

THE LAST NIGHTS OF PARIS

BY
MARC
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*Photography:
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Paris is the original metropolis of the modern mind. From the storming of the Bastille to the Exposition Universelle of 1889 and the erection of the Eiffel Tower, from the Anarchist to the Surrealist manifestos (via Symbolism, Modernism, Impressionism, Cubism, Existentialism and every ism in the book...), from July 1789 to May 1968, Paris seems to have been at the centre of almost every revolution of the modern mind. Even the words we use to define intellectual enquiry in our time – for example, the idea of being ‘an intellectual’, or that of there being such a thing as an ‘avant-garde’, or that of an ‘art movement’ – have all emerged from that geographical Nexus, with all kinds of currents flowing in and around the Seine to form a great delta of the mind.

Paris, in its heyday in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was not just the capital of France, but that of a vast cultural empire. Intensely cosmopolitan, it acted as magnet attracting modernist migrants from all walks of life: Benjamin, Rilke, Santos-Dumont (the Brazilian aeroplane pioneer), Joyce, Stein, Diaghilev, Picasso, Gris, Modigliani, Ernst, Man Ray, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Cortázar, Márquez, Beckett, Ionesco, Dalí, Brancusi, Buñuel, Giacometti, Mondrian, Miles Davis, Balthus, Cioran, the Beats ... – the list goes on.

But a tree needs roots, and before this fabulous modernist flourishing with its international avant-gardist jetset, the French capital had grown powerful cultural roots in its own home soil, in the Paris of the Siècle des Lumières, of the Revolution and Napoleon and Les Misérables and the restoration and the barricades. This was not a matter of immigrants, but one of emigrants, of personalities and ideas who would leave Paris to travel and transform the world – as opposed to arriving in Paris dreaming of changing the course of their art, or their clique. In the early, heroic days, writers and artists were deeply engaged with the world around them.

Voltaire and Rousseau were arguably the most influential men of their century. Through his military and diplomatic service, Stendhal followed in Napoleon's footsteps across Europe. Vautrin-like, and ever the entrepreneur, Balzac dreamt not just of publishing his own books, but of changing



the whole communications industry of his time (via publishing houses, newspapers, etc.) Jacques-Louis David art directed the French Revolution (and later the first Empire). He gave the revolution not only lasting images, but also rituals, ceremonies, choreographies, sets, even calendar days. Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* is perhaps the best known political painting of all time and it is difficult to imagine a more feverishly political artist than Gustave Courbet, who was actively involved in the fateful Paris Commune. But Courbet is already a borderline figure. With him, suddenly, it is hard not to get the feeling that

all this political fervour may not in the end turn out to be just a (vast and sick) joke.

For the French in the nineteenth century, Victor Hugo had come to symbolize the idea of the romantic and engaged artist. His death in 1885 caused an unprecedented outpouring of grief and sentiment – as well as a counter reaction.

Modern Paris, post-Commune Paris, had been conceived by the urbanist Baron Haussmann (the self-professed 'demolition artist', who demolished and rebuilt a significant part of the old Paris) as a reaction against this revolutionary spirit, with wide boulevards running in straight lines from the usual sus-

pect quarters to the army headquarters, with clear views for guns to aim at any budding barricades. Revolt, through arms or paving stones, suddenly seemed futile.

The very emergence, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of terms such as 'une avant-garde', or 'moderne', or 'un intellectuel', clearly signal a change in attitude within the arts, a distancing from the crowds, the politicized and credulous mob. This is clearly spelt out in Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*. For the self-respecting modernist, the world, and politics in particular, were not to be taken too seriously. Art was a far more sig-

nificant and interesting subject, worthy of becoming engaged with. *L'Art pour l'art*. Writers and artists would become engrossed in their issues and infighting.

This disassociation from reality would be pushed further by each successive movement. Impressionism, despite a few urban scenes, was more interested in the interplay of light and colour than in people or politics. Every now and then a bit of newsprint could be seen peering through a cubist composition, but the aim was mostly that of aesthetic as opposed to political enquiry. Long-haired, psychotic Alfred Jarry cycling through the streets with guns in his belt and a fishing rod over his shoulder was only interested in his kingdom, Ubu's kingdom, 'Poland, that is to say: Nowhere'. He became the patron saint of Surrealism and Dada, which pushed this distancing from reality to new hallucinatory extremes. It is almost as if the only artists really interested in the grain of reality at the time were photographers like Eugène Atget and Henri Cartier-Bresson. But even the photographs of humble, old Atget, his 'documents pour artistes', would have their meaning re-appropriated by the surrealist spirit.

As we know now, many jokes had already ran sour along the trenches of the First World War, and World War Two and the occupation would throw an even deeper shadow over the city of light.

So we come to it: the myth of Paris as *La Ville-Lumière*. Before being a city, Paris was, first and foremost, a stage. Or a series of stages: societies, salons, cafés, boudoirs, operas, the Bois de Boulogne, the popular theatres, the cabarets, the great banquets, the boulevards. Every daily ritual and every gesture was part of a grand theatre, or a 'théâtre de Grand Guignol', or Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, or that of *The Absurd*... No city was ever so closely connected to the notion of spectacle.

In Paris the night didn't fall, but was raised like a curtain to reveal a great actress in a dark dress embroidered with light, reciting verses like Sarah Bernhardt. But as she recited, around her, sets and characters kept changing. The societies turned into salons, the salons then turned into cafés, the cafés into blogs. In the streets, the dukes turned into revolutionaries, the revolutionaries into artists, the artists into journalists, the journalists into tourists... From being virtual sets, some parts of Paris have finally been transformed into real ones.

