



UOA D32

ART AND DESIGN:
HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE



RESEARCHER

Aurélien Froment

OUTPUT TITLE

Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval

OUTPUT TYPE

Group of Artefacts

DATE

2014 – 2017

FIG. 1
Exhibition view of Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, Le Plateau/FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris, 2 October – 20 December 2014. Photo Martin Argyroglo.



01 / STATEMENT

The output is an installation comprised of a group of 90 black and white photographs. The subject of the work was *Postman Cheval's Idéal Palace*, a monument built by Ferdinand Cheval in Hauterives, France, between 1879 and 1912.

Through a selection of natural, cultural, architectural and institutional motifs, the installation displayed the monument's myriad of forms and translated its 'architecture of images' into an exhibition form.

Cheval drew upon imagery assembled in world expositions and reproduced as printed matter. Froment's method reversed Cheval's process, reconverting sculptural forms into visual images, as though visually dismantling the building piece by piece. The vast ensemble of photographs in turn created an environment of its own, providing the viewer with a stage from which to re-imagine the monument.

Conceived as a large photographic survey, production took place over two years. The research was supported, produced and shown internationally between 2014 and 2017. It has been presented in 4 international solo exhibitions and 2 group exhibitions. Total audience figures are in excess of 700,000.

Solo Exhibitions

2 October – 20 December 2014.

Montage des Attractions,
Le Plateau, FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris.

24 April – 21 June 2015.

News From Earth,
Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe.

23 September 2016 – 8 January 2017.

Aurélien Froment/Raphaël Zarka
Musée des Abattoirs, Toulouse (two-person).

11 June – 5 November 2017.

Double Tales, M-Museum, Leuven.

Group Exhibitions

21 March – 9 June 2014.

You Imagine What You Desire,
19th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney.

5 December 2015 – 21 February 2016.

The Biography of Things,
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne.

The research has been accompanied by a children's book authored by Froment, and a major publication on Froment's work. See Appendix, page 28.



FIG. 2
Exhibition view of Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, Le Plateau / FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris, 2 October – 20 December 2014. Photo Martin Argyroglo.



FIG. 3
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (20-05) 2014, 40.5 x 50.2 cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 4



FIG. 5



FIG. 6



FIG. 4
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (40-06) 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 5
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (11-07), 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 6
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (08-02) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 7
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (02-12) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 8
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (38-08) 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 9
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (56-03) 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.



FIG. 7

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

FIG. 10



FIG. 11



FIG. 12



FIG. 10
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (01-07) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3 m. Private collection, Netherlands.

FIG. 11
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (03-03) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. Private collections, Paris, Sydney, London.

FIG. 12
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (11-02), 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 13
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (17-01) 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 14
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (30-02), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 15
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (30-12), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.



