In the works created during his EIB residency, Bill Balaskas expands his exploration of utopianism and its limits – a central theme in both his artistic and academic research. By constantly oscillating between the present and the past, his three new works interrogate in different ways the project of the Enlightenment, and the relevance of its key principles of rationality, progress and social transformation to the current historical conjuncture.

In *Rue Thouin*, Balaskas reflects on the legacy of May ’68, fifty years after the events that shocked France and shook the world. Student demonstrations, general strikes, occupied universities and factories became the epicentre of one of the most turbulent post-war periods not only for France, but also for Europe. Calls against capitalism, the exploitation of workers, consumerism, war and the conservatism of traditional institutions
were passionately promoted by a new type of social movement, which had no leader or centralized structure. This was a movement comprised of a diverse group of people: from university students to workers, and from artists to philosophers whose words could be found on posters and graffiti across France. It was a moment of political action, participation and – above all – dreaming, as indicated by two of the most famous slogans of the time: “L’imagination au pouvoir” (“Imagination to power”), and “Soyez réalistes, demandez l’impossible” (“Be realistic, demand the impossible”).

Rue Thouin, in the fifth arrondissement of Paris, is a small street just 144 metres long. Yet, it is also the site of the last student barricade that was breached by the police forces during the “night of the barricades”, in the early hours of Saturday 11 May 1968. Balaskas produces an idiosyncratic photographic portrait of the street through a series of postcards that focus on often-minute details. By providing us with fragments and never with the whole picture, the artist seems to suggest that the images of revolutionary politics from the past have become saturated: we can only approach the tradition of utopianism exemplified by May ‘68 through its individual parts. The postcard rack is a display format that accentuates this fragmentation and the treatment of images as separate entities, or – even – as mere products. However, have such conditions deprived us entirely of the ability to “connect the pieces” and continue to see urban space as a site of civic action? And to what extent could we redefine the notion of the “barricade” in order to preserve the potential for change?