

Introduction

At Kunsthalle Basel, *PANTHEON* reimagines a business district as a stage on which power is constructed, contested, and memorialized. Weaving together film, objects, and spatial installations, Valentin Noujaïm (b. 1991) creates in his inaugural institutional solo exhibition an experience that unearths untold stories hidden in the shadows of urban landscapes.

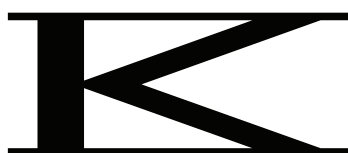
With the premiere of the final part, the filmmaker concludes his trilogy, *La Défense*, which can be seen here in its entirety for the first time. In a France that drowns out the histories of its marginalized minorities, Noujaïm uses the sensual to make their stories visible, employing a cinematic strategy that thus consciously becomes a political gesture. His protagonists move through nocturnal streets, conference room debris, and underground clubs, accompanied by atmospheric soundscapes and pulsating rhythms. Either alone or in conversation, they reflect on the dehumanization and alienation of a surveillance-ridden society, their experiences spanning the 1980s to the present.

In each of the exhibition spaces, the cinematic is transformed into installation—each film presented in a specific scenography. Visitors, walking through corridors of a seemingly abandoned building, encounter ghostly remnants of conference rooms and instruments of surveillance. Watched over by historical gargoyles, *La Défense*, both the setting of the trilogy and Europe's largest business district, looms as both the subject and a metaphor of institutional power.

Noujaïm's *PANTHEON* stands as a counter-monument to the state's pantheon by honoring the overlooked stories and suppressed voices that are equally part of French society. His exhibition thus becomes a critical resonance chamber that endures society's fractures to create alternative images.

Valentin Noujaïm *PANTHEON*

15 Feb.–
25 May 2025



Valentin Noujaïm: *PANTHEON*

Traditionally a temple for all gods and later France's national hall of fame, the Panthéon in Paris stands as a monument to the country's celebrated figures. In this exhibition, Valentin Noujaïm creates an alternative pantheon that exposes the architecture of power through untold stories of French society.

His film trilogy *La Défense*, named after Europe's largest business district, was built in the 1960s as a symbol of modern France atop a former shantytown for Algerian workers. Each of the films occupies a distinct immersive environment, mapping the tensions between integration and exclusion, visibility and erasure, ascent and fall.

Archive of Resistance

The exhibition begins in an abandoned conference space, where *Pacific Club* (2022) immerses visitors through the memories of Azedine Benabdelmoumene. The film reconstructs a fleeting sanctuary amid the upheavals of the 1980s. The Pacific Club, one of the first nightclubs in Paris to welcome young people from the banlieues, most of whom were children of immigrants, provided them with a sense of belonging in a city that often marginalized them. Yet, against the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic, the heroin crisis, and the rise of the Front National, this fragile refuge was overshadowed by systemic neglect. While the club struggled to survive, the French government erected the Grande Arche in the same district for the bicentenary of the French Revolution, a grand monument to republican ideals. The film exposes the gulf between these symbolic gestures and the lived realities of those left on the periphery, questioning who truly finds a place within the national narrative.

Between Protection and Control

As visitors step into the next space, two sculpted gargoyles, trapped within steel enclosures, act as silent sentinels that watch and are watched in return. Noujaïm draws on medieval symbolism, where gargoyles once guarded sacred spaces from evil spirits. Here, however, they are fallen sentinels, reimagined as the relics of a surveillance state that sees everything and yet protects nothing. Their grotesque, hybrid forms, half monster and half patron saint, reflect the contradictions of modern security systems, where protection and oppression, visibility and control, merge into an unsettling unity.

Beyond the gargoyles lies a sterile corporate office, devoid of warmth. It is within this environment that *To Exist Under Permanent Suspicion* (2024) unfolds. The film follows Claire, a young executive navigating the glass towers of corporate life, as she undergoes a systematic dehumanization. Under constant surveillance, she finds herself trapped in a cycle of alienation. The tension builds toward an inevitable transformation,

from a compliant office worker to a vengeful arsonist. Within a system of permanent surveillance and discrimination, Claire's metamorphosis into a so-called "monster" paradoxically becomes an act of self-assertion, a refusal to disappear.