FIG. 13

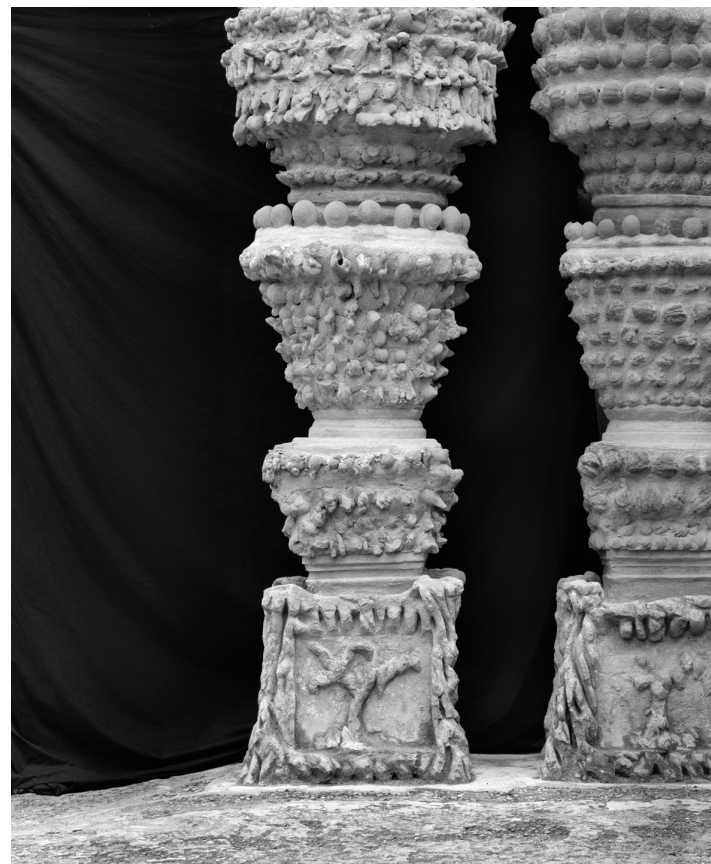


FIG. 14



FIG. 15

FIG. 16



FIG. 17



FIG. 16
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (56-03), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 17
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (26-11), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3 cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 18
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (59-03), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 19
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (10-06), 2013, 52.3 x 64.1 cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 20
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (46-05), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

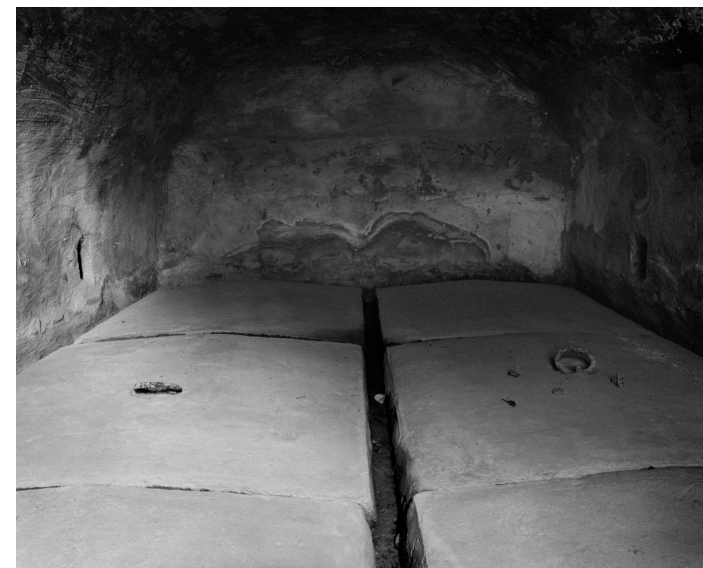
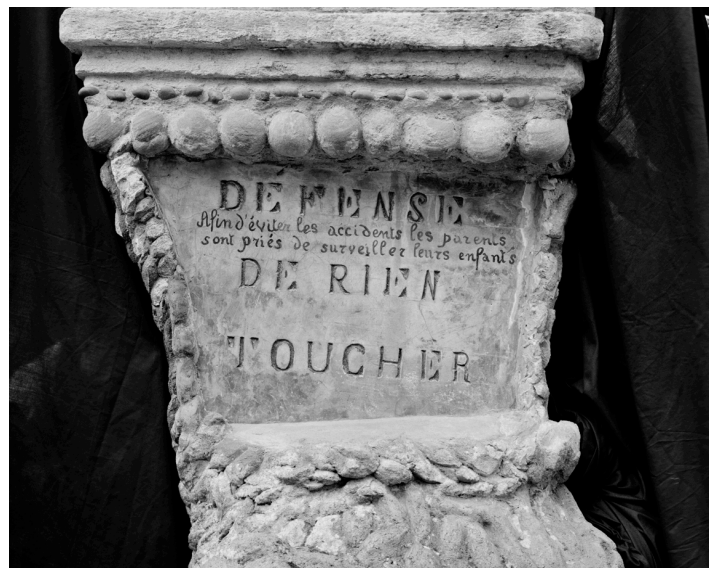


FIG. 18

FIG. 19

FIG. 20

FIG. 21
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (08-02) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm.