Paris, to the a nineteenth century eye was synonym with vigorous modernity, the bold and the new, both in art and technology: the Eiffel Tower, the Universal Exhibition, the avant-garde, the development of photography and early cinema, the roar



of the first cars, the flight of the first aeroplanes... To us, Paris is associated with nostalgia, dreams dreamt, fulfilled, or unfulfilled, and then forgotten.

From Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Douanier Rousseau: from the theory of the good savage, an idea capable of sparking vast social revolutions, to the stylised dream-jungles of a painter known for his naiveness, whose works were exhibited as curiosities, flukes, pranks, in the recently sanitized environment of art galleries and museums. On the cusp of the twentieth century, the Paris of spectacle has followed the heroic Paris as the lightning flash follows the thunder.

Now the storm is over. People come out again, mingling with the tourists alongside boulevards and parks. Every now and then, the ground still rumbles. One is aware of crossing over deep intellectual fault lines. The weather too can change rapidly and violently. You may still walk into a tube station in perfect peace and quiet only to come out in the middle of a frenzied 'manifestation'.

In the second part of the twentieth century, Paris was still able to spring a few surprises: *Waiting For Godot*, Yves Klein, *La Société du Spectacle*, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, *The Nouveau Roman*, Serge Gainsbourg, *The*

Nouvelle Vague, May 1968, *The Anti-Oedipus*, *La Maman et la putain*, Guy Bourdin, *Deconstruction*, Maurice Pialat, Sophie Calle, *Savage Nights*, Raymond Depardon, Michel Houellebecq – just to name a few.

Today, as we have stepped into another century, in a less heady though equally rich and varied atmosphere, a new generation of artists is emerging. They carefully avoid being trapped in bubbles of theory or politics. Open-minded, they are not afraid of engaging with the world around them. Matali Crasset, for example, is always intensely conscious of how her designs will affect people's modes of being. In her work, ideas and life are never disconnected, but feed of each other. The authors of the comics publishing house *L'Association* have resurrected Situationist ideas, adapting them to our post-modern and ever more situationist situation. H5's short film *Logorama* is not just a poignant critique of consumerism, but it also proposes an alternative way of producing and selling and thinking film. What the artists featured here all have in common is that they are trying to find new ways of connecting to their time, recapturing the spirit and the engagement of those heroic days, when Paris could still send shivers down the world's spine ●

ANTOINE ET MANUEL



Opposite:
Antoine Audiaul (left),
Manuel Warosz (right)
Paris, 19 July 2010



PARIS/PAIRS:

When did you meet?

Manuel: We were in the same school and had friends in common. Antoine fancied me and wished to meet me, so he asked friends to invite me to his birthday party. We had fun. Then we fell in love.

Did it work straight away?

Antoine: Professionally, it took several years before we started working together. I first started working as assistant in different studios, while Manuel was still at school.

What is the secret for working together?

M: I guess, a mutual respect and admiration for each other's work.

A: We could also call this love.

Do you ever argue?

A: We argue often, and it makes our interns very uncomfortable! But I think we always know when we've gone too far or been too unfair.

M: As we're a couple, our arguments can be pretty intense. I feel guilty, but it never lasts; an hour after, all is forgotten and forgiven.

Do you still remember your first commercial job?

M: Actually, we had three jobs at the same time, all jeans brands.

A: Yes, all of the sudden, three jobs in the same week for three different jeans companies. That was the day we decided to buy our first computer and printer.

YOU/CLIENTS:

What do you look for in a client?

M: We like clients to be clever, open-minded, enthusiastic, we tend to turn down anyone who's not.

How are ideas developed?

M: I often let the project rest in my brain, let it evolve freely. I think of it while walking, before sleeping. And after a while images pop up in my mind, but sometimes even during the first meeting this can happen. Ideas, I avoid them, especially good ones.

PEN/MOUSE:

Is most of your work done on or off screen?

M: I mainly work on the computer, probably more than eighty per cent of the time. When I draw, I use graphite pens, pencil, black ink.... Antoine works with a lot of various tools and colours.

A: I love experimenting with techniques and materials that I've never used before. I like to go in art shops all around the globe.

NEW/SAFE:

What are your feelings towards technology?

M: Like a lot of people, we're always waiting for the next generation computer or phone. At work, new machines help us to make dreams come true. I sometimes use a Wacom tablet with a screen, it enables me to make certain drawings more easily. We have a large-format printer that allows us to make beautiful large-scale prints. Before that, we wouldn't have been able to produce all the prints for our exhibitions, or make prints of collages and paint on them. So we use new machines to make new projects, easier, cheaper, faster and to gain control over our process.

CONTEMPORARY/COMMERCIAL ART:

Should commercial art be shown in museums like contemporary art?

M: That's a controversial question. I don't really consider our work as commercial. Within our body of work there is a range from very personal to more commercial. But of course, our work is commissioned by clients, so one can consider it to be commercial. But I think that art you see in galleries and museums is commercial. Right now, for the first time, we have



BÉJEAN LEDOUX

Are you from Paris?

Pascal Béjean: I was not born in Paris, but I always looked at it as a beacon. My environment always felt narrow, and I sometimes escaped to visit cousins. When I saw the orange lights in the tunnels, when I inhaled in the subway (the real subway smell, not the other one), I knew I had arrived. When it was time to study art at fifteen, there was no other option than Paris. I was finally home.

Olivier Körner: I came to study in Paris. I was twenty. My antennae grew. The shows, the night life. But it all seems calmer now.

Nicolas Ledoux: I arrived here aged three months! Paris is a living dream for a kid lucky enough to go with his granddad to all the museums and to go to spectacles with his parents. In the seventies, the 11ème arrondissement was like a little village. In the eighties, Paris became harder. But to be able to study here is a great chance. Everything seems possible.

Did you go to an art or design school?

