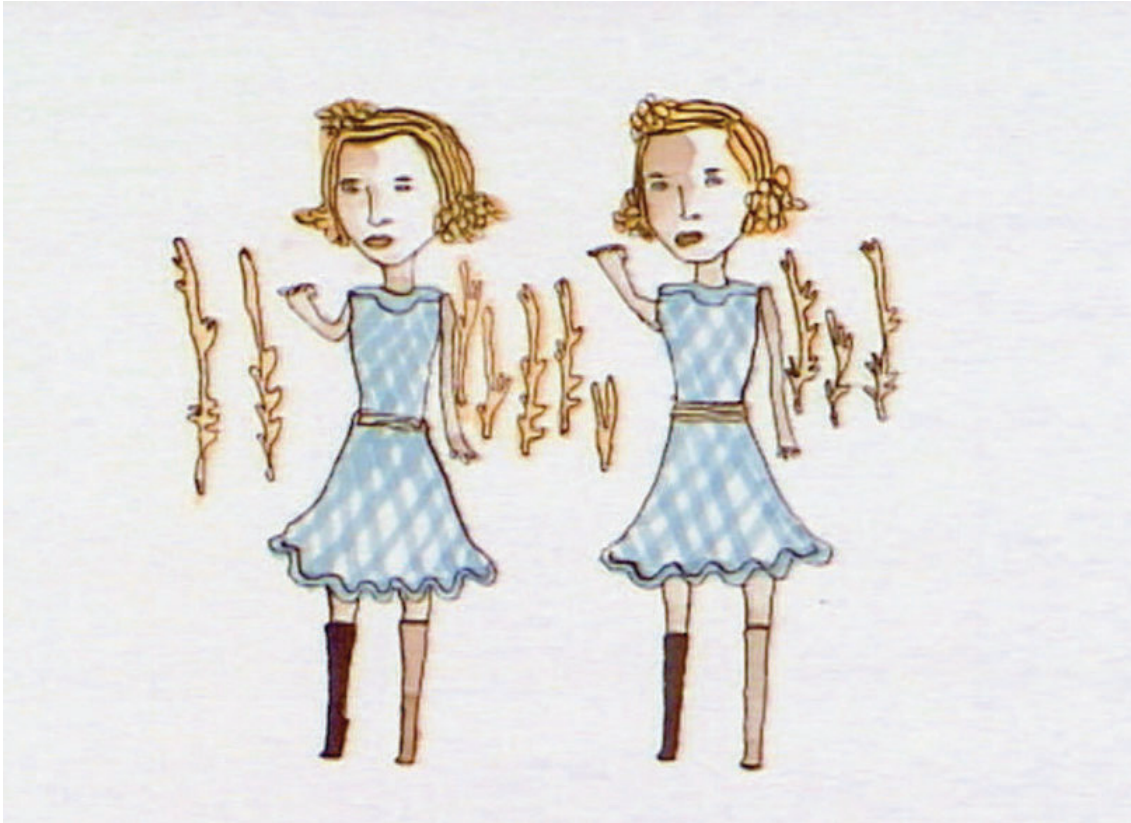


# ARTFORUM



Christine Rebet, *Brand Band News*, 2005, three-channel animation, 35 mm transferred to HD, color, sound, 3 minutes 21 seconds.

## Christine Rebet

### PARASOL UNIT

Christine Rebet's animated film *The Square*, 2011, glowed in a small darkened room. Like all of the artist's films (each just minutes long), this work is formed from thousands of hand-prepared still images, shot in 16 or 35 mm and thrust into movement. *The Square* invokes Samuel Beckett's 1981 television piece *Quad*, echoing the synchronized footsteps of *Quad*'s four dancers and the palette of their hooded costumes. With hand-laid trails of powdered wood, metal, plaster, and clay, Rebet's work traces the agonies of confinement and incarceration, while alluding to the simple, ennobling act of the protest march and the liberating shared space of the public square. Her art thrives in this shared space, built on the exchanges that take place there.

The piece was one of six animated films and thirty-eight drawings on view in "Time

Levitation,” a précis of fifteen years of her practice and the final show at the Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art. The square is also a motif in *Thunderbird*, 2018, which in an electrifying sequence of jittery hand-drawn frames traces the story of the Sumerian ruler Gudea and the construction of his temple in the ancient city of Girsu, in what is today Iraq. Rebet consulted Sebastien Rey, a British Museum archaeologist and the head of the site, on the development of the work. At the exhibition opening he explained to me the richness of the Sumerian cuneiform found there. The temple’s name, White Thunderbird, does not refer to white in the sense of a color, but rather to “something shining, radiant, powerful. It is animation, images, and sounds that allow for the ideal translation.”

For her most recent film, *Breathe In, Breathe Out*, 2019, Rebet drew on her recent journey to Thailand, where she conferred with the artist, curator, and former Buddhist monk Chitti Kasemkitvatana. Her resulting work narrates—in animated drawings, a hypnotizing voice-over, and a brilliant soundtrack by the French musician Mirwais—the descent of a monk from his mountain retreat to the sea, where a small boat, seemingly shipwrecked, is waiting. The feet of the ascetic change into those of an elephant, then into those of a bird. For the narration of this film, Rebet drew from conversations with the philosopher Emanuele Coccia, who was at the time preparing his book *Métamorphoses* (2020). “I have often dreamt of it,” a male voice intones, “to awaken and live in a world that has nothing to do with what we know. Such a dream is the life of our planet. Such a dream is the history of life.”

A latent violence is present in Rebet’s films. The brutality and trauma of colonialism permeate the nightmarish *In the Soldier’s Head*, 2015, in which we see rigging that looks like a torture device and pigment that drips like blood; what sounds like a ventilator—but is in fact a Foley effect created with flames licking glass—provides a haunting audio track. Rebet floods her bright compositions with water across consecutive frames, as if drowning her drawings; the animation, in turn, morphs from clear jewel-toned forms to more rounded, organic shapes. Meanwhile, the nineteenth-century aristocrats in *The Black Cabinet*, 2007, play an ominous game of roulette, and the twin sisters in *Brand Band News*, 2005, are shot dead. But Rebet pictures transcendence as well, and as the twins in this early film pick themselves up and stick out their thumbs to hitchhike, they fluidly take on the form of the wind and then that of a galloping horse. Transformed, they persist.