

# BRUNO PÉLASSY



AIR DE PARIS

# BRUNO PÉLASSY

Born in 1966 in Vientiane, Laos

Died in 2002 in Nice, France

Throughout his life, Pélassy embodied a dazzling and multifaceted persona, as a crossover artist whose work defies easy categorisation. He painted, drew, performed, created sculptures, films, couture, and jewellery. Formal and playful material excesses tend to blur disciplinary boundaries, making it challenging to separate his artistic endeavours from his approach to daily existence. Pélassy was a rampant collector; and it was the very things that others seemed to no longer have any use for that attracted him the most: faded fabrics from various countries, jewellery, books, and toys, as well as records, and old VHS tapes.

The techniques of collaging, sewing, separating, and connecting are deeply embedded in his work process and testify to his studies as a textile and jewellery designer. They enabled him to continually re-adapt reality to his needs and to create formulas for what he felt did not fit. He relied on the combination of different techniques, processes, and materials which he borrowed from both the realms of haute couture and the second-hand culture of a throwaway society, thus combining high-quality production methods with the use of cheap as well as everyday materials. Simple pencil drawings were as integral to Pélassy's practice as the meticulous crafting of glass and crystal, along with the creation of jewellery or reliquary-like objects.

Significantly shaped by an early diagnosis of HIV at the age of twenty-one, Pélassy's work ponders the ambivalent poetics of illness, infection, and death. He perceived the body as a porous and erratic entity that was simultaneously deeply interwoven with its environment. His practice can be considered a personal and political engagement with the norms of desire, nature, gender, social values, and health, as well as a plea for the dissolution of rigid binaries.

Pélassy's multifaceted body of work has been showcased in internationally acclaimed solo exhibitions, most recently at Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, (2024); 55 Walker Street, New York (2018); Flat Time House, London, and MAMCO, Geneva (both 2016), as well as at Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine; Passerelle Centre d'art contemporain, Brest, and Air de Paris, Paris (all 2015). Pélassy's work has also been part of numerous group exhibitions, including Exposed, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2023), Still I Rise: Feminisms, Gender, Resistance, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham (2018), and Un nouveau festival, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2012).

# **SELECTED EXHIBITIONS**

# **Bruno Pelassy & the Order of the Starfish**

**Curated by Ana Gritz**

**Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, Germany**

**20.10.2023 — 14.01.2024**

A photograph captures Bruno Pélassy, freshly emerged from the deep blue of Nice's Coco Beach, wearing a starfish like a living brooch on his chest, consigning him to some secret maritime order. "The blurred distinction between plant and animal that exists so obviously in the sea, as if it offered a perfect metaphor for the philosophical limits of all binary distinctions: good and evil, male and female, night and day, black and white." [1], cast a deep fascination on the artist, as Laura Cottingham, curator and close confidante, recalls. It is exactly this dissolution of binaries that is at the heart of Pélassy's artistic practice.

Bruno Pélassy and the Order of the Starfish is the French artist's first institutional exhibition in Germany. Pélassy was born in 1966 in Vientiane, Laos, and died in 2002 in Nice at the age of thirty-six. His eccentric, subversive, and at the same time extremely sensual oeuvre rubs shoulders with selected works by other artists. The group exhibition presents contributions by Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Beth Collar, Jesse Darling, Brice Dellsperger, Leonor Fini, Ull Hohn, Natacha Lesueur, Jean Painlevé & Geneviève Hamon, James Richards as well as Soshiro Matsubara, who also devised the exhibition's architecture.

The group show interacts with Pélassy's work at various points. The exhibition architecture by Japanese artist Soshiro Matsubara, consisting of labyrinthine fixtures, wall hangings, mirrors, carpets, and a wide variety of Mannerist ceramics and lamps, forms the basis for this exchange. The urgency and relevance of Pélassy's inquiries in relation to contemporary concerns become apparent through the direct juxtaposition of and interaction between each of the works in the exhibition spaces. In dialogue with Pélassy, the group presentation reflects on the malleability of the body, its transitoriness, as well as on a failing political system in which illness has come to be read as an indicator of social power relations.



