

NICOLAS BAIER

*Nervure's Path*

Curated by Muriel Quancard

5 March - 18 April

Opening reception: Tuesday, 5 March, 6-8pm

Arsenal Contemporary is pleased to announce *Nervure's Path*, the first solo exhibition in the United States by Canadian artist Nicolas Baier. The exhibition opens 5 March and runs through 18 April.

*Nervure's Path* features existing and newly commissioned works centered on Baier's critical inquiry into the evolution of technology and its influence on the human condition. In meticulous paintings, photographs, bas-reliefs, and sculptures—exhibited here alongside his sole video to date—the artist explores the transmission of knowledge, from the earliest forms of language to the latest advances in digital data. Baier muses on technology as a force responsible for shaping human civilization since its inception, considering the origins of language as a vital tool in the emergence of phenomenal consciousness and prompting questions around its foundational effect on human culture.

A striking sculptural installation titled *Vanitas (Artist Desk)* (2012), visible through the gallery's front window, consists of a glass chamber containing a desk and an office chair, a computer with two monitors, a pair of speakers, and a scanner, all cast in mirrored nickel. *Vanitas* makes perceptible the conditions and routines of human work in a world that has now fully embraced machines. To make his painting *Percée* (2016), meanwhile, Baier photographed the interior of a prehistoric cave, focusing on the light that enters the space rather than on the ancient paintings covering its walls. Back in the studio, he painstakingly reproduced his shot on canvas using multiple layers of neutral color. The deliberate omission of the cave's paintings restores the cavern, symbolically, to its original blank-canvas state, inviting us to meditate on the platonic idea of knowledge prior to experience.

Questions surrounding human knowledge tend to become more complex as technology's ubiquity deepens. *Nervures* (2019) reveals the intricacies of a standard microprocessor manufactured by Intel, inventors of the integrated circuit that made personal computing an accessible reality. Baier laboriously assembled 1,500 images photographed through a microscope to produce a magnified image of one such microprocessor. Gazing at the result, our attention oscillates between formal contemplation of the image and awestruck awareness of its technological genesis.

When mathematician and engineer Claude Shannon showed how to quantify and encode any type of data, he established the decisive unity of all information media; where language and culture were once the repository of human knowledge, digitization allowed for all knowledge to be stored and operated on (increasingly powerful) computers. In Baier's bas-reliefs of servers ranged in endless grids, the artist presents metaphorical illustrations of the post-Shannon universe reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges's *Library of Babel*. Acknowledging that the composition of such devices remains impenetrably arcane to most users, Baier challenges our uninformed dependency in a sculpture titled *Black Box* (2019). The work

consists of the replicated internal hardware of a PC, its matrix of circuitry concealed entirely within a container, but documented in an accompanying video.

Finally, futurist thinker Raymond Kurzweil has suggested that exponentially advancing technologies will soon become inextricably and unpredictably entangled with human life. In his video projection *Procession* (2019), Baier invites us to embark on a meditative journey through unvarying data centers and a luxuriant forest, in which it becomes impossible to determine which sights and sounds are natural and which artificial.

Born in Montreal, Canada, in 1967, Nicolas Baier received a BFA from Concordia University, Montreal. Baier has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec; Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. His work has been included in group exhibitions at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts; MAC VAL, Paris; and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin.