

## Julie Enckell Julliard

### *Alain Huck – Tragedy or Position, 2011*

Since 2007, Alain Huck has been producing charcoal drawings at monumental scale, mirror images of uneasiness and testimonies of a conflicting relation to the world's course. Generically referred to as "Salons noirs", the series conveys the notion of grief and of lost paradise through intimate and desolate landscapes, allusions to the great wounds of history and literary texts that instill the idea of our civilization's destruction. Employing the superposition of different images that are assembled as analogies of thinking, Alain Huck elaborates a moving and purposely blurred, sometimes even split vision of his subjects, from which the ghost of evanescent human presences emerges every now and then. As a radiography of the mind that would make its complex architecture come out, the obfuscated drawing recalls memory levels that the viewer can spell out as he gradually enters the drawing's physical dimension. Indeed, the composition delivers the illusion of organic depth, of thick and disturbing cavities whose perception never comes to an end. This effect is amplified by the fleeting and dusty attributes of charcoal, carbonized wood that, building on its strong symbolic power, presents every piece as an ash landscape, a modernity ossuary or a vision of the progressive decomposition of the world. The approach to Alain Huck's work requires confronting oneself to the materiality of the piece that simultaneously obstructs and reveals the theme.

With *Tragedy or Position* installation, Alain Huck faces the spectator to the vision of his destiny divided on whether to accept or reject world's tragic evolution. The monumental drawings are installed as a closed space, in four parts through which the artist shows the imposture tied to the prevailing ideologies and, simultaneously, the helplessness of men in coping with forces that can't be controlled. In this tetralogy, the dynamic variation of the viewpoints, as geographic and historical references, reminds the viewer of his own condition and of the irresolvable clash between the pursued ideal and the violence of his own reality.

In *Nebula*, the mysterious shadow of Crab Nebula – a supernova remnant recorded by Chinese astronomers already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century – obstructs the Triumph of the *Divine Providence*, painted by Pietro da Cortona on the ceilings of the central hall of Palazzo Barberini between 1633 and 1639. The work was commanded by Pope Urban VIII, who intended to reaffirm the Church's omnipotence at the moment of its virulent condemnation of Galileo's theories, which questioned the central place of men in the universe. Opposite to *Nebula*, *Edenblock* offers a closed up of an excessively luxuriant and chaotic vegetation in the greenhouse of a botanic garden, as a residual version, a disillusioned and frightening one, of the *hortus conclusus* or of the original paradise. Reversing the low-angle perspective of the painted ceilings, *Position* transposes in monumental scale the air view of a drone flying on the desolate territories of Afghanistan, as an updated version of Urban VIII's propaganda message, where the omnipotence of technology now replaces that of the Church. As a mirror of this dazzling desert, *Tragedy* reproduces a double page of Euripides's *Bacchae*, recounting Pentheus' lynching by the hands of his own mother after having challenged Dionysus. The text is partially concealed by a dark shapeless mass that recalls the Crab Nebula, as well as the drone's explosions in the Afghan desert. Through such an unexpected parallel of these two extreme scenes of violence, separated by 2500 years, Alain Huck evokes each time the vain defiance of the man who ends up on the road to ruin while trying to

cope with forces above him. As a victim of the inevitable and progressive destruction of the world, or responsible for his own end, the human being appears torn between his desire to control his destiny and the harm that this illusion will continue to cause.