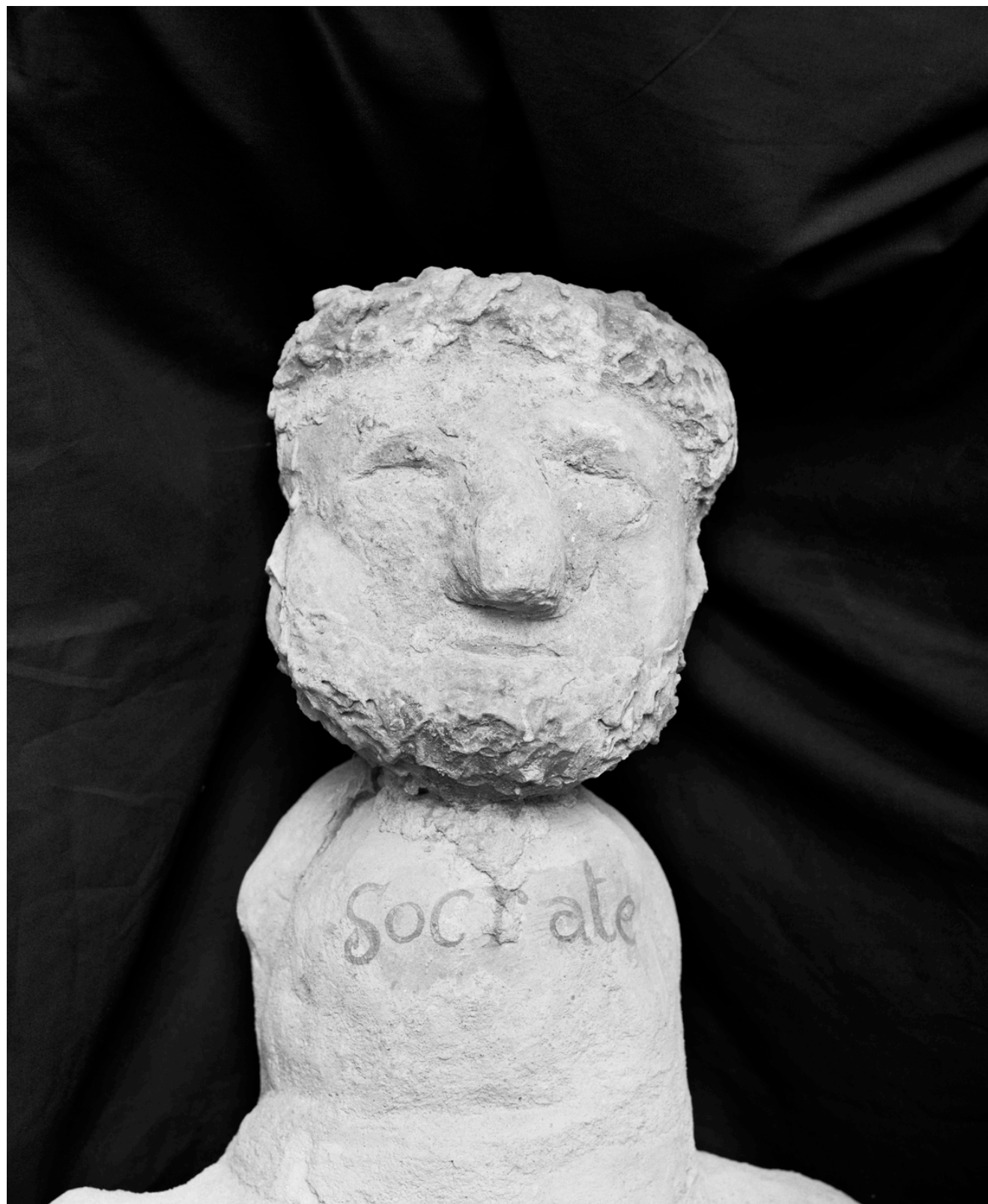


FIG. 22
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (01-07) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3 m. Private collection, Netherlands.