PB: I studied applied arts, fashion design and design. I started graphic design on the battlefield as an intern, learning from the designers in the studio, then as a freelance with actual clients, and in books and magazines such as Eye and

Emigre. I had to wait to be a bit bored to go back to school for a short, but important time, in USA. That's where I learned graphic design history and type design with one of my heroes, Susan LaPorte. It was both wonderful and excruciating. **OK:** I studied programming and telecommunications. Then, after having worked for a few years, I went back to art school. That's where I met Pascal and Nicolas.

Do you remember your first commercial job?

PB: After my second internship, the studio asked me to stay around for a bit to design the program of a musical featuring one of my idols. I couldn't resist spending a whole month at the rehearsals. I worked with two of the biggest French songwriters, observing a famous director, listening to my favourite singer. My photographs even ended in the book. A perfect start, if you don't look at the result...

PARIS/TRIOS:

How do you decide who you would like to work with?

PB: After a few years of freelancing at home, I got bored. I met Frédéric Bortolotti, who had started a graphic magazine, Bulldozer® (www.labomatic.org/bulldozer), and suggested I help out. We ended up sharing the space we called

Opposite:
(From left to right)
Olivier Körner, Pascal
Béjean, Nicolas Ledoux
Paris, 23 July 2010



Labomatic, then working together on some commissions, then a lot of them. We played ping pong with projects. It was fun. Frédéric invited Nicolas on a large project. I guess he liked it, because he never left. Even if we have completely different tastes in art and music, different backgrounds, knowledge and agendas. We bring all of that on the table.

YOU/THE PAST:

Could you say a few words about Labomatic?

PB: Ten years of good times, with a twist of ginger.

NL: Labomatic is dead.

Why?

PB: We grew individually, supporting each other. But we no longer knew how to do it. It was more a personal than a professional breakdown.

NL: We exhausted ourselves. Certain tensions grew and the project d'Ultralab™ – which was very demanding – brought some dysfunction into our organization. Life did the rest. We stopped Labomatic, but Ultralab™ still exists.

You often work with art clients. Are there ever conflicts between your vision and theirs?

PB: We don't overprint our vision on theirs. We only use our experience and knowledge of the art world to propose the

most accurate project possible. Of course, our values obviously have a role in our conversations.

NL: Today's art world is used to artists with multifaceted practises, hybrids... But in the beginning, it was hard as people in the art world would see us as 'graphic designers', while those in the communication industry would see us as 'artists' – in the worst sense of both words.

YOU/CLIENTS:

What do you look for in a client?

PB: Dialogue, open mind, curiosity, respect, a good subject, reasonable expectations, memory, and cash flow... We never get all of these together.

Do you feel part of a 'scene'?

NL: Our positioning, as both artists and designers, is quite unusual in France, where people like to put you in a neat box with a beautiful label. As we prefer to work with a more conceptual than formal approach, we are not connected to a particular style.

How would you describe what is happening in Paris today?

NL: France, though the heir of Duchamp and Debord, has been quite removed from the big bang of the new art economy, and also from the design one. There

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are, therefore, movements questioning the usages and protocols of how one makes art and design.

Should the French language be protected from the English?

PB: I have been replying to your questions in English. Nicolas in French. What does that mean?

The French have managed to support their film industry. Is design similarly supported?

NL: Nobody is interested in design in France, certainly not its institutions. There isn't a single person in the Ministère de la Culture in charge of design.

Do you ever feel oppressed by the past?

PB: With age, you begin to value the past, because it includes your life. You become humble, realizing you did not reinvent the wheel. I love Picasso, Moholy-Nagy, Ella Fitzgerald, Erté, Cassandre, Chopin. All dead!

Favorite arrondissement:

PB: The north of Le Marais. Buildings are quite low, made with yellowish stones than grey Haussmannian buildings, which give a very warm light in the spring. April in Paris, chestnuts in blossom, I never knew my heart could sing...

Best Paris view:

PB: The Seine, in the winter. Winter in

This page:
*Théâtre Nanterre-
 Amandiers*
 Billboard and brochure,
 Available on demand at
 th@amandiers.com
 Photography and design
 2010/2011

Opposite page:
OpticalSound, Manifeste!
 Posters and magazine,
 Special release for the
 exhibition "Le temps des
 manifestes"
 Espace de l'Art Concret,
 Mouans-Sartoux, France
 Curator Fabienne Fuchéri
 Publisher Optical Sound
 Available at www.optical-
 sound.com
 Designed with Geoffroy Tobé
 2010



Paris, la la la...
 NL: My screen.
Favourite restaurant:
 OK: To be honest, I prefer to cook rather than go to restaurants. I like to prepare traditional French dishes, which one eats a bit less these days like, for example, blanquette of veal, stews, or îles flottantes (floating islands).
 NL: Swann et Vincent, a very good Italian, even if my favourite dish a traditional sauerkraut.
Bookshop:
 PB: It used to be La Hune (Saint-Germain), when I knew nothing, and Claudia was running the graphic design department. Now that I have established a de-

cent book collection, I buy here and there: Ofr, Beaubourg, L'Atelier, Amazon (for foreign books only, because in France, French books are sold the same price everywhere. Save your local bookstore!)
 NL: Mona Lisait, a remainder bookshop, who sells design books at great prices. It's our Ali Baba cave. I can be there for hours.
Café:
 PB: Le Café Beaubourg, first floor, right after the gangway. I occasionally went there as a student, spending quality time with the few friends I had in fashion school. It was a luxury for us, which made it more special. I bring my daughter there sometimes. She couldn't care less, but the chocolate is very good. So is the cheesecake. Next to La Hune, Le Flore

also carries a very good chocolate.
 NL: Le Pause café in the 11ème. It has a terrace, and I often meet friends there, by chance, or not.
French movies:
 PB: *Les Tontons flingueurs*. Sacha Guitry. *Escalier C*. All very French.
 NL: Chris Marker's *La Jetée*
Is Paris a good place to be a creative in?
 NL: Paris has a lot of culture to offer, but we don't have a design culture. Design is not valued, and it isn't easy to gain recognition, to be understood, or even to earn a living, as a designer. It can be tiring. But riding a bike through the streets of Paris, having gone to an exhibition or a concert... Well, very few things compare to it ●



MATALI CRASSET



MIND GYMNASTICS:

Would you agree that your work sits between the worlds of art and design?

