

# CARL TRAHAN

## Montréal, Québec, 1965

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### 1. *Der Riß* [The Tear]

2018

Meteorite, aluminum

7.5 x 22.8 x 22.8 cm

Collection of the artist

The notion of *Zerrissenheit* (the tear) is linked to the first half of the 19th century, a period marked by shifts and ruptures, and witness to some of history's greatest paroxysms and reassessments. Many people experienced feelings of helplessness and alienation, what the German poet Heinrich Heine called *Weltriss* (the great world rift). The romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin interpreted *Zerrissenheit* as the disintegration of the modern man who sacrifices unity for the specialization of his activities, and the fragmentary nature of German society, the very image of dispersion, of splintering. The tear becomes authentic in literature when it goes beyond the subjective to reflect the contradictions of its time and bear witness to a kind of incurable wound, the experience of an irreversible rift, a malaise and a void, a great moral suffering and the feeling of internal rupture.

Carl Trahan

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### 2. *Ce qu'il y a d'abîme en nous* [The part of abyss within us]

2020

Molded crystal

10 x 7.6 x 5 cm

Collection of the artist

Glass artist: Dylan Duchet

The title is borrowed from Victor Hugo's *Contemplation Suprême*, written around 1863.

For more than two years following the accidental death of his daughter, Victor Hugo was an avid practitioner of spiritualism. During his seances, spirits named him the depository of the new religion that they prescribed to him. Despite eventually abandoning spiritualism, his reflections remained tinged with mysticism.

*Contemplation Suprême* is a meditation on the artist's role in the understanding of the world, on the soul and destiny, on creation and the infinite. The complete quote from this text reads: "The part of the abyss within us is called by the abyss outside of us."

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### **3. *Im Anfang war...* [In the Beginning Was...]**

2017

Graphite on paper

55 x 76 cm

Collection of the artist

In the beginning was the Word

In the beginning was the Meaning

In the beginning was the Power

In the beginning was the Deed

Faust seeks answers to his existential dread by reading from the Gospel of St. John. From its very first words, he attempts to more precisely translate the word λόγος (logos), not by Verb (or Word), but first by Meaning. Then, after

some consideration, he translates it as Power, and finally as Deed.

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#### **4. *Darkling in the Eternal Space***

2018

Graphite on paper

111 x 77 cm

Collection of the artist

The text is an excerpt from the poem *Darkness* by Lord George Gordon Byron, which describes a post-apocalyptic world. It was written in 1816, also known as the *Year Without a Summer*.

In April 1815, the massive volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia caused major climate disruptions throughout the Northern Hemisphere, jeopardizing crops as early as the fall of 1815. The devastating effects of this cataclysmic event were especially felt in 1816, when Western Europe and Eastern North America experienced alarming food shortages. It is estimated that in addition to the 10,000 people who suffered burns from the eruption, 30,000 others died worldwide from famine and other diseases related to the event.

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#### **5. *Ohne Titel 1***

**[Untitled 1]**

2017

Graphite on paper

111 x 77 cm

Collection of the artist

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## **6. *Trois carrés noirs*** **[In the Beginning Was...]**

2021

Oil on cotton canvas

60 x 60 cm; 30 x 30 cm; 15 x 15 cm

Collection of the artist

A founding member of the De Stijl and Art Concret movements, Theo van Doesburg is one of the artists and theoreticians who reflected the most on the world of space-time during the 1920s. He managed to synthesize interpretations of the fourth dimension found in hyperspace philosophy—which considers the fourth dimension to be the true reality, and which can be perceived through higher consciousness—and in Einstein’s theory of relativity—with its concept of time. He introduced the diagonal in Neoplasticism for its spiritual quality, something he found lacking in this movement. For van Doesburg, mathematics are an essential tool in the enrichment of the power of the imagination, and in the realization of a modern art that goes beyond the representation of a three dimensional world.