FIG. 23
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (59-03), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.



FIG. 24
Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (10-06), 2013, 52.3 x 64.1 cm. CNAP Collection, Paris.

FIG. 25

Exhibition view of Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 24 April – 21 June 2015. Photo Stephan Baumann.



02 / RESEARCH DIMENSIONS

Cheval's *Idéal Palace* has long been an object of fascination but until now, never the subject of artistic investigation.

Surrealists and situationists reclaimed this unique example of 'dream, 'outsider' or even 'psychogeographical' architecture; André Malraux made it the first modern construction to become part of French national heritage in 1968.

In 1997, Harald Szeemann commissioned a model of *Idéal Palace* for the Lyon Biennale. What makes Froment's work unique is its adaptation and re-staging of the palace. He translates the architectural work into an exhibition form through a series of photographs.

Froment's installation departs from the still-common perception of Cheval's work as naive. Its title (which replaces 'Palace' with 'Tombeau' ('Tomb', but also 'homage'), indicates Cheval's aim: to dispose of his own body, design his tomb and build an institution of his own.

The contemporary model of the artist as producer informed the research. Froment interrogated Cheval's assumption of the various, heterogeneous and sometimes incestuous roles of the artist: architect and maker, guide and critic, biographer and documenter of one's own life and work. As such, he underscored the kinship across centuries between Cheval's work and the work of artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Louise Lawler and Daniel Buren, and its unexpected lineage with 1970s institutional critique.

By re-staging Cheval's work, the installation celebrated Cheval's own acts of appropriation and parody as antitheses to universalist models, and his privileging of the self over any other form of institution.

The installation is comprised of 90 black and white photographs showing details of Cheval's monument. By selecting natural and cultural motifs (flora, fauna, historical characters), architectural motifs (pillars, staircase, belvedere), institutional (name, signature, birthdate, titles, addresses to visitors), the installation produced a simultaneous display of the monument's myriad forms, their undecipherable characters and functions, and the way they comprise an 'architecture of images'.

Subtitled 'Une Exposition Grandeur Nature' (A Life-Size Exhibition), the exhibition occupied a surface area as large as the original monument, enabling viewers to connect their experience of viewing the images with the original site. The project was less preoccupied with the reconstitution of the architecture to scale than with the exploration of its imprint within another space.

FIG. 26
Exhibition view of Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 24 April – 21 June 2015. Photo Stephan Baumann.



FIG. 27
Exhibition view of Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 24 April – 21 June 2015. Photo Stephan Baumann.



FIG. 28

Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (03-03) 2013, 64.1 x 52.3cm. Private collections, Paris, Sydney, London.



03 / ORIGINALITY

Froment's reconstruction of a physical structure through installation and the presentation of images is an innovative method, that in turn prompts questions about the relation between the visual and the material in the experience of physical sites.

This re-presentation also constitutes an innovative perspective on institutional critique. Made by a working-class postman with no professional artistic training, the *Idéal Palace* defied habitual and normative categories of art and architecture. By bringing this 'outsider' work into the heart of the international art institutional circuit, Froment's work prompts re-examination of the categorical and nominal classifications of art.

In photographing the building, Froment foregrounded details that underscore the unique, eccentric and obsessive characteristics of the artist and his work.

The images were made using 19th century photographic portrait techniques – black and white film with natural light, and long exposure, with the use of a tripod; the set up of a makeshift studio, in the manner of 19th century photographic studios, which used black curtains to isolate their subjects. This produced a kind of retroactive portraiture.

Froment's installation structure was made to be flexible such that it could be responsive to its various institutional settings. This underscored an emphasis less on the mimetic reconstruction and more on the way reconstruction generates dialogue between past and present.

