

BENOIT JODOIN  
(MONTRÉAL)

A QUEST, AN INQUIRY, AND  
A REQUEST

Text commissioned by Skol for the  
exhibition *Dire où j'étais m'est  
impossible* (To say where I was is  
impossible for me)

This exhibition by French artist Romain Gandolphe originated in an encounter that marked the start of a quest. While studying in Montreal in 2014, Gandolphe came upon a work by Lawrence Weiner, *A NATURAL WATER COURSE DIVERTED REDUCED OR DISPLACED* (1969), presented at the MACM as part of the Biennale de Montréal. The label for the work led him to an article by Lucy R. Lippard published in the *Hudson Review*, “Art Within the Arctic Circle,” which describes the expedition Lippard made to the Canadian Arctic, accompanied by Weiner, N.E. Thing Co. (Iain and Ingrid Baxter), and Harry Savage, in view of creating ephemeral works there. This discovery kindled a dream that Gandolphe long-fantasized about before realizing it: to go to the exact same place fifty years later. Arriving in Inuvik after a 40-hour trip on five flights, he spent the next week photographing and filming the area while also approaching local communities, both white and Inuvialuit, to talk about their stories and their living conditions.

*Dire où j'étais m'est impossible* (To say where I was is impossible for me) is a travelogue in which Gandolphe celebrates the pleasure of storytelling. He reflects on the power of words and images to move and to transport us while conducting a strange inquiry into anything that might recall the adventure of 1969: a billboard repainted white, a building that once housed the telegraph service, a residence named Lucy. In *À perte de vue* (2022), while showing us photographs of landscapes and archival documents, he recites a text written in the form of a diary, somewhat like Lippard who had decided to leave the art criticism behind in favour of a narrative style. For the artist, narrating is a creative act, a performance. Speech, the living support of memory and the imagination, a subjective medium, untrue to

the past as it is to the future, comes alive in the video to highlight art’s narrative becoming, reminding us of the possibility of freely inhabiting the discursive spaces opened up by conceptual, immaterial, or ephemeral works.

Gandolphe’s productions often narrate an impassioned, even obsessive relationship with works of art, particularly invisible ones or those that have been rendered invisible. Be it searching for the last tree planted by Joseph Beuys (*A Kind of Tree*, 2018) or reconstituting a Sol LeWitt drawing from memory (*Ce qui m'échappe*, 2017). Or when, between 2016 and 2019, Gandolphe searched for the place where, in 1969, artist Robert Barry had released helium in the Mohave desert in the United States—on the fourth try, with photographic documentation from Barry’s *Inert Gas Series* in hand, Gandolphe managed to find invisible traces of the conceptual work and to breathe in the ambient air, again, fifty years later.

This inclination toward narrative is conceived as an artistic reappropriation of the field of artistic research, which he reinterprets as a practice of unbounded inquiry that has the effect of bringing us back to the essence of artistic experience: to follow art works to the fullest extent of what they can offer us and to attend to what we experience through them. The exhibition thus also involves an appeal, a request; the works of Romain Gandolphe must be told.

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ROMAIN GANDOLPHE

**DIRE OÙ J'ÉTAIS M'EST  
IMPOSSIBLE (TO SAY WHERE  
I WAS IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ME**

May 5th - June 11th, 2022  
Performance - Video - Photo



Composed of a video and a series of images, the exhibition is articulated around a trip the artist made to the Northwest Territories. In the footsteps of Lucy R. Lippard and the artists who had accompanied her, Gandolphe went to Inuvik to produce and document ephemeral and invisible art works. There he spent a week searching for traces of these works, impossible traces, since the works had been ephemeral.

Returning to Inuvik fifty years after Lippard, Gandolphe found and met the people of the town. He was struck by the glaring inequalities between the indigenous population and the white people who had recently come to the region, inequalities that some people seem to have unconsciously decided not to see. In Inuvik, then, it wasn't just the works that had become invisible.

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First interested by things of the world that cannot be seen, Romain Gandolphe has developed a performance practice—and by extension, a video practice—based on the spoken word, attempting to breathe life into the unseen solely through word and gesture. Questions of memory and transmission inevitably come into play. Cognitive biases then show up: what do we make invisible without even realizing it?

Born in 1989, **Romain Gandolphe** lives in Lyon, France. Following an education in science, he discovered art history and performance at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon, from which he graduated in 2016. He later returned to do several years' research as part of the Post-Performance Future group. Gandolphe uses the spoken word to explore memory and storytelling in performances that take the form of guided tours, travelogues, imaginary exhibitions. He has presented his work at such venues as Centre Pompidou (Paris), Nahmad Projects (London), BNKR (Munich), and LAXART (Los Angeles).

The project *À perte de vue (Out of Sight)* was selected by the patronage commission of the Fondation des Artistes.

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