Exhibition views

Bruno Pelassy & the Order of the Starfish

Le Consortium, Dijon, France

2023

Photo : Rebecca Fanuele © Consortium Museum



Exhibition views

L'Almanach 23 : Emma McIntyre

Le Consortium, Dijon, France

2023

Photo : Rebecca Fanuele © Consortium Museum



Exhibition views

Bruno Pelassy & the Order of the Starfish

Le Consortium, Dijon, France

2023

Photo : Rebecca Fanuele © Consortium Museum

**Bruno Pélassy**  
**Curated by Paul Bernard**  
**MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland**  
**24.02 — 01.06.2016**

Bruno Pélassy is close to a generation of artists who are joyfully challenging sexual identities and showing a taste for ornament in an artistic context still marked by the virile, formalist heroism of Supports-Surfaces. In this milieu - which includes artists such as Jean-Luc Verna, Marie-Eve Mestre, Brice Dellsperger, Natacha Lesueur and Jean-Luc Blanc - Pélassy stands out for its craftsmanship in jewelry and finery. Beaded curtains and sculptures, dresses, statuesque gloves and intuitive assemblages are just some of the elements of this poetic "wonder".

His name remains associated with two emblematic series: the "creatures", elegant fabric dolls evolving in aquariums, and the "bestioles", small sculptures dressed in eccentric costumes that never stop moving. The mute bewitchment of the former is matched by the rude arrogance of the latter. This bestiary is completed by snakes twisted on velvet branches. One of these, entitled Ouroboros, refers to the autophagous myth of self-destruction and renewal.

A morbid impulse runs through many of the artist's works. Presented at the center of the exhibition, his film *Untitled, Blood Titled, One Hundred Titles* compiles in a jerky arrangement extracts from films, documentaries and advertisements. The opening shot of Stanley Kubrick's *Shining* recurs like a ritornello, creating the sensation of an imminent nightmare. Edited by the artist with a VCR, the film is only available on VHS. The more it's shown, the more it deteriorates, the more the image and sound fade before disappearing. This process of corruption is echoed in the series of drawings *We Gonna Have a Good Time*, in which hair salon models are eaten away by disease.

The symbolism of moulting and the practice of montage characterize the artist's large-scale installation at Atelier Soardi in 1997, as part of the *Sur le moment* exhibition. To set the scene for a "photo rave safari" initiated by artist Ben, Pélassy, then in the midst of moving house, recreated a room with his own belongings. On the floor, brightly-colored carpets held a bed, armchairs, tables and a host of accessories; on the wall, a gigantic patchwork of hangings, featuring a fake rhinoceros head by Ben and a number of works by his close friends and family.

It's worth emphasizing Ben's role as benefactor and occasional assistant to Pélassy, who gave the artist a great deal of support, notably through the purchase of numerous pieces.

Bruno Pélassy also cultivated a taste for the occult, cryptic symbols and sacred objects. The reliquary series features jewels and a jacket in baroque chests. Exhibited in a dark room, as the artist did in 1993, they are teeming with secret details and remain silent as to their possible ritual function. A year later, the artist created the *Temple*, which accumulates fetishes and is accompanied by a sibylline poem mixing Latin with French and English: hermeneutics will be in for a treat. In the final analysis, this protean, generous, eccentric and romantic work, shot through with genial intuitions, manifests, in the words of Didier Bisson, "the risk of living as well as the concern for the unknown, with the idea of also having to die".



Exhibition views

Bruno Pélassy

MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland

2016

Photo : © Annik Wetter



Exhibition views  
Bruno Pélassy  
MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland  
2016  
Photo : © Annik Wetter



Exhibition views

Bruno Pélassy

MAMCO, Geneva, Switzerland

2016

Photo : © Annik Wetter



#### Exhibition views

Tears Shared - Marc Camille Chaimowicz featuring Bruno Pélassy

Flat Time House, London, United Kingdom

2016

Photo : © Plastiques Photography



Exhibition views

Tears Shared - Marc Camille Chaimowicz featuring Bruno Pélassy

Flat Time House, London, United Kingdom

2016

Photo : © Plastiques Photography

**Bruno Pélassy**  
**Curated by Claire Le Restif**  
**Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-seine, France**  
**16.01 — 22.03.2015**

An art center is not a museum but occasionally it has to become one. Thus, today, for the first time, Crédac has mounted a retrospective exhibition devoted to the living work of a deceased artist, Bruno Pélassy. A beautiful and fruitful collaboration played out around his oeuvre, with the unfailing support of the Pélassy family, the artist's friends (Natacha Lesueur, Brice Dellsperger, Frieda Schumann), art critics and experts of Pélassy's body of work (Didier Bisson, Florence Bonnefous, Marie Canet), generous collectors, and the art centers Passerelle in Brest and MAMCO in Geneva which host exhibitions and events dedicated to Bruno Pélassy in 2015 and 2016.