FIG. 29
Exhibition view of Aurélien
Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand
Cheval*, Le Plateau /FRAC
Ile-de-France, Paris, 2 October
– 20 December 2014. Photo
Martin Argyroglo.



04 / RIGOUR

Froment initiated the research following an invitation to exhibit at the 19th Sydney Biennale (2014).

Froment's in Cheval was shaped by a number of writers (Clovis Prévost, Roger Caillois, Peter Weiss) including John Berger's essay, 'The Ideal Palace' (2001). Of particular importance for Froment's decision to create an installation that could be inhabited was Berger's observation that the experience of being within the Palace is lost in the sedentary experience of its photographic representations.

Froment conducted site visits to Hauterives over a period of two years. Through three photo shoots, Froment photographed a total of 156 different motifs through 650 exposures. The Palace provided full access to the monument and a cherry picker was supplied by the local municipality to access and photograph at height in the Palace.

Froment mimicked 19th century portrait photographic techniques to emphasise the intermingling of past and present. This involved the use of a black cloths – as a makeshift studio – to isolate the architectural motifs. This method enabled Froment to bring focus to the sculptural details of the building. The films were processed and scanned and the archival pigment prints digitally printed under Froment's supervision.

Froment also conducted interviews with the Palace restorer, Pierre Constant, and with renowned Cheval scholars, Claude and Clovis Prévost, whose film, *Le Facteur Cheval où Quand le songe devient la réalité*, and eponymous book, were key sources. This research provided further context about the Palace, the figure of Cheval, and his archive and the ongoing history of the monument's renovation.

In the installations, the photographs were hung at eye level, to establish connection between the gaze of the visitor and the gaze of the faces within the imagery.

The installation was re-arranged for each iteration:

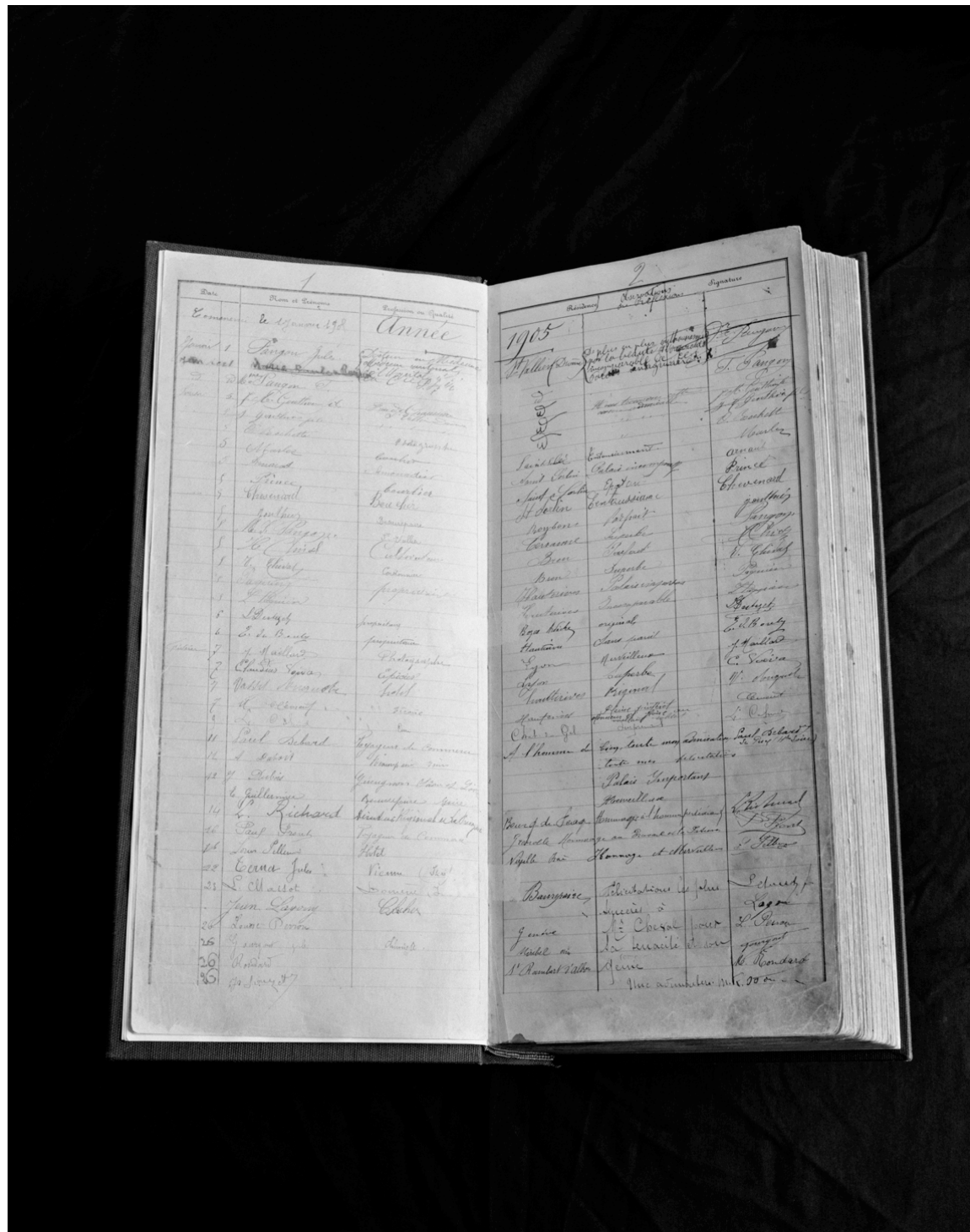
– At Le Plateau, FRAC, Ile-de France Gallery (Paris, 2014), the photos were hung against a continuous black curtain, which replicated the black background of the individual images, produced the sensation of a unified space and recreated the sense of the infinitely proliferating imagery in Cheval's Palace. The photographs were lit by projectors, enabling visibility of the full iconographic detail. The lighting and use of the black curtain generated an atmosphere for silent contemplation.

