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GRAYSON ALABISO-CAHILL: FIRST A RADICAL, AND SECOND, AN OPTIMIST

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I.
On May 16, 1871 Gustave Courbet oversaw the demolition of the Vendôme column, a monument to the imperialism of Napoleon.

II.
There is a blurriness to this reflection; it is marred by dust, deterioration.

III.
spectral words loose focus

IV.
wry smiles, loud voices, stolen pistols
 ragged hair, wind tousled blue eyed my crooked teeth

V.
“They rose from homes; from garbage, furniture, and cobblestone. They coalesced, gaining momentum as they flew upwards.”

VI.
These ghosts trembling frames in ink wavering on barricades disjointed nows

VII.
We have become too vague in our demands.

VIII.
“Any labour with joy.”

IX.
Is this useless?

The Commune seems to mark the beginning of a new kind of political action; one that is photographed and surveilled, that is performed and propagandistic, that is celebratory and popular. The instability of both the photograph and the barricade play a role in how the narrative of the Commune is constructed, and this tension between urgency and historicity carries with it lessons to untangle. “First a Radical, and Second, an Optimist” will consider the fleeting moments of poetry, resilience, and improvisation that can be found in unabashed revolution. Using the gallery as an ad-hoc pedagogic site, this project takes the form of a transient installation, a series of workshops, and several multiples.

Grayson Alabiso-Cahill is interested in radical mythologies, in the unruly birthplaces of popular uprisings, and in the rose-tinted and often troubling nostalgia of young and masculine leftism. The transiency of this installation nods to the ways in which any reading of a history is revisionist: punctum, narcissism, and instinct are used as tools by Alabiso-Cahill to guide his reading of an event that made a lasting impact on the superstructure of Socialist thought.

Grayson Alabiso-Cahill (born 1996, Philadelphia) lives and works in Toronto. Recent exhibitions include “Through A Wavering Line” (2018) at IMA322, and “The Bomb Party or What Goes Up” (2018) at Bunker 2. Alabiso-Cahill is also the editor of Successful Press.