

“My work is like poetry, or a living dream.” The morphing magic of François Curlet’s artworks

François Curlet (1967) is a self-professed “synthetic Belgian” whose work has covered the disparate subjects of consumer culture and found seaside objects. He studied at École régionale des beaux-arts de Saint-Étienne, in Grenoble and at La Cambre. Since the 80s the Parisian’s work has been preoccupied with things and their essence, using them as spaces to deconstruct commercial signs and symbols and revealing glimpses of a Skype logo or a plastic milk container. It crosses the forms of graphic art, sculpture or film. Read below on his artistic thought process, Duchampian influences and hopes for an upcoming film in lieu of his first ever major monographic show Crésus & Crusoé at MAC’s, on display till Sunday 10th March.

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At its core, what is your work about? How would you describe it?

My work deals with our society and the signs it produces. I tend to play with those in order to let a new sense emerge about our society, its complexity and what it’s like to live within it. In order to do that, I use its signs to create deviations. My work is like poetry, or a living dream. It can be objects, it can be paintings or it can be film.

What is its starting point and statement?

Usually it’s an object. I like to look at them thinking of the multiple senses they refer to, like a cat playing with a wool ball, and looking at it from different angles.



Moonwalk (2003)



Moonboot (2008)



T.V. Set (2010)

Can you talk to us about your approach in general?

I never wanted to work. When I was a kid I thought I could stay in my pyjamas and sleep at different rich people's homes as a means to work. I like to look at our world in a playful way to show people how cynical it can be. I also want to enhance its dreamlike aspects.

What characterises your work?

Probably the fact that I don't want it to be aesthetically consistent. What's important to me is the idea *behind* the work and the fact that my work gives onlookers a new perception of reality.

How do you actually work on a piece, from start to finish?

I start by making small sculptures with the things I find around me. If I'm in Camargue, it can be small plastic things I find at the seaside. I let them talk by joining them together. This is the moment of the process I prefer most – it's like a 3D sketchbook. Sometimes it becomes a work, and sometimes not. When it does, I usually work with craftsmen to prepare specific aspects of the work. For the glass suitcases for example, I worked with a glassmaker. When it becomes a real work, it gets colder. There's a certain distance which appears in the work created.



Chaquarium (2003) / Cococat (2001)



Toast cannibale (2014)



Suite objets de plage (2015-2018)

What series or project are you currently working on?

For the past few years I've been focussing on film. In the exhibition alone, I showed three new short films. I would now like to create a full-length feature film.

Who would you say was instrumental in shaping your artistic practice?

Life itself and artists such as Dan Graham, Robert Filliou, Marcel Duchamp, Jef Geys and many more. I can't name them all.

What are the challenges you face as an artist working in Belgium today?

I try not to think of art in such a way. I do my work on my own and try not to get involved in the art world too much.



Philippe De Gobert (c)



Philippe De Gobert (c)



Philippe De Gobert (c)



Jonathan Livingston (2013)



Jonathan Livingston (2013)



Jonathan Livingston (2013)

How do you see yourself fit into the country's contemporary art scene?

Well, I'm what I call a synthetic Belgian. I come from France and was very happy 30 years ago to find a country as surrealist as I like life to be.

To what extent does your local scene inspire and influence you?

If I have to talk about the people around me, I would probably talk about Christophe Terlinden, Fred Biesmans, Michael Dans, Michel François, Ann Veronica Janssens, Jef Geys, Jacques Louis Nyst and many more.



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What does success look like to you ?

I don't care about success. I just want to do my work.

To you, what role should contemporary art occupy in the community ?

It should improve one's reality by being accessible.



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On a more personal note, how does your everyday inform your work?

What I do speaks about what we see everyday and what it does to us. Logos are everywhere, for example, such as McDonalds and discount shops.

What were your first introductions to the visual arts?

I was ten years old when I saw, during the eight o'clock news a report about César Baldaccini's retrospective at the Pompidou in 1977. They showed a car being scrapped, which was then displayed in the museum. I then understood that museums were not only for drawings, paintings, bronzes or marbles. Everything could be used!

→ François Curlet's *Crésus & Crusoé* is on display Musée des Arts Contemporains de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles in Grand-Hornu until Sunday 10th March.