



Laurence Aëgerter, *The Horse's Guide I* (2012) from the *Somnambulic Archive*.

## Editions Reviews

### Laurence Aëgerter

*The Somnambulic Archive* (2012)

*Séance Book* (2012)

Jacquard tapestry including phosphorescent and reflecting yarns, 112 x 155 cm. €3710.

*Brûler sans ouvrir!* (2012)

Jacquard tapestry, including phosphorescent yarns, 155 x 215 cm. €5300.

*The Horse's Guide I* (2012)

Jacquard tapestry, including phosphorescent yarns and horsehair, 163 x 211 cm. €5300.

*The Horse's Guide II* (2012)

Jacquard tapestry, including phosphorescent yarns and horsehair, 163 x 211 cm. €5300.

Editions of 4 each. Tapestries fabricated by The TextielLab at the Audax Textiel museum, Tilburg, Netherlands, published by the artist. Available through Johan Deumens, Amsterdam.

In 2010 artist Laurence Aëgerter was invited to work at the Museum van Loon, a 17th-century Amsterdam canal house dedicated to preserving the lengthy and colorful legacy of the patrician van Loon family. (Willem van Loon co-founded the East India Company in 1602, the eminent archaeologist Maurits van Loon established the museum in the 1970s, and today the museum foundation is headed by his daughter Philippa van Loon. Family members continue to live in the house.) Aëgerter found herself most intrigued, not by the long rows of Dutch Golden Age eminences that hang on the walls, but by a more recent and eccentric member of the family, one Antoinette de Bach van Loon (1891–1981) whose long, peripatetic life Aëgerter found archived in a set of traveling trunks found in the building's attic.

The *Somnambulic Archive* consists of four works, each derived from a seemingly minor artifact from that stash—portrait photographs, a couple of scrawled journal

pages, a paper wrapper for old letters. But each of these things turns out to be deeply peculiar: the photographs are portraits of prize horses in which the attending grooms were expunged by someone at some point in time; the journal contains, not the musings of a dreamy adolescent, but spirit writings (in English) from séances conducted in the 1920s, some 50 years after Spiritualism's prime; most curious of all, the paper wrapper was penned in a modern hand with French instructions to "burn without opening" and contained nothing at all.

Aëgerter re-presents these odd, seemingly ephemeral things in the pompously historicizing form of tapestries; the small becomes large, the private becomes public, and the 20th century gets to cross-dress as the 18th. This is pomposity by purposeful design. The artist is not interested in aristocratic nostalgia—the woven images remain defiantly photographic (the two horse photographs appear in negative form, the

copied journal pages are obscured by flash burn, and both phosphorescent and reflective yarns were deployed to make the images more difficult to read and less reliable.

What you see depends on where you stand and when darkness falls. In broad daylight the horse stands proudly alone (though one might wonder about the halter), but in the dark, the horse disappears and the spurned groom glows forth. In *Séance Book*, the script can only be seen in certain lights at certain angles, a neat parallel of the elliptical logic to the spirit message contained on its script: "all is all and has always been if you can grasp this... but know what passes on your planet is so infinitely small."

Finally, in tapestry form, the sublimely perverse survival of the wrapper is monumentalized in tapestry, and the questions it raises become more insistent: what did it once contain (if anything)? If the contents were in fact burned, why was the wrapper kept?

There are of course no answers to these questions, even though these were objects kept by a family that has shown itself, over the centuries, to be remarkably adept at managing its own history and belongings. What Aëgerter leaves us with are glow-in-the-dark signposts for secrecy, the visual equivalent of a deafening silence. ■

## Wendy Artin

### *Stone from Delphi* (2012)

Wendy Artin (images), Seamus Heaney (poetry) and Helen Vendler (introduction), 152 pages (112 pages printed letterpress, 16 unnumbered leaves for the illustrations printed digitally), 11 5/8 x 8 3/8 inches. Edition of 300. Typeset, printed, bound and published by Arion Press, San Francisco, CA. \$1200.

Arion Press, now in its 38th year, is well-known for having revitalized the *livre d'artiste* tradition in the late 20th century, bringing together significant contemporary artists and important literary texts: among its 96 publications are *Poetry of Sappho* (2011) with prints by Julie Mehretu [see *Art in Print*, Vol. 1, No. 5], Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* (1991) with relief prints by Mel Bochner, and John Baldessari's addenda to Tristram Shandy (1988). This past year brought *Stone from Delphi*, a collection of poems with classical references accompanied by ink-jet reproductions of watercolor drawings by an American artist resident in Rome. Described like this, the project may sound dusty and unpromising, the kind of contemporary art loved by people who hate contemporary art. It is not.

To begin with, the poems are by Seamus



Wendy Artin, *Jupiter* (2012), watercolor.

Heaney, whose earlier project with Arion, *Squarings* (2003), matched 48 of his poems to 48 drawings by Sol Lewitt. Heaney, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995, is very much of the modern world, but he had a strong classical education and his touchstones include Virgil, Aeschylus, Horace, Ovid and Homer.

The drawings are by Wendy Artin, whose practice of *plein-air* drawing may be venerable, but whose hand and sensibility are distinctly post-photographic. The subjects are all classical statues, rendered in sepia with the overblown highlights of over-exposed film. Reproduced at a 1:1 scale on watercolor paper with astonishingly high resolution, it is easy to read them not as prints but as actual drawings: the ink seems to puddle and bleed before your eyes, its placement offering indexical evidence of the rapt concentration of an artist at work.

In this sense the drawings function much like the poetry—not because they both refer to ancient Rome—but because of the kind of attention that both demand, the necessity of moving between the pleasure embedded in the sound of the phrase or the shape of the shadow, and the kind that arises when those phrases and shapes snap together into a clearly visible but somehow unexpected whole.

Helen Vendler, who selected the poems and wrote the introduction, describes Heaney as "reclaiming, for modern ears, works inaccessible in their original language to the common reader"; Artin's drawings do much the same thing for modern eyes. It may even be that for some "common readers," a book like *Stone from Delphi*, with its beautifully set type and haptically inclined paper, reclaims the codex form itself. ■