

Julien Bismuth
Exonomia
March 5 – April 11, 2026

Our entire life is made of the same cloth, meanings that impose themselves in succession, and each of them, when it appears and penetrates us through the senses, reduces all the ideas that could oppose it to a ghostly state.

Acting on oneself, acting on others consists in transforming meanings.

Simone Weil

This exhibition is a collection of images - some still, others moving - accompanied by a single object, titled *every pale has its beyond*. The word “pale” also means a stake or boundary marker used to demarcate a property or territory. The expression “beyond the pale” means something that is outside the limits of the “proper.” This object is a pale that marks no boundary, only the point of its location. All the works are linked by lines that fluctuate, vary, modulate and migrate, lines whose delineation shifts with every encounter.

The exhibition includes a series of silkscreen prints, transferred directly onto the wall using a process invented for these works. Each image shows a set of exonomia: coin-like objects that have no legitimate value as currency (such as subway tokens or casino chips). These include a set of so-called Hard Times tokens from the 1830s. Hard Times tokens were produced in the United States during the presidency of Andrew Jackson, when he delegitimized official coinage in an effort to dismantle the Second Bank of the United States. In response to the shortage of currency, jewelers started producing these tokens as ersatz currency, adorning them with satirical messages mocking Jackson and his minister of finance Martin Van Buren. A portrait of Andrew Jackson currently hangs in the Oval Office.

These drawings are primarily graphite on paper. The first set of three drawings was commissioned for the exhibition *Copistes* at the Centre Pompidou Metz. Each drawing is a reinterpretation of a drawing in the collection of the Louvre, titled *Forêt Vierge du Brésil* (1819), which is the first image ever produced of a Brazilian rainforest, as well as the only work of art produced by the Count of Clarac from sketches he made while on a scientific expedition in Brazil. Other drawings are taken from other artists-travelers from the same era who were influenced by Clarac’s drawing, namely Carl Friedrich Philipp von Martius and Jean-Baptiste Debret.

The other works on paper in the show are inspired by images found in the press that contain palm trees, the emblematic genus of warmer latitudes. In all of these drawings, the delineated forms of the original image were transformed into a nuanced texture of minute marks, akin to the dance of particles of dust in a beam of sunlight, in which the Roman atomist philosopher Lucretius saw “the secret and unseen motions also hidden in matter.”

The first of the two videos in the show, *Jimmy Xi Rosie March* (2025), is a restaging of Öyvind Fahlström's *Hope Mao March* (1966), in which the Swedish artist staged a mock protest in New York with placards bearing the images of television show host Bob Hope and Mao Zedong, while the radio host Bob Fosse asked passers-by if they were happy. In my version, I substituted the comedian Jimmy Kimmel for Bob Hope and Xi Jinping for Mao Zedong, adding in the comedian Rosie O'Donnell. As in the original, the march served as a catalyst for the simple yet complex question: "Are you happy?"

A second video, titled *The Descent of Man* (2026), pairs footage shot in the city of Belém, Brazil with a quote from the book of the same name by Charles Darwin.

This is a show without a central unifying topic, from the Greek "topos" meaning place. The site it occupies is as thin and evanescent as the sharpened point of its only sculpture. What courses through it are the questions and perceptions illuminated in the epigraph above by Simone Weil. Another meaning of the word "epigraph" is the legend on a coin.

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