

FROM APRIL 26 TO JUNE 28, 2025

5 rue de Saintonge, 75003, Paris

Opening : Saturday April 26, 2025 from 3 pm to 7 pm

GUILLAUME BARTH

ELINA 2015-2025, THE PROMISE TO THE AYMARAS



Elina, 2015, photograph of the salt and water sculpture 300 cm in diameter, Bolivia, projet Elina, 2013-2015 © Guillaume Barth

The Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition dedicated to the artist Guillaume Barth, allowing us to grasp the full scale of his sculpture titled ***Elina***, created in 2015 on the vast salt desert of Bolivia, the *Salar de Uyuni*.

The new planet *Elina*

Elina initially existed as a vision that the artist wished to bring into reality. In 2013, he set off to find a territory in Bolivia suitable for this vision, discovering Tahua, an authentic small village on the shores of the *Salar de Uyuni*, at the foot of the snow-capped Tunupa volcano, which rises to an altitude of 5,321 meters. On the opposite side of the city of Uyuni, the Aymara community lives there, balancing ancient traditions and Western influence.

After obtaining the official permission of the Aymara community in 2013, with the condition that the land be returned to its original state, Guillaume Barth continued to pursue his dream and returned to Bolivia in December 2014, to locate the exact spot for his sculpture: it would be on the *salar*, 4 km from the shore of Tahua. The hemispherical wooden structure, made in France beforehand, was placed, the transporter identified to carry the two tons of salt bricks, assembled by hand and bound with a mortar made of salt and water, completing the 3-meter-diameter hemisphere (the highest point reached by the artist's outstretched arms) in December 2014. In early 2015, the Aymaras, facing a dire water shortage, gathered near the village church to invoke the benevolence of *Pachamama*, the Earth Mother, by preparing the *Costumbre de la lluvia* (*Tatal Huánca*), an invocation for the arrival of rain lasting three days and two nights, accompanied by drum and flute. On January 5, 2015, as the *salar* was miraculously covered by 2 centimeters of water, turning into a monumental mirror, the sphere revealed itself in its entirety, suspended, weightless between Earth and Sky, subtly outlined by a fine horizon line connecting them, in the pure vision of its creator, brought miraculously to its full realization. This new planet was named ***Elina*** by Guillaume Barth, "**Hélê**," the Greek word for sunlight, with the added symbols **Li** (Lithium) and **Na** (Sodium), elements it is composed of. Its providential appearance was short-lived, as the water that revealed it was also the same element that made it disappear; *Elina* returned to its condition of salt dissolved in water three days after it appeared. In addition to the rare photo-reportage of the Aymara community's rites in Tahua, taken by his friend François Klein, who lived with the artist for three months on-site, three photographs of the artist (the appearance of the complete sphere in the *Salar*, an image taken three days later showing the decomposing salt blocks, and a night view under the Milky Way), along with a video filmed on a bicycle in concentric circles around the sculpture, will serve to immortalize *Elina*'s image for posterity.



An impromptu visit, 2014, Elina project © François Klein

the union of matter and spirit. This sculpture holds a special place in the artist's work, who creates worldwide, especially with indigenous peoples that he seems to favor. As Estelle Pietrzyk, Director of the Strasbourg Museum, writes about him: *From the salt deserts of Bolivia to the reindeer peoples of Mongolia, from Quebec to Senegal and Iran, Guillaume Barth follows an unusual trajectory, one that discourages a "classic" reading of the young artist's path—school/diploma/residency/exhibition/publication...—for this path is interspersed with mysterious moments, more akin to anthropology than artistic practice. These secret moments, kept by the artist, nourish an approach that is attuned to the spiritual while embodying in simple materials, such as salt, living trees, or pieces of fabric, which also invite fragility. (...)*

Thus, *Elina* seems to embody, through the purity of its vision, a global artistic approach undertaken around Planet Earth, where the artist is always listening to a landscape, spatializing it both physically, geographically, and temporally: from the *celestial path* he traced in 2011 telling the story of an imaginary aviator drawing a sculpture-plane and crossing Spain, Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal... to the *forests of Alsace* in 2016-21, *salt* in Bolivia in 2013-25, *saffron* in Iran in 2018-20, the *Journey to Hyperborea* filmed in northern Quebec, Canada in 2019-20, to the *Milpa* now in Mexico since 2023... Aware of the impermanence of things, Guillaume Barth calls upon us, through his works, **to celebrate the living** by giving it a form that he draws from the oldest civilizations, rooted in sacred rites that have preserved their traditions.

The environmental and social context

With a perimeter of 150 km by 100 km, the *Salar de Uyuni* is not only the largest white salt desert in the world, with the horizon stretching to infinity, but it also contains what is known as the *White Gold of the Andes*, the planet's largest lithium reserve, a fundamental resource and a major issue in the ongoing energy revolution. Lithium is to high-tech products and electric vehicles what oil is to gasoline-powered cars. When the artist and gallery owner visited Tahua ten years after the appearance of *Elina*, in order to present the catalogue with images of the work and the photo-reportage of the indigenous people from 2015, they fully realized the stakes of the salar, which are even more perceptible in 2025. The scale of the looming ecological disaster is apparent. The *Salar de Uyuni* contains 40% of the world's lithium stock, while the other two salars in Chile and Argentina contain 40%, creating a lithium triangle in the Andes that represents 80% of the



world's resources. The brines are pumped and stored in salt marshes for several months to extract the water through evaporation: 2 million liters of water are evaporated to produce one ton of lithium. The groundwater is thus depleted, causing a severe drought in rivers and threatening the cultivation of quinoa, which is widespread in this Andean region. The Aymara farmers, who are particularly affected, have noted the drying up of nearby rivers and have expressed concern both environmentally and socially.