Matali Crasset: In effect, what we produce can often belong to very different contexts, from industrial design to art galleries. We also do illustration, graphics, animation. It's very varied what we do here.

I like going through what I call 'mind gymnastics', jumping from one project to the next. I like changing context regularly, as this gives me a sense of perspective. I also like working on projects with different scales.

It is always a meeting ('une rencontre'). Normally, when I show in a museum, I do not show any industrial design, as people have different expectations when they go to an art gallery, or a museum. But for the show *Nature Morte*, I wanted to create an ob-

ject that worked as a sculpture, but was also something you could sit on – so a piece of furniture. I wanted to be right between the two worlds, creating a passage between them.

Do you have a method?

My point of departure is always an intention: that which I want to communicate. Materials, forms, colours – these will come later, they are a consequence of that intention. I am not into just doing pretty chairs. The idea always comes first, the function later. More often than not, I work with 'scenarios of life'. For example, in the *Hyperactif* show I tried to create furniture 'typologies', to try to open people up to the idea that one can think furniture differently: a chair does not need to be just a chair, one could maybe turn it and write on it, therefore moving from an inactive mode to an active one, or moving from a formal

I like going through what I call 'mind gymnastics', jumping from one project to the next



position to an informal one. It is important to create such 'points of passage'. Making furniture active in a way.

Certain themes are more relevant to the work I do with art spaces. Take, for example, the last exhibition I did with the Thaddaeus Ropac gallery. It was called *Living Wood*. I built an installation combining a number many elements: furniture, collage, animation. At the centre was this bench, based on the idea of the bark of a tree, which could also be the idea of skin. I was trying to explore this idea and to apply it to different areas. This is something that interests me a lot: to find links between areas and contexts through ideas such as the bark of a tree. In the end, when you put all this together in one room there is a sort of fluidity.

I always try to put in place new systems

Opposite:
Matali Crasset
Paris, 13 July 2010



of logic. We need that today. To find new ways of doing things, and to regenerate energies. I also have projects which take place in small villages, and that function in an interactive and experimental mode.

I have a certain number of values which guide my work: the idea of sharing, of hospitality, of empathy, of fluidity, and the idea of activity, being in touch with one's time, but actively so, relating actively to objects and spaces. These themes, these ideas, are then the prime matter that feeds all of my projects.

YOU/CLIENTS:

Who do you work for?

My clientele is incredibly varied, but there is still a link between the clients. What I do is very experimental and, therefore, a form of natural selection takes place. I am not going to be doing decoration. And the objects I do are objects of today.

But I have no problems with clients. I think I took a lot of trouble initially to sketch out a certain way of doing things, that is, I think, quite easy to understand. This way of doing things is not based on aesthetics. It is more a question of values, a will to move about, which means that sometimes our paths cross. It is no more complicated than that. If we share the same values and want to head in the

same direction, the results will be far more interesting. It is not a question of having loads of clients, but rather to have partners with whom we can do real work, to move forward and cover real ground together, to have time to think about problems in depth. That is what I propose. If I feel that this feeling is not shared, then I stop. We stuck to a small structure – four people, three designers and a manager – in order to allow us to have this freedom.

YOU/CLIENTS:

Is Paris a good place to be a designer today?

We were maybe a bit behind in terms of design in France, but we are waking up. When I talk to Italian furniture makers, they tell me that, strangely, Paris has become their first market. It is a very interesting period for us. Ten years ago, nobody seemed to know even what design was and every time we had to do something we had to explain what design was about. But if you look at French design, it is extremely varied. When you talk, for example, about Dutch design, you immediately have a picture in your mind. That is not the case here. You can't stick a label on us. This is also probably valid for artists. I like this multifaceted angle.

Favourite arrondissement:

There is a part of Paris that is a museum,

and people come from all over the world to visit it. I live in the East, because I want to have that feeling that I can still intervene, that not everything is fixed, or anchored to the past, and that one can still change things. I live in a neighbourhood called Belleville, which has a great diversity. When there are tensions, you feel them. It is directly in touch with our time and with life. It is not over-protected. I like the idea of waking up in the morning and coming out in the streets and feeling that there are still many things one can do. It is a different vision of Paris. And I think there are still many places like that and that one can still decide what kind of rapport one wants to have with one's neighbourhood and one's neighbours.

Where are you from?

I don't come from Paris. My parents are farmers and I come from a very small village of only about eighty people. It was only at the end of my school years that I decided I wanted to be a designer and came to Paris. I came here to study and, in order to earn some money as a student, I worked in a cinema. So, you see, I was already in that realm of the imagination. I would cross the city at night, in a taxi.

You are lucky to still have so many cinemas.

We were lucky to have had Jack Lang. The laws put in place at the time ensure that

Ideas are often to be found in recesses on the periphery of things



Opposite page:
Éric Gaspar,
Marie Bertholle
Paris, 12 march 2010



Are you originally from Paris?

Marie is from Dijon, Eric from Lyon. We live and work in Paris, because it's a city that made us dream when we were kids. It still makes us dream.

Where did you go to art school? Are courses more theory-based in France than in the UK?