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## **7. *Dans une ténébreuse et profonde unité*** **[In a Deep and Tenebrous Unity]**

2018

Graphite on paper

111 x 77 cm

Collection of the artist

This line comes from the poem *Correspondances* by Charles Baudelaire, published in his 1857 volume of poetry *Les fleurs du mal* [The Flowers of Evil]. The poem deals with synesthesia, or sensory equivalencies. In it, Baudelaire

maintains the poet's ability to have a mystical experience through an intimate perception of the sensitive world, and thus be part of the Romantic tradition.

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## **8. Series *Ce que dit la bouche d'ombre*, 1 à 4** **[Series What the Mouth of Darkness Says, 1 to 4]**

2018

Graphite on paper

30.5 x 25.5 cm each

Collection of the artist

Title borrowed from Victor Hugo's poem of the same name (1856).

"It is the black hole of existential self-awareness in all of us, our fear of the eternal silence of infinite spaces that so alarmed Pascal, which produces culture. Once the 'givenness' of the culture that has been handed down by tradition is eroded or shattered under the impact of modernity to a point where contemporary history is experienced as 'decaying', and the fabric of the world is 'rent asunder', it is this primordial black hole that 'churns up' the human psyche, causing our mythopoeic consciousness to swirl around the vortex until it either exhausts itself or triggers the principle of hope once again, engendering new mythic meanings projected onto the world."

Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism:  
The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, 2007

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## **9. *Es zerfiel mir alles in Teile*** **[Everything Fell into Parts]**

2019

Two engraved graphite slabs

2.54 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm each  
Collection of the artist

The German text—and its translation—is from the novella by Hugo von Hofmannsthal titled *Ein Brief* (*The Lord Chandos Letter*), published in 1902. The Austrian poet's early success was apparently followed by a moral and intellectual crisis that all but stalled his writing for many years thereafter. Echoing this crisis, *Ein Brief* deals with the failure of words and traditional discourse to truly comprehend reality.

"This crisis of speech and of poetic language that strikes Lord Chandos is accompanied by a dissolution of the self, which, having lost all sense of personal identity, ends up merging with the world around him in one mystical surge. The elimination of the distinction between subject and object and the disintegration of the self, as described by Hofmannsthal, illustrate the identity crisis of the subject, which will become one of the major themes of Viennese culture at the beginning of the 20th century." (Jean Blain, "La désintégration du moi," *L'Express*, September 1, 2000. Our translation.)

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## 10. *Loin de tous les soleils* [Away From All Suns]

2021  
Pastel, charcoal and compressed charcoal on paper  
33 x 33 cm  
Collection of the artist

This drawing was made from an image captured by a telescope. It shows a pale sun, different from the one we can see with the naked eye.

In his writings, contemporary philosopher Eugene Thacker talks about a *cosmic pessimism* that would be tied to a *world-without-us*—a spectral and speculative world in which humans would become extinct. Unthinkable until now, this

world is now possible to predict and imagine. In this scenario, Earth becomes a planet like any other, and by designating it as such, we go beyond its terrestrial framework toward a cosmic one that is impersonal and indifferent to human beings. According to Thacker, our World as a Planet is a negative concept; it is what “remains” after our extinction. The author suggests that this cosmic interpretative framework comes in the wake of other interpretive frameworks, such as the mythological (classical-Greek), the theological (medieval-Christian), and the existential (modern-European). This perspective can be understood not simply in terms of interstellar space, but from a world-without-us; a Planetary perspective.

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## 11. *Blank and Pitiless as the Sun*

2019–2021

Graphite on paper

111 x 77 cm

Collection of the artist

The drawn text is from the poem *The Second Coming* by W. B. Yeats (1919).