The wide shots of the building were suspended within the space, their position chosen with reference to the original orientation of the Palace's facades. Froment thus underscored the relationship between the *prise de vue* (to take a view, to shoot) and the *mise en vue* (to place in view, to display).

– At the Badischer Kunstveiren (Karlsruhe, 2015) the installation occupied a former Royal Palace, 'usurping' the authority of the former owner by way of a parody of a portrait gallery. This approach to display was retained for the subsequent group show at ACCA in Melbourne.

FIG. 30

Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval* (61-11), 2014, 64.1 x 52.3 cm. The register of visitors kept for decades by Cheval.
CNAP Collection, Paris.



05 / SIGNIFICANCE

The output has contributed new understanding to an important and idiosyncratic cultural monument.

It also constitutes an innovative contribution to contemporary practices of installation, in the broader context of memorisation, rethinking archival practices, and institutional critique.

The research was initiated through a personal invitation Froment received in 2014 to exhibit in the 19th Biennale of Sydney. The success of this initial showing of the work led to three further solo exhibitions at internationally renowned venues and inclusion in a further group exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne.

The exhibitions have been accompanied by a monograph on Froment's work:

Michelon, Olivier, et al: *Three Double Tales, Dent-de-Leone*, 2017 (288 pp.). With contributions from François Piron, Rémi Parcollet, Anna Craycroft, Caroline Hancock and Philippe-Alain Michaud.

Froment also developed the research as a children's book (*Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, MAC VAL, 2017, 52p), with his photographs accompanying excerpts from Cheval's own autobiography.

An interview was published between Froment and the Idéal Palace restorer:

Froment, Aurélien: 'Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval', journal de l'exposition, Le Plateau/FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris, 2014, 8p. (reprinted as Froment, Aurélien: 'Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval (détails)', Accattone N°2, Brussels, 2015, pp. 34-53).