We started studying in France, but we were aware of what was going on in Britain through books and magazines and we thought that France wasn't the best place to learn. We got into the graphic design course at Central St Martins in London together. We stayed there for three years, then did another two at the Royal College of Art. At St Martins we felt like fish in the water. We had a real independence of both work and thought. In France, when you embark on a new domain, you start with the theory, studying the work of past masters, and, consequently, when you start working, you're paralysed. In the UK it's the opposite. One is less bothered with the past, one tries things out and that enables people to find their own personal direction. We do not think people should be ignorant, but learning should go hand in hand with personal work – not as a castrating introduction.

PARIS/PAIRS:

When did you two meet?

We met when we were studying. Then we started working together during our last year at St Martins. We are now husband and wife. We are together in our personal and professional lives. It makes us inseparable.

Do you ever argue?

It is inevitable. But also positive. There are often misunderstandings: listening to another, we can sometimes have a mental picture that is very different from what the other was trying to express. This reminds us of our first years in London. Our tutors would brief us, but our English was still quite approximative, and we would understand, full of excitement, something else. We would come back a week later with work that had taken quite a different direction. It would trouble our tutors. But this approximative nature of language makes one creative.

YOU/CLIENTS:

What do you look for in a client?

The best people, capable of listening and with whom one can have a dialogue. Those who don't come to see us with half of the solution to a poorly formulated question. Also people who have a rich visual culture, a culture that goes well beyond our immediate visual environment.

NEW/SAFE:

How does an idea come about and is then developed?

Mostly, ideas come about with difficulty. We have many sketchbooks, about sixty or seventy. On them we paste photocopies of images collected from all kinds of books. The best ideas generally come out of a long roundabout, when one finds oneself in a new terrain, quite inconceivable at the beginning of the process. Ideas are often to be found in recesses on the periphery of things. Afterwards, it is a question of simplifying in order to come to something coherent.

Is most of your work done on or off screen?

We do both. We must go digital at some point in the process. But we also like paper very much. We like the physicality of things in general (we have created glass letters, unique prints, boxes). But it is strange how we are always a bit disappointed when we produce something. There is always a little printing mistake somewhere. It is often that little imperfection which later gives the work its quality.

What are your feelings towards new technologies?

It is much easier to realise things now than it was before. During our first years studying, one still had to compose using blocks of text using one's hands, while

JACQUES FLORET



Opposite:
Jacques Floret
Paris, 8 July 2010



MEMORIES:

Did you go to art school?

Yes, to an ordinary art school. I hung out with a group of friends. Everything was a subject for reflection, discussion, self-assured assertions, endless debate. We were quite arrogant. We tried to give strange replies to the weird questions we were asked by lecturers. I also remember doing some other amusing things for reasons I don't remember today. And then, one day, everything went in the bin. Apart from four or five blank and numbered pages... I think they're in a private collection in Italy now.

Do you remember your first exhibition?

It was a long time ago, in a pizzeria. With friends from my secondary school. The

place was called La Piazza Papa. I presented large squares of plywood on which I had done pyrography images of major-ettes. The restaurant's customers showed complete indifference to my work. After this failure, I vowed that I would never again exhibit in a pizzeria.

Your first published work?

Perhaps a series of images for a woman's magazine that doesn't exist anymore? I had to illustrate those personality tests, with questions like: 'How good are you at losing weight?' or 'How seductive are your clothes?' Or even better, 'What kind of child is right for you?'

How does an idea come about?

Actually it's quite simple. I'm informed

I drew her seventy-eight times. And I still don't know who she is

of the project, I'm given the instructions. I walk back and forth for a while. Soon, I get two or three ideas. I sit at my desk and make a few sketches. Then I explain them to my contact. We debate them. If all goes well, I create a final piece of work. Sometimes I have to begin again. Once, twice... Then I raise my rates. Same as everyone else.

Were you ever tempted by 'la bande dessinée'?

Indeed, some of my images can be seen as small stories. Often they are drawings in black and white. They're static gags, graphic clowning around. One image for one idea, that's what I try to find. A direct and clear shortcut. A drawing which has no caption, but where there is no room for confusion. As to whether I am tempted by 'la bande dessinée'...

As a teenager, I tried to tell the story of my life in just a few pages. It was, it seems to me today, marvellously monotonous... And had so many spelling mistakes. I appreciate the classics of the bande dessinée: Louis Forton, Alain Saint-Ogan, Benjamin Rabier, Calvo... From time to time, I copy a frame, a character, a background, a large nose, a car, a tree.

GIRLS & DOGS:

How did the book Rachel & Rosco come about?

Grégoire Robinne, the publisher of Dialecta, saw my previous book Permettez-moi d'admirer votre parc (published by Orbe) at a book show at the Point Ephémère in Paris. At our first meeting, he gave me Sept Manifestes Dada by Tristan Tzara that he had just republished. I was seduced straight away. Then he gave me a few months to create a new set of drawings. I had free licence. I decided to do a subject that was simple, something banal, but vaguely sexy. And to use only a four-colour ballpoint pen.

Why always a woman and a dog?

In memory, perhaps, of Beauty and the Beast.

Who is that woman?

Rachel. I drew her seventy-eight times. And I still don't know who she is.



PEOPLE/STORIES:

Are you from Paris?

Ludovic Houplain: No, I'm originally from Orléans. I moved to Pau in the Pyreneans when I was seven, and then to Paris at the age of fifteen. My first impressions were that the Parisians were snobbish, but that the girls were pretty (at fifteen that was just about the only thing I was interested in!) The other thing that did strike me was the fact that Paris seemed so immense.

Do you feel that French art & design courses tend to be more theory and art-history-based than ours?

I feel that for the graphic designers who came out of May 68 (our tutors) commerce and graphics were incompatible. And by intellectualizing everything I think we were left behind in terms of visual communication. In the forties, we had figures like Cassandre (Dubonnet, La Compagnie

Transatlantique, Chemin de Fer du Nord...), and, in the sixties, Vuillemot (Orangina, Air France, Perrier...), we then ended up, after 1968, in a heavily theorized scene, away from the terrain, and from people. I think our generation reacted against our elders by wanting to work on CD covers and pop-promos. We didn't want to be stuck to posters...

