

The aptly named **Les quatre coins cardinaux (The Four Cardinal Corners)** (1984) evokes as many reflections on the notion of space as it does the concept of the limit. Although Pierre Courtois' first boxes were strictly frontal-oriented, from 1984 onwards we could occasionally see all four sides of them. From that point on they became simpler on a scenic point of view but more complex on a structural level. Some, with mirrors, even showed all the vertiginous aspects of being a spectator. *Les quatre coins cardinaux* has a thoroughly vertical impetus. Is it an enigmatic theatre or a sphinx devoid of enigma? It is impossible to say. But one thing is for sure, this strange window is widely open to the sensitive gaze. A broom becomes a field of wheat, whilst a simple veil hides the unspeakable. The box becomes a theatre of mysteries. An enthusiast for Renaissance curiosity cabinets, Pierre Courtois goes back to the strange appeal of 18th century catoptric boxes. For an artist who has made verticality his privileged path in life, *Écartèlement (Tearing Apart)* (1985) was an exception. The incongruity of the horizontal placement of this box can be explained by the desire to create tension. Here we see a piece of white earthenware hung between two very taut pieces of rope. The artist's original idea was to explore 'horizontal geographies'. This is a relatively rare, though not unique, occurrence in Pierre Courtois' work. The crossbow can be considered the 'archetypal' object used by the artist to articulate the many implications of the concept of tension. With an almost heraldic visual power, the crossbow calls medieval fascinations into play as much as it does visual questions of line, trace and target.

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