The main aim of the Crédac show is to return to the spotlight the work of this singular French artist, who is etched in the memory of the artistic community but has yet to be discovered by the public at large. Pélassy produced his work in the context of the 1990s, a time of economic hardship and individual and collective traumatism having to do with the AIDS virus, but the decade was also one of artistic ferment in Nice, where he was close to the art school and art center of Villa Arson, then under the direction of Christian Bernard. His friends were the artists Jean-Luc Blanc, Brice Dellsperger, Natacha Lesueur, Marie-Ève Mestre, Jean-Luc Verna and "guardian" artists like Ben. He had his first exhibition in 1993 in Nice at Art:Concept. Pélassy did not attend art school. Rather, he studied textiles and jewelry, which eventually led to his working for the jeweler Swarovski, while from fashion design he was to borrow his processes, materials, and the techniques for shaping them. A do-it-yourself approach joined forces with painstaking work that employed glass and crystal, and the creation of jewelry went on right alongside his construction of cheap little mechanical creatures.

The works featured in the show were all created over a period of ten years. What is striking from the very outset is the diversity of the experiments, both esthetic and technical, which the young artist seemed driven to give form to like some irresistible impulse. There are the "Créatures", silk and lace organisms moving about in aquariums; "Bestioles" (Bugs), a mechanical bestiary making a spectacle of itself; the portraits done in wax or pencil; his only video piece, *Sans titre, Sang titre, Cent titres* (1995), a kind of manifesto in which the magnetism of the video tape is gradually erased as it is reread over and over again, damaging the image until it disappears; and the "Reliquaires" (Reliquaries), which contain both pieces of jewelry and one of the artist's jackets.

The Crédac show refuses to stake out a position that strives to ape a display the artist himself might have devised, but neither does it adopt an overly museum-like approach to presenting the work. Thanks to the present show, Bruno Pélassy's output can be seen once again and now is part of what is most current and relevant in today's art. The images to which it refers, the echo of the context in which it was created, and the use of metaphors and figures which it puts out into the world form a vast field of experimentation that allows us to fully measure the interest of this body of work, an oeuvre that won't go out of fashion, that is somber and luminous, sophisticated and cobbled together, heartfelt and lucid, and above all free.