When was H5 formed?

We formed just after art-school, l'ESAG (l'Ecole Supérieure d'Art Graphique Met de Penninghen), in 1993. Antoine Jacquet and I knew we wanted to work together. But Antoine still had to finish his military service, at Vincennes, near Paris. This allowed him to join me every evening to work on our first H5 projects. We had just one computer for the two of us, and had to ask for loans in banks right left and centre. But, on the whole, it was

Our main enemy: the artist's ego. I believe that in our profession the key thing is to remain humble

a very exhilarating and careless period. Antoine was from Versailles and friends with Etienne de Crécy, Alex Gopher and Nicolas Godin (of AIR) and we found ourselves at the start of the 'French Touch' (the early French electronic and house music movement) and in an atmosphere of incredible effervescence. We would find the covers we were producing on the pages of the NME and The Face... There was not a lot of money amongst this whole effervescence, but plenty of adrenaline, and we felt we were living through a great adventure. For once, French music was looking beyond its borders...

How many are you?

At the start, it was just the two of us, with that one computer, the two of us taking turns between composing on the computer and working on the manual techniques we had learnt at Penninghen. Then we pro-

Opposite:

(From top left to bottom right) Matthieu Lelièvre, Fleur Fortuné, Ludovic Houplain, Kevin Lhuissier, Rachel Cazadamont, Nicolas Rozier, Hugo Blanzat Paris, 26 July 2010

Below:

Window & Alain Delon Paris, 26 July 2010



ceeded by leaps and bounds, which is still very much how things work at H5 to this day. Someone puts forward an idea and waits to see how the others react. If there is a response, a following, we take this further. But the gaze of the others, internally, is very important. Once an idea is agreed and taken on board, one artist (usually its originator) is in charge of carrying it to its conclusion. He is made to feel responsible for the project. If there are differences, we give opinions, but remain respectful of the opinion of the designer in charge of a particular project. We also know the workings of the company well enough to know that no design revolutions will take place without us becoming aware of it.

Every designer is free to leave once him or her feel it's the right time for that. I am not keen on working with frustrated egos. As matter of fact, I think that is our main ene-

my: the artist's ego. I believe that in our profession the key thing is to remain humble.

PEOPLE/STORIES:

Do you enjoy working for clients?

There is nothing dishonourable or humiliating in working for someone else. It is hardly something new: from the artists of the Renaissance down to Cassandre, Rockwell and Warhol, all have also created to order.

But I believe that it is important to stop 'fake' relationships with large corporations like L'Oréal, where the commissioners no longer have any responsibility, and are so afraid of their own hierarchy that they can no longer take decisions, and we find ourselves deadlocked in terms of decision-making. They also often fail to realize the amount of work there is behind a logo or a layout.

FASHION/MUSIC/FILM:

What is it like working for brands like Dior or YSL?

Dior is an exception, really. Hedi Slimane came to see us and noticed that we worked with quite a few of the 'French Touch' artists. After he was placed at the head of Dior Homme, he asked us to work with Dior Parfum, and on the identity of the new 'Higher' perfume, on the packaging, the ads and the Dior signature. Then he asked us to work on various catwalk shows.

With him there was a real efficiency. We were directly in touch with a subject. We were like an extension of his state of mind in the graphic domain. We now have a similar privileged relationship with Hermès. But with time, you come to realize that these beautiful budgets are, first and foremost, adventures among individuals, and that's true from the luxury industry to the music one or culture.

What do you think of the changes that have occurred in the music industry in the last few years?

Too much change. Change in the majors, where centralization reduces our interlocutors to just three or four groups. Drop in the sales of records, generating a drop in the budgets. It is exactly the opposite of the spirit of the years around 2000, when we had real artistic freedom.

So we are now focusing on the independents, where we still have a relationship with the singer, be it on the label Pixadelic of Etienne de Crécy or Alex Gopher's GO4. We ceased working on pop-promos to focus on shorts, a domain in which we have been recovering what we had lost with pop-promos, meaning better budgets and more freedom of expression. We are now even wondering if we shouldn't start conceiving a new economic model, based around these small formats, which could be sold over iTunes and for iPads, leaving behind the old distribution channels and moving towards new self-financing models.

How did the Logorama film come about?

The idea came out of a typographic pop-promo directed by Antoine Bardou Jacquet in 1999 called *The Child*. At the time, I had the idea of doing a pop-promo (for the

GHISLAIN GARLIN



MEMORIES:

Where are you from?

I grew up in the South of France, near Nice, under fig and olive trees, with the sea, the sun and cicadas. It had nothing to do with Paris. I came to Paris after studying for four years in Arles. I came over with no pre-conceived ideas. I knew nothing about the city and my main focus was work. I made one friend and rather squatted for a year. Then I started making contacts and friendships. But sending out cvs to companies and dressing up for interviews never got me a job. I can still remember all my job interviews... Maybe it's a good thing I am no good at writing cvs or cover letters.

What's behind your imaginary?

I have always been fascinated by human nature. It never fails to surprise me, in

both positive or negative ways. I consider myself to be a chronicler reacting to what is around. I feel I am often in revolt against my own time, and it is this mix of acceptance and rejection which informs my expression.

How do you divide your work between drawing and graphics on a computer?

I started drawing because I needed to get away from the hum of my computer. I had to empty my head. It is a medium which allows me to express ideas without being surrounded by a numeric veil. A friend of mine, Manan Ibrahim, invited me last year to Pakistan, in order to teach me the techniques of miniature painting and he often remarks that he doesn't find works 'which could have been done on a com-

In the winter, I like the banks of the Seine, and the Latin Quarter (5ème et 6ème arrondissement), when the Sorbonne has its authentic face

puter' all that interesting. Handicraft gives value to objects. I use computers as tools, and I make a living with them, in particular by working with 3D graphics software.