There has been much scholarly interest in Froment's work. See Appendix, page 28.

In total the output has been seen by over 700,000 people.

21 March – 9 June 2014.
19th Biennale of Sydney.
You Imagine What You Desire.
Exhibition attendance: 623,000.

2 October – 20 December 2014.
FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris.
Montage des Attractions (solo).
Exhibition attendance: 4,600.

24 April – 21 June 2015.
Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe.
News From Earth (solo).
Exhibition attendance: 1,053.

5 December 2015 – 21 February 2016.
ACCA, Melbourne.
The Biography of Things (group).
Exhibition attendance: 12,761.

23 September 2016 – 8 January 2017.
Musée des Abattoirs, Toulouse.
Aurélien Froment/Raphael Zarka (two-person).
Exhibition attendance: 44,520.

11 June – 5 November 2017.
M-Museum, Leuven.
Three Double Tales (solo).
Exhibition attendance: 11,748.

06 / APPENDIX

PUBLICATIONS

Portfolio and artist publications

Froment, Aurélien: 'Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval', journal de l'exposition, *Le Plateau* / FRAC Ile-de-France, Paris, 2014, 8 p. (reprinted as, Froment, Aurélien: 'Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval (détails)', Accattone N°2, Brussels, 2015, pp. 34-53).

Froment, Aurélien: *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, MAC VAL, Paris, 2017, 52p.

Catalogues and monographs

Engberg, Juliana et al: *You Imagine What You Desire*, 19th Biennale of Sydney, 2014.

Engberg, Juliana et al: *The Biography of Things*, ACCA, Melbourne, 2015.

Michelon, Olivier, et al: i.c.w. Åbäke, *Three Double Tales*, Dent-de-Leone, 2017.

FIG. 31

Catalogue, *You Imagine What You Desire*, 19th Biennale of Sydney, 2014.



FIGS. 32–33

Artist publication, Aurélien Froment, *Tombeau idéal de Ferdinand Cheval*, MAC VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine, 2017.



EXCERPTS FROM CATALOGUE ESSAYS (selection)

'Aurélien Froment doesn't action the chisel either: he frames, replicates, conceives models. All of the characters he becomes interested in are builders, keepers of specific techniques... Each one of his bodies of work derives from induced learning, taught by the subject itself, in a process that is more empirical than programmatic.'

Piron, François: 'The Museum of Existence and appearance'. Aurélien Froment, Olivier Michelon (ed.), *Three Double Tales*, Dent-de-Leone, 2017, p29.

'Initially an object of research, Postman Cheval's Ideal Palace became a subject to photograph. In his progressive documentation, which Froment describes as a 'partial photographic survey of the facades', the items take on a very ordered organisation.'

Parcollet, Rémi: 'The Anadiplose Expository. Aurélien Froment', Olivier Michelon (ed.), *Three Double Tales*, Dent-de-Leone, 2017, p41.

'Aurélien Froment's work grasps the multi-facted relationship between photography and its exhibition [...]. It is by confronting images with the contexts of their making, their reception, their rendering, and their environment, that they become an alternative to explanation.'

Parcollet, Rémi: 'The Anadiplose Expository. Aurélien Froment', Olivier Michelon (ed.), *Three Double Tales*, Dent-de-Leone, 2017, p85.

EXCERPTS FROM PRESS REVIEWS (selection)

'For this writer the big discovery was a second journey, embarked on imaginatively and triggered by the haunting black and white photos by French-born Aurélien Froment.'

Patricia Anderson, 19th Biennale of Sydney Review, *Daily Review*, 16 April 2014.

'Crucially [...] Froment brings the palace – or parts of it – into the context of a museum-like space, privileging some of Cheval's work over other parts for our examination. With their blackout backdrops, we might find stories rising out of them, or we might impose narratives or histories upon them.'

Andrew Stephens, 'Object Lessons', *The Age*, December 2015.



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