Exhibition views

Bruno Pélassy

Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-seine, France

2015

Photo: © André Morin



Exhibition views

Bruno Pélassy

Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-seine, France

2015

Photo: © André Morin



Exhibition views

Bruno Pélassy

Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-seine, France

2015

Photo: © André Morin

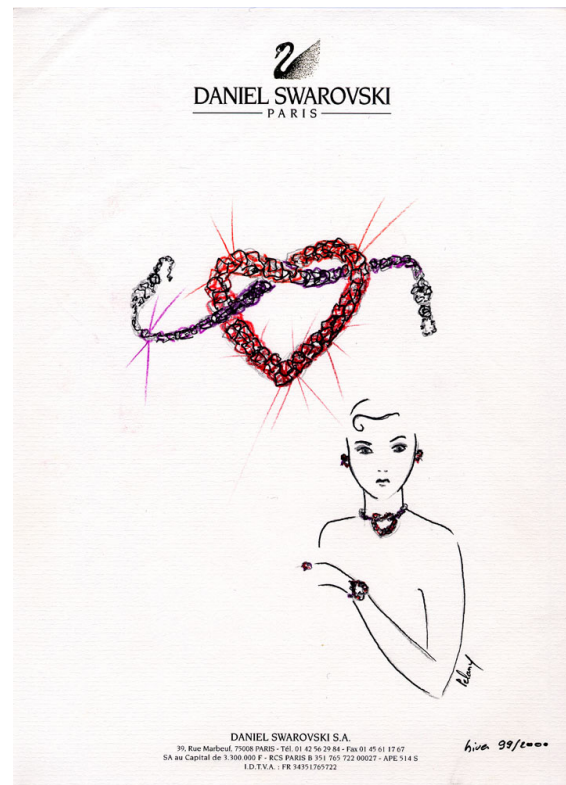
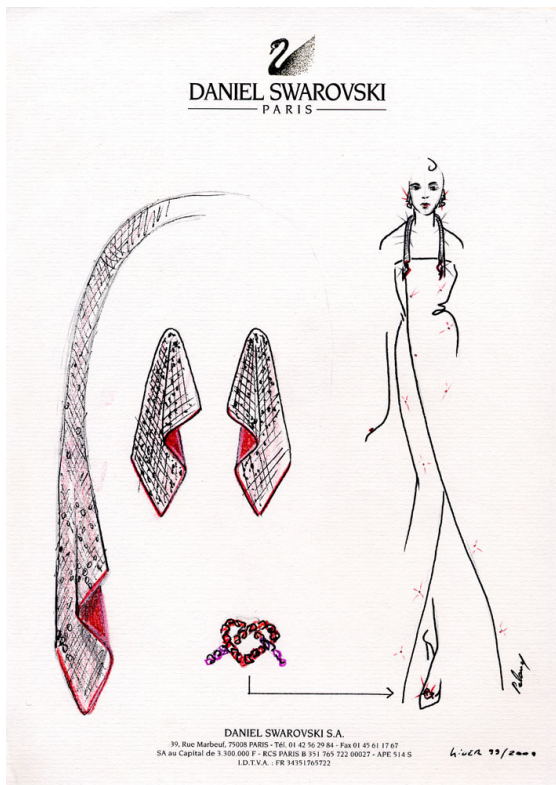
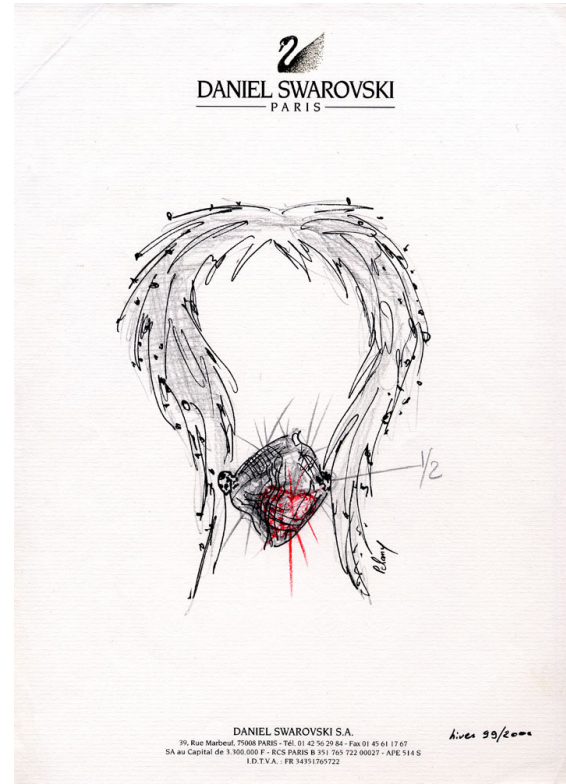


Exhibition views  
Bruno Pélassy  
MAMAC, Nice, France  
2003



Exhibition views  
Bruno Pélassy  
MAMAC, Nice, France  
2003

# **SELECTED ARTWORKS**



Swarovski drawings  
1999-2000  
Set of 9 sketches, pencil and ink on paper  
21 x 29,7 cm (each)  
Unique



Untitled  
 (Collaboration with Natacha Lesueur)  
 2000  
 Chromogenic print on aluminium  
 50 x 50 cm  
 Unique  
 Edition of 5



Untitled  
2000  
White kid glove, synthetic stone.  
23,5 x 7 cm  
Unique



Untitled  
2000  
White kid's glove, solidified foam  
34 x 10 cm  
Unique



Untitled (Bye Bye Jeff)