How would you define what you do?

It may be a way of getting away from reality, without quite being able to take off. Maybe I should call it 'dream-like realism'. *Is there such a thing as a french style in illustration?*

The French-Belgian comics tradition has covered quite a lot of ground and a whole generation grew up with illustrated narrative (as well as on American comics as well as Mangas and all kinds of adaptations). The number of comics published in France has never stopped growing.

Opposite:
Ghislain Garlin
Montreuil, 22 July 2010



YOU/PARIS:

So what is happening in Paris today?

Graffiti has been an active and important movement in the last ten years in the greater Paris region. Increased security has hurt it though. Today the very few 'groups' are those of commercial artists. The time of 'theorization' is over. One must produce, get out of the pack, make a living... Individualism together with liberalism, every one moving in his or her own direction. I am also under the impression that there is a new 'international' style, very different from that of the situationists.

Favourite arrondissement:

I like borders and limits. The periphery, between what is called Maréchaux. This junction between the city and its surrounding areas is like an effervescent



tablet in water: people move, cross one another, all kinds of activity take place, the landscapes changing radically. But when one lives in a city, one does also experience its seasons. In the winter, I like the banks of the Seine, and the Latin Quarter (5ème et 6ème arrondissement), when the Sorbonne has its authentic face. One can enjoy the cinemas and the bookshops, the quiet of the Luxembourg Gardens in cold sunny days. In the spring, I like the area stretching from the Père Lachaise cemetery to the banks of the Saint Martin canal, going through the Belleville, La Chapelle and Buttes Chaumont parks. This quarter blossoms with the arrival of the sunny days. In the summer, one must at all costs avoid the La Villette park and, in the autumn, while everyone else gets

back to serious business, I stay inside and regret the ending of yet another summer.

Best view:

I like the view of the Belleville park from above the Couronnes Metro, lying down on the grass or sitting on the tarmac of Piat street. I also like cycling and I would particularly recommend climbing Oberkampf, then Ménilmontant street.

Favourite bookshop:

You cannot miss Un Regard Moderne, where one can find rare treasures. Next to it, the others pale, with maybe the notable exception of Phillippe le Libraire, where time has a tendency to stretch itself indefinitely. I would also recommend the bookshop of the Palais de Tokyo for art books, The Lazy Dog for street art and Super Héros for comics ●



Opposite:
Killoffer
Paris, 5 July 2010

Like everywhere else, it's a great mess. All forms exist simultaneously, and I can't see anything clear emerging out of it. The exception, in fact, might be comics, in which one sees the emergence of the idea of authorship and that of art



SITUATIONS:

When did you arrive in Paris?

I was born in Metz, in the Lorraine, and came to Paris in 1981, aged fifteen, to go to art school. I was on my own, free, and could have got up to really stupid things. In the end, I was rather well-behaved.

What was the beginning like?

I came to Paris in 1981 to study graphics at the applied arts school of Duperré. I came out of it four years later, without a degree. After collaborating here and there with various fanzines and magazines, drawing illustrations and comics, I finally got down to doing significant work in 1990, when I started L'Association (with J-C Menu, David B, Lewis Trondheim, Mattt Konture and Stanislas), which published comics and managed to substantially transform the comics scene in France. And maybe even abroad.

In 1994, I started working with the Libération newspaper, which then led to me working with Le Monde, Télérama and many other newspapers and magazines. In parallel to this illustration work, but with more personal input, I have been writing comics, mainly for L'Association. I published a few books.

In 2007, I exhibited at the Anne Barrault gallery. It was the start of another big adventure. This is what I am mainly interested in at the moment.

Comics, illustration, art... Is there a common thread? How would you define what you do?

I'm still looking for that... I suppose what would be common to all these activities is the fact that I am always trying to dig deeper.

Do you consider yourself as part of a 'scene'? Yes, certainly, in a very concrete and factual manner, I feel part of L'Association

and of that whole generation of authors published under its wing.

How do you feel towards the internet?

I use a computer only for purely practical purposes. The internet doesn't interest me particularly. The virtual aspect of the internet frustrates me. I am mainly interested in producing objects.

THE ORDER OF THINGS:

Should commercial art be shown in museums like contemporary art?

This kind of separation, of segmentation, doesn't come from the artists themselves, who are quite happy moving from one area to the next. What we define as 'fine' art today was, in most cases, considered as 'commercial' when it was being produced.

How would you define what is happening in Paris today in terms of visual styles?

Like everywhere else, it's a great mess.



Opposite:
Florence Deygas,
Olivier Kuntzel
Paris, 6 July 2010



PARIS/PAIRS:

Why work as a pair?

Working in a pair brings the idea of dialogue. We simply extend this dialogue to many of our creations that work in duets. Our two black silhouette dogs 'Caperino & Peperone' are more like 'signs' than characters. As time passes, the various designs in 'Cap & Pep' become our very personal alphabet. Maybe this is due to our French culture, but our dialogues are very much based on 'thesis/anti-thesis', how to say one thing and its contrary and play devil's advocate.

When did you meet?

At work, on a project with cat drawings

by Olivier. He was a pioneer of digital pictures, and I could bring my classical handmade animation skills to his project. I felt like a classic pianist joining a rock band. It was amazing to be able to make animation without the heaviness of classical tools (stockfilms, etc.) and it was interesting to bring to these digiworlds some high standard of quality coming from an old-school system.

Did it work straight away?

We mainly struggled to make people understand this idea of working as a pair. Now it seems obvious, but not twenty years ago in France, when the fashion was for strong egocentric individuals.

