

## ARTFORUM

## CRITICS' PICKS



DELME

**Merlin Carpenter**CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN LA  
SYNAGOGUE DE DELME

33 rue Poincaré

October 24, 2020–August 29, 2021

Industrial farmlands line this stretch of heavily traveled highway, a key artery in the European supply chain where a former synagogue, built, famously, at the height of the Dreyfus affair, sits quietly next to the village's town hall. Lacking a congregation, the space was repurposed as an exhibition hall in 1993, becoming a site of art-world pilgrimage. Out front, Merlin Carpenter has parked a brand-new, bright-red forklift and positioned its metal risers as if to hook on to the temple's arches and pull the structure right out of the ground. The gesture is playful, if not aggressive in its precision. Calling it *Untitled* (all works 2020) seems safely aloof.

Inside, for *archive elastique*, Carpenter has stacked neat columns of thousands of unmarked cardboard boxes of identical size—large enough to accommodate an onboard Rimowa or a bulk order of surgical masks. The exhibition was installed last fall, only days before the country's second Covid lockdown. And as French museums and cultural spaces were shuttered again, this time for much longer than they had been the previous spring, Carpenter's boxes became portraits, in a way, of these suddenly sealed, inaccessible places, and of the digitally enabled mass consumption so many turned to in the meantime. Of course, an Amazon warehouse comes to mind when navigating the narrow passages between Carpenter's brown boxes, but so does a medieval labyrinth, a devotional path. The parcels are held shut by clear plastic tape, each strip of equal measure and laid down just as carefully as Daniel Buren's stripes, which, almost twenty-five years ago, covered the synagogue's arches, their outlines still decipherable under layers of house paint. Carpenter is still talking about painting, even when rendering it—almost disdainfully—invisible.

— Lillian Davies