Les héros du néant (Heroes of Nothingness)

Leaving the corporate landscape behind, visitors enter a counter-monument to the people erased from official history. Suspended above them, silk-printed film stills on steel plates create a secular pantheon, elevating individuals who exist outside the traditional narrative of heroism. It is an act of reclamation, an assertion that these lives deserve to be remembered. Noujaïm borrows the term "héros du néant" from the French author Louisa Yousfi, positioning his protagonists as figures of quiet resistance. Much like the youths who gather beneath the Grande Arche in search of belonging, they are symbols of survival in a society that offers them zero recognition.

The ascent continues toward the exhibition's final space. In *Demons to Diamonds* (2025), the final chapter of the trilogy, a voice from the underground echoes through the district, repeatedly warning of impending catastrophe. Recurring suicides cast long shadows, silent yet persistent reminders of a structure that has already failed. The glass towers of La Défense appear fractured into isolated realities, each window revealing a separate, enclosed world. The workers inside the towers share a paralyzing awareness of systemic dysfunction yet remain incapable of breaking free. The verticality of the business district becomes the catalyst of an endless fall, a system spiraling toward its own undoing. Despite the search for recognition, the business district remains a scene of collapse.

Noujaïm's trilogy *La Défense* exposes a district once envisioned as a beacon of French modernity as a monument to exclusion. From the underground refuge of the Pacific Club to the sterile corporate offices and the deadly heights of the towers, he charts a topography of power, a space where the marginalized must navigate between integration and rejection, ascent and fall, humanity and monstrosity.

Room 4

- 5 *Ghost Still - Azedine, 2025*
- 6 *Ghost Still - The Prisoner, 2025*
- 7 *Ghost Still - Scanner, 2025*
- 8 *Ghost Still - The Bridge, 2025*
- 9 *Ghost Still - Dancer, 2025*
- 10 *Ghost Still - The City, 2025*
- 11 *Ghost Still - Claire, 2025*

Silkscreen print on raw steel
90 × 160 × 1cm

Room 3

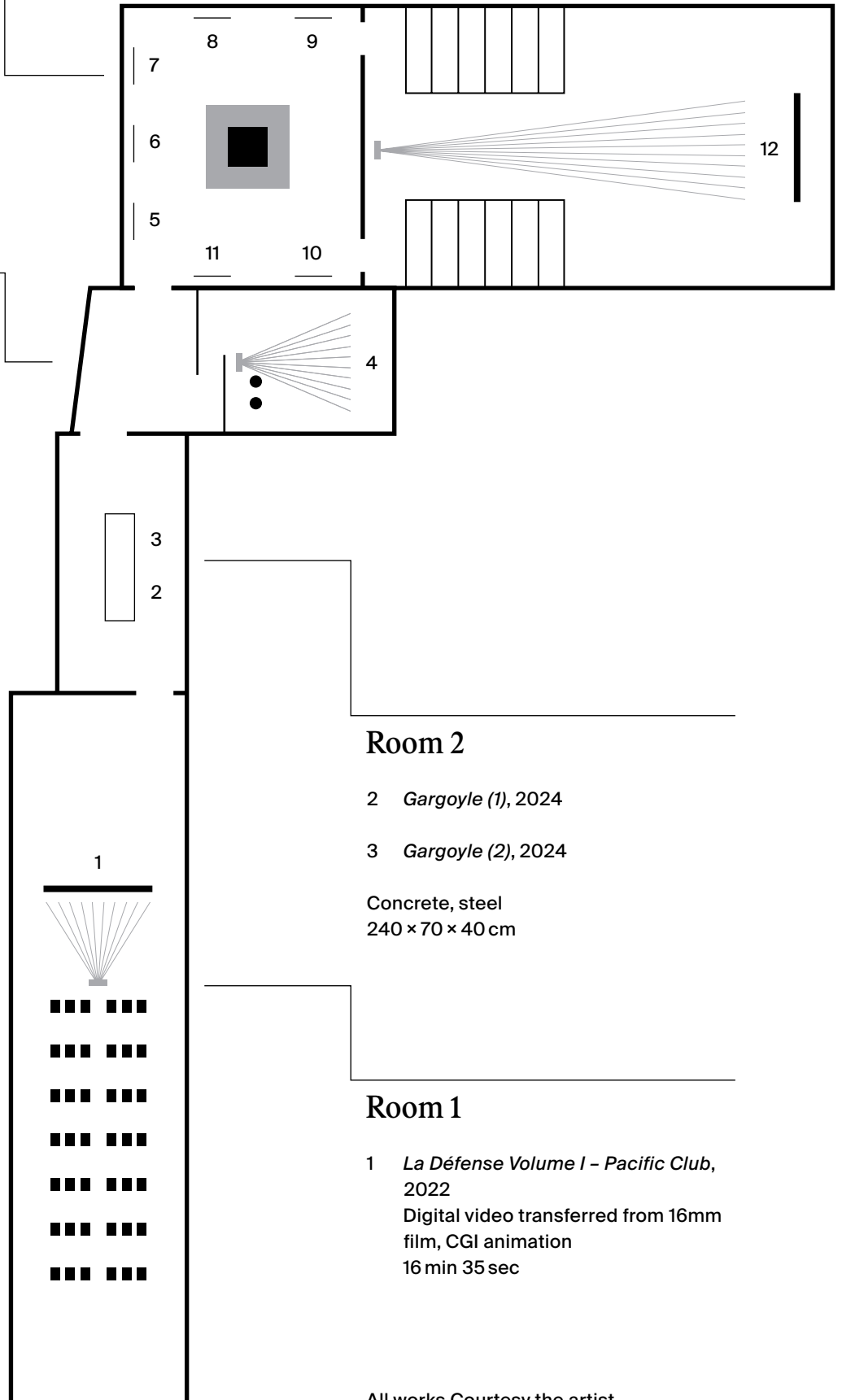
- 4 *La Défense Volume II - To Exist Under Permanent Suspicion, 2023*
Digital video transferred from 16mm film, CGI animation
14 min 29 sec

