

In our postmodern or post-postmodern world, it is clear that the concept of space can no longer be thought of in simplistic, linear terms. Basel-based artist Boris Rebetez questions the idea of a physical environment by exploring the concept of space in its relation to history, psychology and culture. In the work of the Swiss artist, the idea of space emerges as an entity that transgresses the physical notion of space, becoming a place that generates real and fictional narratives and is essential when it comes to the constructions of identity and subjectivity.

Born in 1970, Boris Rebetez is a multi-faceted artist whose work spans various mediums. His eclectic oeuvre encompasses drawings, collages, photographs, sculptures, and installations and these works are united through artist's unique conceptual approach to the phenomenon of space, physical and social environment. He is best-known for his site-specific installations and special interventions that alter the existing gallery architecture. In January, the artist will participate in a group exhibition with six other artists whose work in one way or another relate to his own practice. The exhibition is titled [Sitting on a Branch](#) and it will be hosted by von Bartha Gallery in Basel.

Prior to the exhibition, we had the honour of talking to Boris Rebetez, discussing his everlasting fascination with the space-related phenomena, the characteristics of his creative process and the upcoming show. Enjoy the talk...

## Spatial Inspiration in the work of Boris Rebetez

**WW:** *One of the fundamental aspects of your work is the concept of space. What triggered the fascination with this idea?*

BR: Rebetez: It's the idea of place that interests me the most. In particular, place as a psychological concept – where something can happen, will happen or has happened. For me, making an exhibition involves constructing or organising a space. I develop this idea through the process of constructing a place for an exhibition.

**WW:** *In architecture, the difference between space and place is often used to underline the difference between space as an open and abstract phenomenon and place as the concept full of meanings. Do you make this distinction in your work?*

BR: Space is definitely an abstract notion, and one that is culturally, politically, or historically influenced. A place, as I understand it, is the combination of the notion of space with the notion of time and movement. Place is therefore the possibility or the promise of a narrative. A place is always accompanied by a story, whether this story be real or fictional.

## Artistic Process and Multidisciplinary

**WW:** *As a multidisciplinary artist, how do you decide which medium will be the best choice when you want to express a particular idea?*

BR: Every medium I use takes on a different and appropriate function: some are more for the project area, some more the realisation and some for the archive or documentation of the idea. I use all these different tools precisely because they help me to project a kind of vision. I choose them based on the function or capacity they have to express a certain view on something.

**WW:** *Your work often involves small interventions within the existing setting. Can you imagine yourself building something from scratch and does this idea appeal to you?*

BR: I don't ever completely change the space I work with. My interventions tend to alter one aspect of the space, which means they appear to be discreet, but in fact these are often original-size architectural elements like staircase or pillars. My intention is to conserve the original aesthetic of the space but at the same time to change its spirit or identity through my interventions. I don't want to hide the exhibition space under theatrical scenography but to reveal it through external elements, to make it exotic but still recognisable...

**WW:** *How does your artistic process look like, considering that your work it is always created in relation to the given space where it will be exhibited?*

BR: I need to know a lot about the specificities of the space – I need of course to take detailed measurements but also to know the context and the surrounding environment. After that, I can start to think about it. The empty room is at first as important to me as the full, activated room, if not indeed more important. The emptiness is in truth the material that I need, because I find or can conceive of real and imaginary movement in it. The elements that I later bring to it are only means to define this emptiness that is the character and the identity of the space more clearly. Though the elements exist in their own right, what links them to the context is more important.

**WW:** *You are particularly interested in the artist's role in shaping the experiences of the visitors. In what ways your interventions change the visitors' journey through the gallery?*

I am most interested in the movement of the visitor in the space. I try not to constrain the audience's movement too much by setting a particular course or path which should be followed – I want them to be as free as possible. In fact, I would rather create a sense of disorientation than order. The spaces that I want to present are often passages, entrance areas or waiting rooms, i.e. transitory spaces, which have for the viewer, an expectation of an active space.

**WW:** *What is the project you are most proud of, or a project you found to be especially rewarding?*

BR: The projects where fiction and real and existing space are at play.

## Sitting on a Branch at von Bartha Gallery

**WW:** *From January 2016, we will be able to enjoy your new works at von Bartha gallery in Basel. What can we expect to see in "Sitting on a Branch" exhibition?*

BR: *Sitting on a branch* is a group show which I conceived of for von Bartha in Basel. Works of Daniel Robert Hunziker, Aglaia Konrad, Doris Lasch, David Thorpe, Bernard Voita, Claudia Wieser and myself will be exhibited. Some works are site-specific and conceived especially for the exhibition and some are existing works which I felt were particularly fitting. All these artists I know and admire. I am looking forward to seeing these works in their different particularity converging in one exhibition.

**WW:** *For the exhibition "Sitting on a Branch" you have invited several other artists to join you. How did you choose the artists and how does their work relate to your engagements?*

BR: The artists have all been working in ways that run parallel to my practice for some time. Some of them I know personally, and have been active in developing my work through artistic discussion and the exchange ideas. All these artists share a common desire to think and work with the idea of space, architecture or environment in a substantial and existential way. This can be utopian, historical or concrete. In their various expressions and mediums, they propose a way of seeing their environment – how it is now, what it has been like in the past or what it could be in the future. The show is also an essay on a way of thinking about the past, present and future, and of the duality between tradition and modernity. The title of the exhibition plays with this duality – there are two ways to sit on a branch.

*Sitting on a Branch* is at [von Bartha](#), Basel from January 30th 2016 through March 26th 2016. Scroll down to see some of the works by participating artists...