We believe we are 'narrative designers'

When we started together, being a pair composed of a feminine and a masculine part, we had to impose the idea that the feminine part was not an assistant, or a muse, but a creative alter ego. Working in pairs has existed for ages, but signing as a pair is pretty recent.

Do you complement each other?

That's the basis of our association, but we both need to keep our own solo creations. Not a mix, but a juxtaposition. I draw 'beauties, dolls' and Olivier draws 'beasts'. He calls them 'Bears'. We develop pictures, videos and objets that we nicknamed 'Doll & Bear', 'Beauty & Beast.'

What is the secret for working successfully together?

Space, in all the senses of the word. When we develop a project, we don't both do the same thing, each one has his own field of creation. On a shoot, we're not both behind the camera. Our field of action is not still, it's always on the move, its limits are always floating. We can switch parts depending on how much affinity we have with the project. If a project requires Olivier's graphic design skills, then I will do all the things around that creation. This role-sharing has no defined rules, but is necessary so that each one of us can express oneself one hundred per cent on one point, and not fifty per cent on each detail.

Another space would be the one in which we play. We don't define ourselves according to the media we're using. We make films, does that make us directors? We draw, does that make us illustrators? We create objects, does that make us designers? There is only one thing in common to all our creations: they're narrative (story-telling). We believe we are 'narrative designers'.

Since the very beginning of our professional relationship, we understood that it was important, if not essential, to explore, in our own way, fields which were mostly left aside by other artists: contracts, communication, the distribution of our cre-

CHLOÉ POIZAT



Opposite:
Chloé Poizat
Pré-Saint-Gervais,
26 July 2010



I am very critical towards contemporary illustration. It is a waste of time. There is too much mediocre work in the domain

Even if divided between artworks and illustration (in your two websites), your art seems to have a common thread and inspiration. Are both aspects the same, or different things?

I impose quite a clear separation between both aspects of my work. On one side, you have my illustration work (even if I consider myself not to be an illustrator, but an artist doing illustration to earn a living), and my artwork proper. I have therefore two brains, living and working together constantly. There are very few bridges connecting both: www.chloepoizat.com and www.chlpzt.info.

What are your feelings towards contemporary illustration?

I am very critical towards contemporary illustration. It is a waste of time. There is too much mediocre work in the domain.

So how would you define what you do then?

Let me try and draw a list of what I am trying to figure out in my work:

- Collage as a thought-process.
 - Documentation, printed image, photography.
 - Redirection and diversion, re-appropriation, metamorphosis.
 - Humour (dark), the absurd, irony, derision.
 - References to literature, fiction, the genre.
- What would be your main sources of inspiration?*
- Literature.
 - Cinema (Aki Kaurismäki, Buster Keaton, all of early cinema, D.W. Griffith, Murnau, etc.) is a major part of my imaginary.
 - David Lynch.
 - Fellini.

Do you ever feel oppressed by the past?

I think it is important to get to know the past, as much as possible. I often come across people who have a daily rapport with images in their work and who nevertheless know nothing about art history. This is a problem.

Favourite arrondissement:

The 19ème, which very few tourists know.

It is a poor neighbourhood, multicultural and very green.

Favourite Paris view:

The view from the top of the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont.

Favourite bookshop:

Gibert Joseph, where one can find the largest selection of secondhand books and literature.

Favourite café:

Le Bar Ourcq to drink a beer lying on a chaise longue on the canal.

Favourite art space:

Le Château d'Oiron (outside Paris) and exhibitions at l'ARC in the MAMVP (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris).

Favourite French movies:

L'Anglaise et le Duc (The Lady And The Duke), of d'Éric Rohmer

Les Deux Anglaises et le continent, of François Truffaut

L'Attaque d'un poste Anglais, of Georges Méliès ●



TILL RABUS

PERCEPTIONS:

How would you define what you do?

My paintings reflect some hidden aspects of the contemporary lifestyle in the West. I believe that behind the surface of our shiny modern life, there is a more dark and disturbing reality that we are trying to ignore, consisting of basic instincts, pollution, mass media... My inspiration comes from the ordinary background which I arrange in an unusual form. Can we call that a perverted hyper-realism? I wonder.

What are your feelings towards technology?

In my work, I use the potential of digital imaging in the composition process but I remain a painter who uses brushes and pigments.

In your work traditional painting elements and references (Surrealism, Pop Art, etc.) are applied to a hyper-contemporary imaginary.

What is your relationship with the past like?

I am fascinated by Flemish still lives, Surrealism, German Expressionism and Pop Art. These styles and painting practises are a great source of inspiration to me. It is

Opposite:
Till Rabus
Paris, 23 July 2010



more difficult for me to identify my work to a unique reference in contemporary painting.

I am great fan of Paul McCarthy, the Chapman Brothers, Fischli and Weiss, as well as other contemporary artists of my generation that are not such big names yet.

PARIS/PAST:

Is there such a thing as a French style in painting and creative projects in general?

I do not want to categorize a whole generation of artists, but I noticed that the artists in France are well conscious of their artis-



tic heritage. I notice a lot of references to the French artists of the previous generations within the new one. I think French artists are with no doubt interesting, but, for my taste, they often lack a sense of self-derision and humour, a quality that I admire among British artists.

Arrondissement:

11ème arrondissement is a cosmopolitan area of the city. A lot of my friends live there.

View:

The roofs of the city centre from any high point of view.

I notice a lot of references to the French artists of the previous generations within the new one

Restaurant:

Le Grand Véfour! The cook Guy Martin is definitely an artist. The speciality of the menu is 'les ravioles de foie gras'.

Café:

Zero Bar .

French movie:

Playtime by Jacques Tati.

What does Paris has to offer to creatives that no other city does?

I am wondering ...but I am still here. Maybe because of a strong addiction to these 'ravioles de foie gras'... ●