

LONDON

Benoît Maire*David Roberts Art Foundation // March 15–May 11*

THE SHORT FILM *IE 4*, 2012, has actors performing a visual dialectic concerned with the metaphysical repercussions of

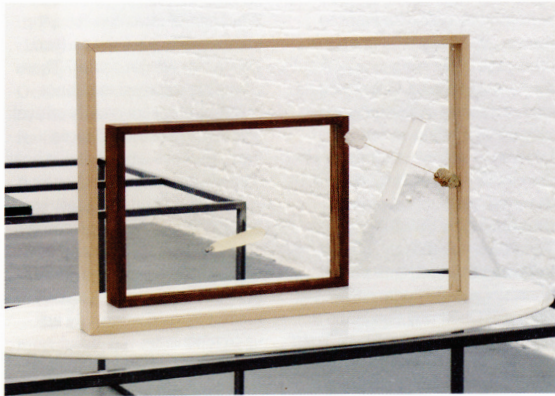
owning an image of oneself—or of another person's possessing that image. To explore this idea, two charac-

ters take pictures of each other using a strange hybrid of invented and real-life cameras. The film ends with a *mise en abyme*, alluded to in a shot of a woman that pulls back to be revealed as footage from a television broadcasting the woman's picture. This mixture of visual trickery and dense philosophy neatly encapsulates the themes that run throughout this intense grouping of video, performance, installation, sculpture, and photography work, numbering 18 pieces in all.

In the film, as in the rest of the show, Maire's intellectual bombardment is intriguing but overwhelming. Maire says in the exhibition's

generous notes that he wants visitors to explore not only the relationship between measurement and object—as in *IE 4*, where a photographer appears as a voyeur who sizes up his muse—but also the notion that clocks, rulers, and cameras act as “weapons” that ultimately destroy their subjects. Just one of these two questions would be enough to occupy a show double this size, using half its methods.

The artist moves to make these themes more manageable, with visual puns that riff on his philosophical concerns. *The Cave*, 2013, is simply a mirror, its title a reference to Plato's *Republic*—in which the shadows on a cave's wall



Benoît Maire
Detail of
Suspended
Weapons, 2013.

Benoît Maire
Untitled,
2013. Wood
plinth and
photograph,
39 x 13 x 20 in.

are used as an allegory about people's misperceptions of reality. *Marie*, 2012, shows the artist's wife determining the distance between herself and a philosophical tome in front of her, the book being a defense of the idea of unimpeded sensual experience written by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. These pieces are interesting, but too enslaved to their texts, a shortfall that renders them overly earnest.

A highlight is Maire's employment of his own invented visual language—such as the display of laboratory instruments fused to roughly

hewn rocks and minerals—which crops up in his collage and photography. *Untitled*, 2013, is an installation made up of a series of frames and boxes, where a *trompe l'oeil* effect makes the piece appear to bend out over the gallery floor.

It could be that the exhibition itself is meant as a kind of *mise en abyme*, but therein lies its strength and limitation. Just as many visitors will feel frustrated by these controlled, fragmented glimpses at an apparently infinite well of concepts and references as will be invigorated by them.

—Rob Sharp

