

Interview by Marleen Wynants  
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**- Is acceptance by society for you a reason to move on with your work to an area where it isn't? (roughly based on John Cage)**

>I am not sure I understand the question, but I remember John Cage saying that if society rejected what he was doing, then it was probably a relevant sign that the work was going in the right direction. And when the public would straightforwardly accept a work, he would therefore be doubting the piece had matured enough since that could but only be awkward considering the nature of art. What intrigue me in your question is your assumption that society “accept” what I propose.

I somehow came to understand what I am doing as Conceptual Poetry, but also as a rather mystical practice of art making I link to Fantastic Art, a term coined by Viennese critic Johann Muschik after the Second War when he proposed painters like Ernst Fuchs or Rudolf Hausner belong to a “Vienna School of Fantastic Realism”. Fantastic Art cannot be applied to any historic movement and in the 20th century for example it has been difficult to draw a line between the Art of the Absurd, the Art of the Insane, Surrealism or Magic Realism... so I wonder if society accept, since I'm not sure society can categorize Fantastic. Then comes the question of what society we talk about: if Zhang Xiaogang has mixed a western-style fantastical into his work as to create a rather new form of expression previously unknown to Chinese society (which helped him sell very well in the West), I am myself using some Japanese or African traditions in my work... and that does probably alien part of what a western society can hitherto accept, while it is a way for me to achieve 世界性 (*sekaisei*, a Japanese calligraphy notion meaning something like “world relevance”).

**- What is the role or the interplay between private and public space for you?**

>I do not think I need to know the role of that interplay to do what I do.

I work with my intuition in a world where decentralisation is only preceded by the ever-growing dynamics between notions of public (or global) and (local) private<sup>1</sup>: of culture (As we speak Chinese students in art universities are practising their drawing skills after Michaelangelo's David), of identity (the Becoming Dutch Causus at the Van Abbemuseum recently), of politics (the Croatian president extend his 2007 political campaign to Bosnia & Herzegovina for there are many Croatian passport holders in that country<sup>2</sup>), etc. Beside, I live in Tokyo, a city where each intimate functions of the human realm (sleep, make love, watch a film, bath,...), which in Europe are hold within the privacy of the house itself contained in the public space, are scattered within the public space (respectively: apartment, love hotel, video café, ofuro,...).

**- What's the relevance of an exhibition space? Or do they all merge?**

>As long as books will have relevance as reading spaces, I don't see why exhibition space should lose relevance. Now, space encompass many more things than the dogmatic minds seem ready to cope with.

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<sup>1</sup>Which is one of the focus of what they call Interaction Design.

<sup>2</sup> Just imagine Sarkozy putting his political posters in Algiers for the reason that there are many French passport holders in Algeria.

**- What is your relation towards time? How does your work relate itself to time? It is a sign of the time? Of a very specific here and now - opposed to the global standardization of place and time?**

>If “Contemporary Art” is still a western institution also because we conquered time after space (political and geographic independence were granted to most former colonies, but they remain largely subject to our time-currency dominion): the Universal Time rests in London not very far from the Tate Modern where the Prime Meridian line marked with a green laser crosses the skyline. One could wonder if “Contemporary art” is ultimately destined to be digested as any other human “realm” has been to this date, from the Manding Empire of Sundiata Keita to this of Nintendo. Of course some could always oppose me saying that contemporary art isn’t an institution but simply “the art of today”, but it doesn’t change a thing, for “today” is ours: and that can only but change.

I tend to think of time as of a constituent of the work I do, as in the [Metragram Series](#) which is a life long work that mainly revolve around the passage of time, or for example in this recent work using birds' droppings in Madagascar ([Mesures du temps](#)). It is Chris Marker who was saying in *Sunless*, his film focusing on Africa and Japan (the two remaining major animistic environments), how if the last century was about the meeting of space this century would be about the meeting of time: this is also why I move constantly, as an *artist-in-nomadency* so to say. But not as an “art commuter” going back and forth between New-York, Basel and Venice... I am rather going from a meeting with the spiritual leader of the vestals of José Rizal in Mt. Banahaw north of Manila, on to researching about Karelianism in the Kola Peninsula in Finland, on to visiting one of the last young speaker of Ainu language in Asahikawa north of Hokkaido for a work, then creating an art platform using cell phones in a video game center in Tokyo before going to make workshops for the UNESCO with young artists in Jordan: meaning I inhabit time difference, and this is a tangible displacement.

Else, I affiliate my work to untimely achievements: Arnold Böcklin's *The island of the dead*, Franz Von Stuck's *The sin*, James Anson's *Self portrait with masks*, Giorgio de Chiric's *The poet's pleasure*, and untimely people: Wifredo Lam, Balthus, Paul Delvaux, Charles Beaudelaire, Frida Kahlo, Fernand Khnoff, Marcel Broodthaers, Henri Michaux, Inoue Yuichi...

**- What's the role of a gallery? Of a museum? What would the perfect museum be like?**

> The perfect museum? Life. Reality's Wunderkammer.

So maybe it could be said that museums are in fact useful for their obvious imperfection, and it is precisely this artificiality that allows them to display art in a significant way.

**- I guess that in many of your works - you had to learn to let go - I mean however big the effort was, a lot of your work is gone or disappears right after or even during the performance (can we still talk about an original here? Was there ever an original? Or only an original?)**

> Well, I have also many works that aren't performative, it is all depending on which part of my work someone decide to focus on. But I believe these questions about the status of the art object as bound between the ephemeral and the durable exists since times immemorial.

So in fact that question is somehow trivial.

I believe that a society which comes to label an art work as “ephemeral” testifies of its alienated relationship to time: labelling an art work as ephemeral can only be done from the opposite assumption that the side of the observer is “concrete”. The fact that our society came to label art with such a poor adjective is for me only testifying of its growing decadence and abstraction: in Africa for instance, there is no one to speak of an ephemeral art since nobody forgot that life is ephemeral. I might even go further as to say that the ephemeral of life is precisely what is called time. Paintings ends in fire, Roman sculptures will be used as building materials by the following empire, while the musical compositions of Bach and Haydn that are now so concrete were similarly destined, after numerous initial repetitions, to be played only once for a single audience<sup>3</sup>: palimpsests. Original doesn't exist, that is western utopia, an urban myth.

**- Marcel Duchamp said: an art object should never stand in the way. Or as Douglas Gordon formulates it: "art is an excuse to have a dialogue". Comment?**

> I'm fan of Robert Filliou's “Art is what makes life more interesting than art.”