The writings of William Butler Yeats were influenced by spiritualism, mysticism, and the occultism of his time. Yeats’ interests led to the development of a complex system of thought detailed in his book *A Vision* (1925), which is filled with mythical, esoteric, and religious references. In it, he expounds on life as a cycle of eternal returns balancing between order and chaos. Thus, the birth of Christ marks the end of Antiquity, and because cycles last 2000 years, the chaos of modernity announces the eventual return of a new order. The conception of the myth of transition and the conviction that his era was one of decadence, of unbearable spiritual anarchy and self-destructive violence led Yeats to predict the eschaton of modernity.

*The Second Coming* uses Christian imagery of the Apocalypse to describe the moment of extreme chaos preceding the establishment of a new order,

announced by the coming of an ambiguous “rough beast” with a blank and pitiless gaze.

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## 12. *Was taten wir?* [What have we done?]

2018

HD video

3 min 51 s (loop)

Collection of the artist

The sentences that appear in this video are from *Der tolle Mensch* (*The Madman*) by Friedrich Nietzsche's *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (*The Gay Science*), published in 1882. The English and French subtitles were taken from official translations.

Nietzsche is undoubtedly the most important figure in the history of thought on nihilism, which he placed at the centre of the critique on modernity as decadence. He believed that Western civilization was caught in the vice of a debilitating and demoralizing nihilism in which the world's most fundamental concepts were no longer tenable or credible.

Nihilism is thus the negation of the sensitive world in favour of a metaphysical one; it is the denigration of life. According to Nietzsche, nihilism begins when our belief in the most important values is lost, when they become devalued. These values are: *Einheit* (unity); *Zweck* (purpose) and *Wahrheit* (truth). Existence has neither purpose nor intent when there is no intelligible unity in the plurality of events; when the nature of existence is not true.

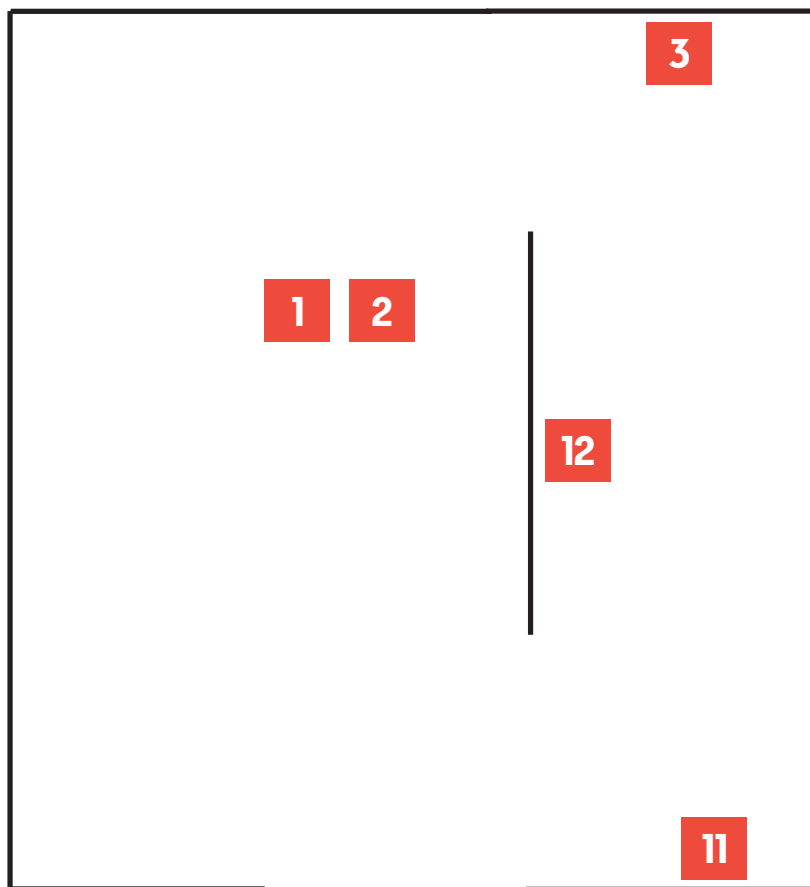
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## 3<sup>rd</sup> floor

Salle Yvan Guibault



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