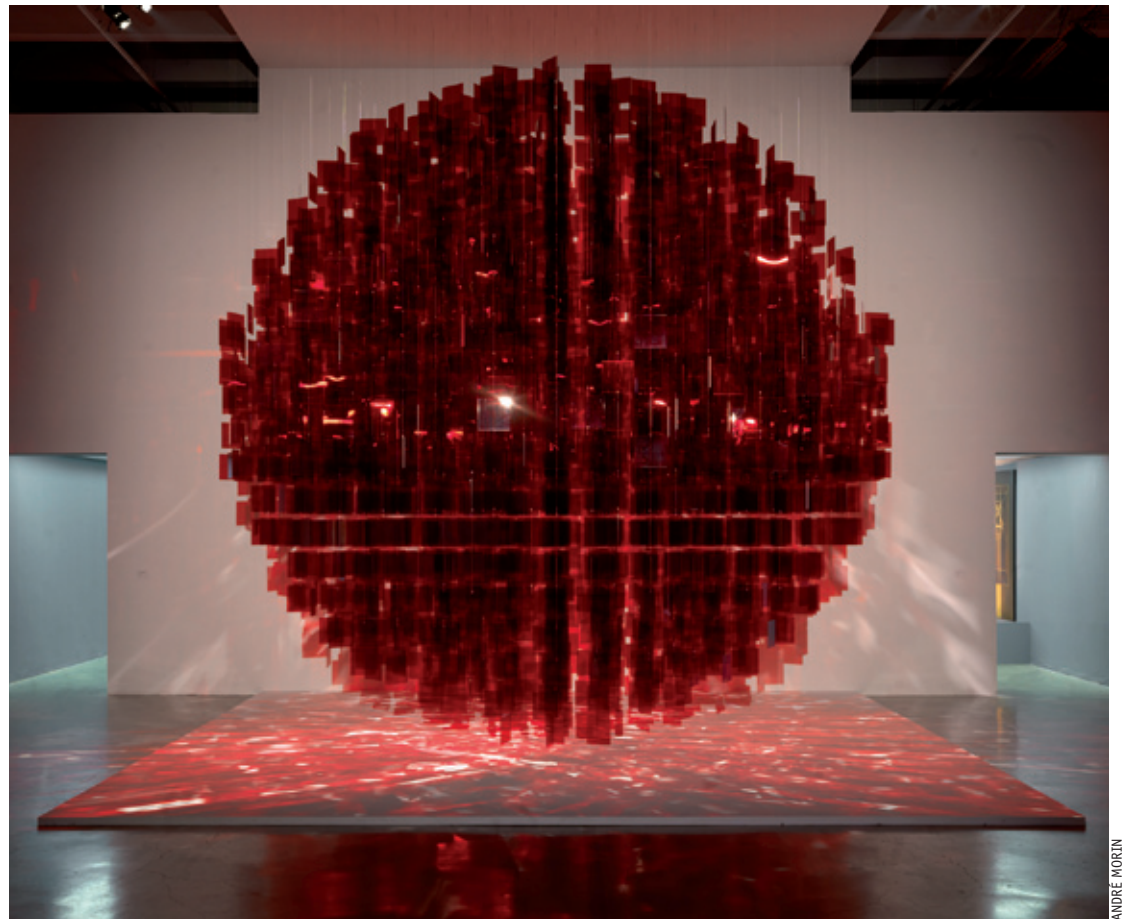
Right: Julio Le Parc's *Sphère Rouge* reflecting and diffracting

Below: Evariste Richer's *Le Blanc des Yeux de Magellan*, part of his solo show *Le Grand Élastique* at Palais de Tokyo

Every night in the City of Light a 'cold sun' shines deep inside an art-deco palace. Almost literally. A great suspended globe made of myriad plastic squares scatters warm red light around it in serene, shifting patterns. The installation is *Sphère Rouge*, a work by Julio le Parc. It embodies the title of the sprawling show *Soleil Froid* at Paris's cavernous Palais de Tokyo, which runs till midnight six days a week.

The exhibition has two stars: le Parc and the building itself, but more of the artist later. There's a lot going on in the magnificent 1937 exhibition venue, the western half of which was dramatically resuscitated in 2002 to host the contemporary arts centre. When architecture practice Lacaton & Vassal striped back the building, it gave it industrial chic and opened it up right down to its vast subterranean levels. At the lowest level, *Soleil Froid* even offers the feels of a mine in a dark, wooden labyrinth by Joachim Koestler, in which he embeds video about the reptilian brain within us.

Far more successful in seeking the primal are the compelling, organic stop-frame animation films of Daniel Dewar and Grégory Gicquel, projected four across on each long wall of a deep chamber in their contribution, *Orange Juice*. Clay bodies and animals, or parts of them, metamorphose and group in a muddy forest, conjuring strange



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earthy spirits with dark humour.

Many artists are to be found in the level above, particularly in its largest section, *Nouvelles Impressions de Raymond Roussel*. He wrote of a fantasy colonial Africa (how odd, the similarity of his name to fantasy jungle painter Henri Rousseau) and was unappreciated except by the Surrealists. An eclectic collection of works by artists responding to him in diverse media may leave you baffled – perhaps the perfect response.

By contrast, on the main floor,

## THE EXHIBITION HAS TWO STARS: JULIO LE PARC AND THE BUILDING ITSELF... DRAMATICALLY RESUSCITATED IN 2002

Evariste Richer's *Le Grand Élastique* is clear and unified. In a space commissioned as 'an artist's library', he explores traditional scientific data collections, mainly geological. Some works spread across whole walls, such as *Le Blanc des Yeux de Magellan*, a grid of astronomical negatives of the dwarf galaxies near our own Milky Way, called the Magellanic Clouds. Scientific enquiry probes reality, yet here produces aesthetic unreality.

The largest section of *Soleil Froid* is given to Julio le Parc, a member of GRAV, the Sixties Paris artist group that challenged art of the time by deconstructing visual perception. This is more than the solo show that the Argentinian-born artist declined to stage on the toss of a coin in 1972 – this is a retrospective with fresh and refreshed works.

Entered through a dark room of hanging mirrored strips, it offers a narrative through le Parc's obsession that started with Op art. He explored outwards from its illusions of movement or warping by actually

making elements that move or warp. White electric light is often an integral tool, so that bending filaments reflect beams into curving patterns. Diffracted rays play across a great drum. Installations of shivering mirrors scatter dots of light. These are meditative experiments that twist predictable Newtonian 'opticks' into unpredictability. He also explores surfaces of colour, for example in the long wall mural of flowing parallel bands, *La grande marche*. But he can have fun as well, and the final room, *Salle de Jeux*, is an ensemble of interactive works, from an array of punch bags adorned with cartoon stereotypical characters – priest, general, intellectual and so on – to a coconut shy-like stand where targets include Uncle Sam. Here is an artist who can create pure cerebral displacements, but gets political with a throwaway laugh.

*Soleil Froid* includes much more than mentioned here, including an extensive programme of live events and entire pop-up shows within the show that come and go. Until April, for example, *Hell As Pavilion* crammed a fascinating cornucopia of works by no less than 42 Greek artists into a modest space, each addressing contemporary crisis in their ancient culture. *Soleil Froid* is as exciting and edgy as any underground warehouse show was, a grand spectacle on an extraordinary set of stages.



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