

# GALERIE LESSIRARD

## ART ANALYSIS

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## SEBASTIEN GOURMELEN

### *BEYOND THE BODY*

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COULEUR BAROQUE III, 2024

Digital photograph on cotton paper, 42 x 59.4 cm

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This body, this body where time slips away,  
It is a fabric, a cloth, a sheet, a sheet full of stars.  
The body is not simple, it is a journey,  
Where everything transforms, where everything is created and undone.

Paul Valéry, *The Body*

This photograph by Sébastien Gourmelen questions the Cartesian duality between *res extensa* (the extended thing) and *res cogitans* (the thinking thing). The pink sheet, abandoned atop the pile of stones, becomes a metaphor for the interaction between matter and thought, between the tangible and the intangible. *Res extensa*, represented by the rough stones, evokes immobility and permanence, while the light fabric, in its fluid unfolding, suggests interrupted movement, an erased human presence.

Here, space is defined by the tension between these elements. The absent body becomes implicit, inscribed in the folds and hollows of the fabric, recalling the traces of a past action. This dialogue between absence and presence invites a phenomenological experience in which perception is at the heart of aesthetics. Indeed, the viewer is called upon to fill this void, to imagine the movement that preceded this frozen moment. This suspended gesture situates the work in a particular temporality, where the frozen instant continues to vibrate under the viewer's gaze, who is himself engaged in the act of seeing.

This approach echoes the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for whom "to perceive is to render present to oneself something that is not directly so." Perception is an embodied act, a direct relationship with the world in which the body plays a central role. Here, the fabric becomes the imprint of a past gesture, an extension of corporeality which, though physically absent, remains perceptible through its effects. Is the fabric a vestige of the body, or a broader evocation of the human condition, where the memory of the gesture persists in space long after the individual has disappeared? This question reinforces the idea that presence is not limited to the mere materiality of a visible body, but is expressed through what is left behind.



Extending this reflection, Heidegger's notion of Dasein also sheds light on this work. Being-in-the-world is not limited to physical presence, but is expressed through the surrounding space. Heidegger asserts that "space is not that in which things are contained, but that in which they unfold." The absence of the body does not signify a lack of existence, but rather a transcendence of the body towards something beyond it, where space becomes the true site of being. Thus, the fabric floating within the mineral environment creates a tension between raw materiality and the potentiality of movement, between a frozen state of being and an opening towards elsewhere.



This relationship to space thus becomes an essential interpretive key. The image is not limited to a mere juxtaposition of physical elements; it opens a field of questioning about our own inscription in the world. Space is not a neutral backdrop—it is an active agent that interacts with objects, forms, and traces of the living. This work illustrates how space can be both container and signifier, revealing a dialectic between presence and absence, between gravity and lightness, between enclosure and openness.

Aristotle defined *ousia* as "that which is in itself and by itself," a fundamental reality underlying appearance. Here, the absence of the body paradoxically makes its essential presence more manifest, as if what is not visible becomes the structuring element of the image. The viewer then perceives an oscillation between being and withdrawal, between the trace of the past and the emergence of new meaning.