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Benait, Yamina. "Laurent Grasso, from reality to fiction," *L'Officiel Art*. June 17, 2019.

## L'OFFICIELART

Temporality has always permeated Laurent Grasso's approach. Attentive to the invisible, the artist - using electronic tools - explores the different superimpositions of reality, as evidenced by *OttO*, his last work presented in June at Art Basel. Meeting with the creator in his Paris studio.



**THE ART OFFICIAL: You attended a training at the Beaux-Arts in Paris. What do you remember from this institution in terms of exploring artistic territories, teaching by artists?**

LAURENT GRASSO: I chose the Beaux-Arts in Paris because two specificities interested me. On the one hand the international exchange program, and on the other hand the fact that active artists devote part of their time to this school. This allowed a direct weekly contact with creators whose work could be admired, and whose exhibitions could be seen in galleries or museums. We had the vision of a journey as a whole. The long study time - five years - was for me a form of wandering and a thorough search for what would then form the matrix of my work. I retain the notion of investigation and amplitude of view, accompanied by the principle of multiple experiments. Thus, I had the opportunity to benefit from two crucial exchanges in different respects. The first at the Cooper Union School in New York. Hans Haacke was one of the teachers I taught: he was passionate and generous, teaching very structured courses. We were invited to write reviews of each student's work in turn during fruitful work sessions. In addition, this trip allowed me to discover the functioning of American society, the New York scene, galleries, museums. Since then, I have never lost contact with New York. For an

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artist, it is very beneficial to face different contexts and to meet interesting people in different parts of the world. At the time, there are twenty years, the reception of the French scene was very different. There was in the process a part of conquest,

After New York, the second highlight was the Saint Martins School of Art in London. This exchange coincided for me with a period of intense interrogations, increased by the fact that we students had grasped that nothing would happen if we did not organize. We had to put on exhibitions, be attentive to the relevance of the alternative places that were opening up ... The School of Fine Arts in Paris was in great demand. The context, it is true, was particular: the director of the school, Alfred Pacquement (later director of the Museum of Modern Art), with a great knowledge of the art world, was particularly concerned about invite a number of excellent artist-teachers. We thus benefited from workshops with Gabriel Orozco, Esther Shalev-Gerz, who followed my work from the beginning ... I was in the workshops of Pierre Buraglio, Christian Boltanski, Tony Brown, Jean-Luc Vilmouth. This energy meant that we were offered prestigious exhibitions. My first was at Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations, with Hervé Mikaeloff, propelling me into a professional context where you had to decide what to show, how to show it, how to communicate about the event. Then, when I left school, I made a workshop at the Palais de Tokyo with Ange Leccia, an artist with the desire for a generous and protective transmission. Later, in my own workshop, I had young artists as assistants with whom, in the same way, engaged in an exchange where to transmit and receive allows to broaden one's own vision. These meetings are important because they secure you and encourage you to continue. That being said, the best way to help a young artist is to give them visibility by exposing their work.

## **Many of your personal exhibitions have been part of immersive or labyrinthine structures: why this choice of demonstration?**

To me, the exhibition is a form of achievement and a medium in itself. The artistic matter is not only visual, it is sound, architectural, contextual, historical, as well as almost invisible. I use the memory and ghosts of places, but also waves, frequencies, lights, some vibrations. From the beginning of my work is the idea that we are crossed by different flows, the environment around the work inevitably impacts the viewer. Also, in my exhibitions, I have the desire to capture the entire environment and not just an object, but the context of this object, as well as the off-camera and all that will influence the visitor. In my latest projects, I used hyper spectral cameras, thermal cameras to make a film in Australia on sacred sites. The idea was to identify other layers of reality, flow, to which the eyes do not have access, but that today some tools allow to see. This constitutes an interesting metaphor for grasping all that can be artistic matter.

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## **The questions that have tapped you have their share of truth?**

These are permanent questions about what to do, not to do, to know how to put together the conditions to speak as an artist, to have the opportunity to set up a practice. This requires grasping the aesthetic, theoretical, and philosophical

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issues of the moment. Do not be mistaken about problems and do not answer anachronistic questions. It is thus a question of permanent intellectual questioning to understand where one will place one's energy. Contrary to what some people suggest, to be an artist is not only to express oneself, it is to help advance a practice as a whole, to converse with contemporaries, with history, with the future, and invent a relevant positioning that questions the world.