All films in OV with subtitles; the films are shown alternately with German and English subtitles.

Room 5

- 12 *La Défense Volume III - Demons to Diamonds, 2025*
Digital video transferred from 16mm film, CGI animation, iPhone
29 min 40 sec

We would like to make you aware that the film *Demons to Diamonds* in exhibition room 5 contains references to suicide.



Room 2

- 2 *Gargoyle (1), 2024*
- 3 *Gargoyle (2), 2024*

Concrete, steel
240 × 70 × 40 cm

Room 1

- 1 *La Défense Volume I - Pacific Club, 2022*
Digital video transferred from 16mm film, CGI animation
16 min 35 sec

All works Courtesy the artist

The film *La Défense Volume III – Demons to Diamonds*, 2025, is commissioned by Kunsthalle Basel in partnership with Lo Schermo dell'Arte, Florence, and the Vega Foundation, Toronto, with the support of the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, Paris.

The exhibition is supported with an in-kind contribution from Options (Switzerland) Ltd.

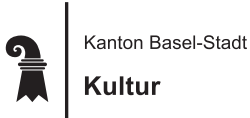


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Thanks to

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The Kunsthalle Basel bookshop stocks publications on Valentin Noujaïm alongside its broader selection of art books. You will find a selection of publications related to the artist in the Kunsthalle Basel library.

More information at kunsthallebasel.ch

Public Programs

Visual Diary, lecture performance by Fabio Cherstich
13.04.2025, Sunday, 4 p.m.

Screen Dialogs, at Stadtkino Basel
29.04.2025, Tuesday, 6 p.m.

An art and film program by Kunsthalle Basel at Stadtkino Basel; followed by a talk.

Mal•Mal, in German and English
30.04.2025, Wednesday, 6–8 p.m.

Draw from a live model in the current exhibition; materials will be provided.

Thursdays at Kunsthalle Basel

Guided tour by Director and Chief Curator Mohamed Almusibli, in English

17.04.2025, Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Registration at kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch

Espresso Tour, in German

24.04.2025, Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes.

Sundays at Kunsthalle Basel

Public guided tours, in German

02.03.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

06.04.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

Tandem guided tour, with S AM Swiss Architecture Museum, in German

16.03.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

A joint guided tour through their current exhibitions highlighting the intersections between architecture and art.

Espresso Tour, in English

04.05.2025, Sunday, 3 p.m.

The exhibition's key points are presented in twenty minutes.

Program for young people

Produce short films with your smartphone.

Young people are invited to shoot their own videos in places that have a personal meaning for them, inspired by Valentin Noujaïm's films at Kunsthalle Basel. The workshop for school classes or youth centres can take place either in the exhibition space or at your educational institution.

Further information can be found at

kunstvermittlung@kunsthallebasel.ch