Water mirror on the salt desert, 2015, Bolivia, Elina project © Guillaume Barth

Honoring his promise to the Aymaras

Accompanied by his friend François Klein, photo-reporter, long-time friends and collectors, and his gallery owner, in preparation for the exhibition at the end of April 2025, ten years after the birth of *Elina*, the artist returns to unveil the *Elina* catalogue, translated into Aymara and Spanish, to the residents of Tahua, and to give a series of conferences: on March 10th at the Elementary School and the College of Tahua; on March 11th with the representative of traditional authorities, Jiliri Malicu, followed by a presentation in the Town Hall Auditorium and with the Tahuenios in the communal living space; on March 14th at the Martadero Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and on March 17th at the National Academy of Fine Arts in La Paz... Guillaume Barth not only wants to gauge the current situation in the small village of Tahua but also to announce his support, along with that of his gallery.



Véronique Jaeger, traditional authority Jiliri Malicu and Guillaume Barth © rights reserved



The Aymaras discovering *Elina*'s catalog © rights reserved

The exhibition

In addition to the three photographs immortalizing *Elina* taken in 2015 (birth of *Elina*, *Elina* after 3 days, *Elina* at night under the vault of heaven), the exhibition features an installation with the video *le deuxième Monde, Elina*, photos documenting the creation of *Elina* in situ and the wooden structure that served as its framework. Also on display: a brand-new salt sculpture from the *Salar d'Uyuni*, created in Bolivia on the occasion of this trip in March 2025, and a hand-designed **artist's box set, *Elina, the promise to the Aymaras***, including 3 photographs in a limited edition of 100. The artist and Galerie have decided to donate 10% of sales to the local Tahua people, to help raise awareness of the ongoing lithium mining that threatens their equilibrium, and to help them develop eco-responsible tourism.

By bringing the shape of a white planet to the sacred territory of the Aymara community, *Elina* poses a universal question and stimulates global awareness. Inspired by the rites and traditions of ancient civilizations, Guillaume Barth's work brings us back to the hidden meaning of things – the work of the Living – and connects us to a deep intuitive consciousness, beyond the visible.

We thank the François Schneider Foundation Collection, Wattwiller, for lending the video *Le deuxième Monde, Elina* (2015) presented as part of the exhibition.



Cycling through the salt desert, 2014, *Elina* project © François Klein

The Artist

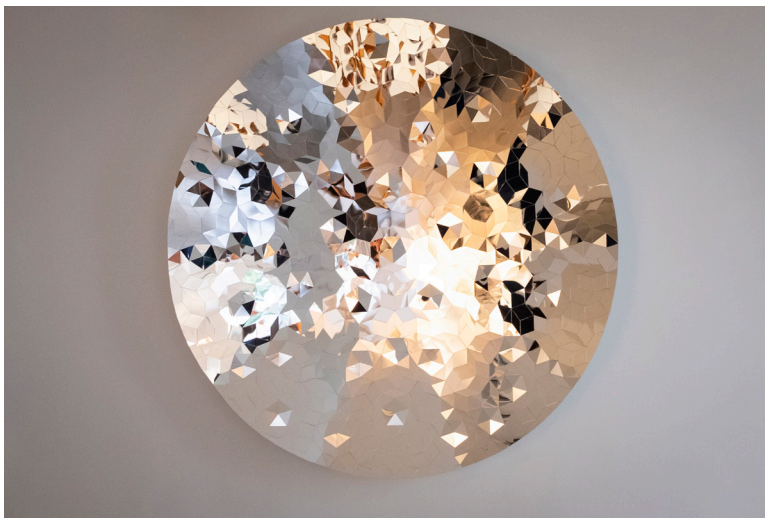
Guillaume Barth was born in 1985 in Colmar, and lives and works between Sélestat in Alsace and Amatlán de Quetzalcoatl in Mexico. He graduated from the National Studio of Contemporary Arts in Fresnoy in 2021 and from the Art Department of the Strasbourg School of Decorative Arts in 2012. He is the recipient of the Martel Catala Foundation Prize for the book project *The New Forest* in 2023, the Talents Contemporains Prize from the François Schneider Foundation in Wattwiller (FR) in 2019, the Bullukian Foundation Prize in Lyon (FR) in 2017, and the Théophile Schuler Prize (FR) in 2015. He participated in the 61st Salon de Montrouge in Paris (FR) in 2016.

Portrait of Guillaume Barth © rights reserved



"My ideas are built from different places, they have original forms that seem to drift apart, but when looked at more closely, their invisible part overlaps into a single whole. For nearly a decade, the formal and semantic forces that emerge from my sculptures—simple forms and forms of nature, motifs of the sphere, the cycle, and openness, the phenomenon of absorption and visual reflection, geographical exploration, realized fictions, transcultural narratives, inscription in landscapes, appearance and disappearance, blossoming and rooting—have tried to make sense through an approach that is as sensitive, reflective, and artifactual. It is characterized, before any gesture, by an attentiveness to the elements of the Living world."

Guillaume Barth, 2023



Oeil de Simorgh, 2023, concave wooden disc covered with silver-leaf mirrors, 150 cm diameter, project based on the Sufi poem *Cantique des Oiseaux*, Farid oddin'Attâr, 1177 Iran © Guillaume Barth



The Flower Market of Torbat-e Heydarieh, Iran, digitized edition of 4, 70 x 90 cm © Guillaume Barth