**After being a resident of Villa Medici (2004-2005), you won the prestigious Marcel Duchamp Prize (2008): how did these two experiences impact your career and your practice?**

The Medici Villa is an inspiring place, while being quite complicated. It must have been lived to understand the complexity of the situation of an artist in residence. It is a place both magnificent and grandiose, which can almost annihilate by its beauty, but it is also a place that is not sufficiently structured to accompany artists of the twenty-first century. Today, an artist is not a solitary worker in his studio, far from interpersonal ties: he needs support. Namely an intellectual relay, a production aid, a network. I benefited from the support of the Villa Medici to carry out projects, including access to certain places: Cinecittà and specific places in the Vatican, during a short film about the Pope's funeral to which I had been invited. I understood that the Villa was a place of representation and a political place. In retrospect, through the projects that I was able to lead, I think I have done rather well, but I think I owe it to a form of hyper-organization and self-discipline. I also saw a similarity with the Beaux-Arts in Paris in this form of wandering it involves. But having too much time worries me deeply. Today, as part of the travels for my work, I like that everything is organized beforehand, because it is in this planning that I define ideas. Rome is a city that inspired me a lot for the range of history it offers, but you have to be part of it in a dynamic project, otherwise it does not work. As for the Marcel Duchamp Prize, it was at the time accompanied by a personal exhibition at the Pompidou Center, which was considerable in terms of artistic ambition. My exhibition thus welcomed 45,000 visitors: it was a real project, a real challenge dictated by the obligation to seize this space.

**You are part of the artists (few) whose works enamel public space (Solar Wind, 2016, Convent of the Jacobins, 2018, Institut de France, 2019): how do you approach this form of exercise complex style? What does it bring to your own knowledge?**

The public space interested me since my studies. I have always had a taste for side-by-side, sideways, the creation of enigmatic installations in this kind of jamming of the status of objects and situations that I try to invent. The public space questions the setting, it refers to an almost original relationship of discovery: the viewer is not prepared to see what is presented. One of my first

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installations in the public space was for the Saint-Germain course (2004): I had placed some very powerful flashes on the roof of the sixth town hall, which were triggered randomly and created an impression by day during the night. It was quite disturbing and brief enough that we did not understand the source of this light. These punctual installations are complemented by long-term projects. Inscribed in a temporality longer than that of an exhibition, they really allow personal reflection, with regard to an architecture - in construction or completed. Thus, I recently worked with architect Marc Barani in the ideal context of a historic site: the Institut de France. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge. in relation to an architecture - under construction or completed. Thus, I recently worked with architect Marc Barani in the ideal context of a historic site: the Institut de France. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge. in relation to an architecture - under construction or completed. Thus, I recently worked with architect Marc Barani in the ideal context of a historic site: the Institut de France. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge. This institution sought to renew itself and to open to the world with an architect who respects the artists and considers the order not as a subtraction to his own intervention, but a complementary point of view. I created a dozen bright onyx objects, set on the facades of the courtyard. They are inspired by the history of the Institute, around Minerva, a figure of wisdom and knowledge.

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**Your polymorphic practice suggests an intense search for form: what is your process of "formalizing" the idea?**

There is a back and forth between the existing work, the practice, and the new context of an exhibition, a search, a trip. There is always a part of investigation, exploration, and part of existing, search for links with what does the work. It is in a mix of constraints, timing, personal inclinations, dialogue with different people that can arise ideas. Thus, I envisioned my own workshop as a thinking machine, in which I integrated people whose role is not only to manufacture, but also to search. Which is quite risky because we are not in the efficiency, but in the investigation. I expose ideas (works, exhibitions) and I ask my teams that they are worked.

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The notions of conscious / unconscious; reality / fiction underlie your works: what is your perception of the world and human relations?

I have a rather methodical, scientific, rational practice, but I try to open the fields to new points of view on the world. Including all parameters, data of a place, a story. The invisible is not necessarily what is obscure, it is more in a structuralist will, or in this fantasy of wanting to measure everything, to understand everything. Thus, as part of my project on the president's office at the Elysee, or that on the aboriginal sacred sites, the idea was that one day we can measure what moves us, influences us or transforms us into a place that we think hard. My work then involves thinking about new postulates, new ways of seeing the world using scientific theories that allow one to position oneself differently. The freedom to create is that which can also be won by not depending on a single context. This is also the reason why I multiply the types of projects. At Art Basel, as part of *Unlimited*, my film, *Otto*, will be screened, which I am very happy because the fair generates a great visibility. My approach was to film rocks, mountains, as human presences, and deal with the issue of the non-human and living: a strong question today for artists who rethink the plant, including, and other topics excluded from artistic thought. This is a long work that finds its culmination at both Perrotin, Art Basel, but also the Biennial of Sydney, as well as the Biennale of Havana. What also catches my attention is fiction. Simply, I take as a basis the real because I think it is more interesting than the pure invention of a virtual world.