1998

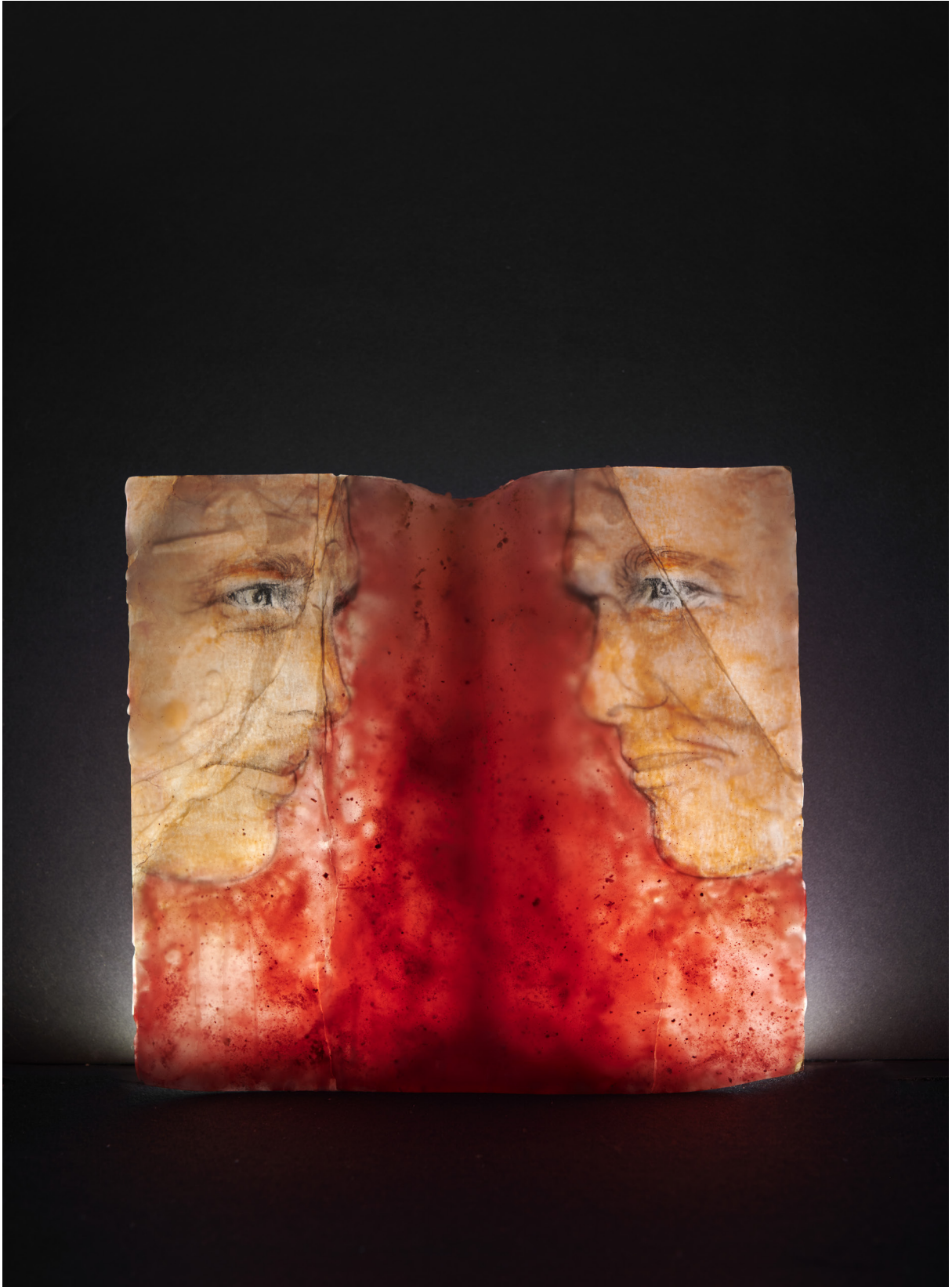
Glass, crystal, carnelian, glass beads, wire and metal rods, cotton thread, plastic

32 x 20 x 19 cm

Unique



Untitled  
 1998  
 Chainmail glove, metallic porcelain, silver, steel, cotton  
 22.5 x 9 x 5.5 cm  
 Unique



Untitled  
 1996  
 Pencil on paper, paraffin wax, pigment  
 24 x 26 cm  
 Unique



Untitled  
 1996  
 Pencil on paper, paraffin wax, pigment  
 24 x 32 cm  
 Unique



Untitled (Viva la Muerte)  
1995  
Glass beads, nylon, wood  
220 x 90 cm  
Unique



Untitled (We gonna have a good time) series  
 1994-1995  
 Framed crayon on paper  
 39,5 x 31,5 cm (each)  
 Unique



Untitled  
1994  
Black wig, plastic, toy mechanism, batteries  
30 x 20 x 18 cm  
Unique



Minerve  
 1992-1993  
 Glass beads, black cabochons, wire.  
 28 x 23 x 35 cm  
 Unique



Reliquaire  
 1992-1993  
 Glass beads, tassels, rhinestones, golden painted wood, velvet, mirror, glass, metal and wire  
 63 x 34,5 x 34,5 cm  
 Unique



Reliquaire  
1992-1993  
Glass beads, tassels, rhinestones, golden painted wood, velvet, mirror, glass, metal and wire  
52 x 55,5 x 36 cm  
Unique