Tlön Projects invites curators, artists, authors and thinkers to enter into a dialogue with and develop innovative, noteworthy presentations of works on the basis of their imaginary collection or “museum without walls” at different locations. French artist Béatrice Balcou (1976) will select an as yet unknown work from the collection in the context of a ceremony as well as presenting a series of new works.

Béatrice Balcou’s works are well thought-out exercises in attention — that increasingly scarce and yet, oh so precious of human capacities. Over the years, she has developed an oeuvre that purposefully explores the boundaries between art and framework. Since 2013, Balcou has been working on a series of Untitled Ceremonies, performative actions that take place around an existing artwork from a public or private collection. The work in question is carefully unwrapped and re-packed in the presence of a limited audience as part of a gestural choreography that focuses attention on the work’s concrete materiality. During Balcou’s secular ceremonies the works are declared as it were; they are — temporarily — released from the obscurity of the collection and revealed to an audience. There is phenomenological pleasure to be had from the way the work’s meaning is divested of every utility or exchange value solely by interacting with it as well as how it declares its independence from every economic framework before it is returned to storage. The same applies to Balcou’s series of placebo sculptures (2014 – present), wooden replicas of artworks featured in ceremonies. These wooden objects originally served as substitutes or props for rehearsing the ceremonies, yet have slowly, but surely demanded autonomy.

It is perhaps no coincidence then that interest in rituals has risen markedly in recent years, precisely at the point in time that they threaten to disappear. Historically, rituals and ceremonies have a more religious (Lat. religare, “connecting”) connotation and assign symbolic meaning to objects, words and actions. They bring individuals together as part of a larger whole and ensure the continuance and handing down of human culture. In a disen-chanted society, art is perhaps the final refuge for the sacred, the museum as a temple. Whereas 19th-century museums divested countless religious objects and icons of their aura by secularising them or making them profane, and into “merely” artworks, Béatrice Balcou engages in re-ritualising works from art collections. Instead of attempting to graft Balcou’s work onto the performance or conceptual art canon, her art only becomes truly graspable through the performative, protocolised nature of daily life.

Within the ritual framework — and the accompanying protocol — the subjective, internal, emotional world is of little to no importance. It is precisely the meticulous execution of an objective protocol that determines the success of a ceremony, thereby registering the individual in the social structure of a community. This is the strength of symbols (Gr. syn-ballein, “bringing together”). Their meaning is very embodied i.e. impossible to ponder free of its bearer or medium. Compare it to the meaning of a poem that cannot be paraphrased without repeating the text step by step. This is why the progress of rituals and ceremonies — a constellation of gestures, words and actions — always has something protocol-driven and solemn about it. As a narrative with no beginning and no end, it has to be experienced in its entirety, without taking shortcuts.
Béatrice Balcou’s newer works can also be understood from a comparable perspective. We also recognise the symbolic meaning of, for example, relics and icons. In this case their *material* ties play a crucial role in denoting meaning, more so than that of mutual similarity⁸. The seemingly contingent — the unexpected touch, the accidental contact — suddenly becomes essential at a symbolic level. It is this invisible, “magical” tie, its iconic meaning that is often transferred by religious traditions. This element is clearly part of two series Balcou made during the *annus horribilis* 2020. *Porteurs* consists of elongated, glass shrouds that can contain the residues of contemporary artworks or historic artefacts which the artist collected from restorers — only the title provides an inkling of their origins. Balcou ensconces these ostensibly irrelevant remains of the restoration process like relics in transparent capsules that, oddly enough, are reminiscent of relay batons, thereby evoking the concept behind oral traditions. The same material tie is also important in *Containers*, a series of dead insects under a variety of bell jars. Here too, the title betrays more about the work: as it pertains to invertebrates that fed on works of art. Corpses perhaps being the most macabre form of relic, and in this case they fascinate because of what else they contain.

Container #17 (Hexarthum Exiguum & Rosa da Tivoli), 2020
Insect, glass
ø 5 x 11,8 cm
Photography: Regular Studio

Porteur #14 (Untitled, Laura Lamiel, early work), 2020
Slate powder, glass
ø 3,6 x 30 cm
Photography: Regular Studio
Béatrice Balcou
*Untitled Ceremony #16*
**Assistant:** Theodora Jacobs
05.11.2021 – 07.11.2021

**Performance times:**
05.11.2021 17:00
06.11.2021 14:00 and 17:00
07.11.2021 11:00

A ticket for attending a performance is required.
You can book a ticket on satellite.eventgoose.com.

**Curators:**
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