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FLORENCE BONNEFOUS

In the 1980s Florence Bonnefous met Edouard Merino at the École du Magasin in Grenoble, with whom, she says, she made two mistakes: the first, opening Air de Paris. Founded in 1990 in Nice (and now located in Paris), the gallery represents Trisha Donnelly, Rob Pruitt, Sturtevant, Sadie Benning, M/M Paris, and Torbjørn Rødland ... which leads us to the second mistake: "in the end, the gallery is rather white!" The latter still fixable. Over the past three decades, Bonnefous and Merino again and again managed to use the gallery as a format for experimentation: in the exhibition "Domino" (2006), for instance, each artist invited the next, progressively transforming a very empty display to a very crowded one. For the gallery's inauguration, Bonnefous and Merino handed the space over to Pierre Joseph, Philippe Parreno, and Philippe Perrin, who spent a whole summer month there. In this issue, Bonnefous takes a break from preparing the gallery's next move to Komunuma (Esperanto for "community"), a new art quarter in Romainville just outside of Paris, and spoke to Joseph about what happened during that wild holiday (p. 62).

CONTRIBUTORS

Exhibition Histories

“Les Ateliers du Paradise”, 1990

Air de Paris, Nice

In the summer of 1990, artists Pierre Joseph, Philippe Parreno, and Philippe Perrin took over Air de Paris in Nice at the invitation of gallery owners Florence Bonnefous and Edouard Merino. Under the title “Les Ateliers du Paradise”, they orchestrated one of the first exhibitions-as-living-artworks. It marked a turning point for the generation that would later be associated with Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of relational aesthetics. *Florence Bonnefous* and *Pierre Joseph* talk about wish lists, swimming, and situation design.

Florence Bonnefous: We met in Grenoble at the end of the 1980s. You were students at the École des Beaux-Arts, we were studying at the École du Magasin, and we very quickly opened an art gallery in Nice (by the sea, rather than in Paris). We did our first exhibition there together in the summer of 1990. We invited you to come and live in Nice and gave you carte blanche for a month, a summer month, a holiday month, a month of play, a month to change everything. You proposed to call it “Les Ateliers du Paradise”. Do you remember how you came up with the idea for the title?

Pierre Joseph: The title was in reaction to the popularity of residencies, those in which young artists often participated once they had finished their studies. These usually contained the word “workshop” of this or that in their announcements. We wanted to talk about this moment after art school, which

perhaps corresponds more to a post-MFA or post-graduate degree today, by doing something fun and entertaining while mastering the context. “Le Paradise” was the name of a Monegasque nightclub. The name that seduced us all was a collage of a word that evokes work with a word that evokes celebration. “Les Ateliers du Paradise” is a kind of an oxymoron, isn’t it? For us, this meant no responsibilities, no reporting, no studio visits in a classical sense, no pedagogy. Enjoy, enjoy.

FB On our side, we had strong Fluxus leanings and in particular were inspired by *La Cédille qui sourit* (The smiling cedilla), a project by Robert Filliou, Georges Brecht, and many others, in Villefranche-sur-Mer (July 1965 – March 1968), later renamed *La Fête permanente* (The Permanent Party). The motto was “art is what makes

Photo: Pierre Joseph, Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris



Philippe Parreno
Untitled (Climbing Holds), 1990
with Pierre Joseph climbing the wall



Philippe Parreno
Bibliothèque du Paradis, 1990
25 books with coloured dust jackets
from the Pantone colour scale, IKEA
shelf, wood, 106 x 90 x 28 cm



Gaming station

Courtesy Air de Paris, Paris



Exhibition view "Les Ateliers du Paradis"



Exhibition view "Les Ateliers du Paradise"

life more interesting than art." So, your project, which replaced the search for the establishment with the search for meaning through the experience of everyday life by including us, was necessarily exciting. You offered us an experience rather than an exhibition. First, you gave us a wish list, which we tried to answer as best we could!

PJ Yes, it all started with a visual and material trigger: by coming across a design supply store on rue du Renard in Paris, the idea of "Les Ateliers" began to take shape. Could we live in the middle of such objects with our creations and have this on display together? By extension, we started to think about the objects and services that we wished to bring to this experience: technological equipment that was unaffordable

for us (video projector, hi-fi system, large television, game console), fitness facilities (jacuzzi, weight bench), designer furniture, artworks, credit cards, etc. You crossed off this phantasmagorical list with the possible ones. We finally furnished the space and surrounded ourselves with a Ron Arad seat, Louise Lawler works, a "Big Nude" by Helmut Newton, a double switch piece by Angela Bulloch, a *House No 8* by Andreas Schulze, Michel Journiac's *Homage to Freud* (1972), a Bang & Olufsen hi-fi system, an Atari game console; and we were dressed by Jean-Paul Gaultier. Air mattresses and beach towels were lying around. In short, everything we needed to make our idea a reality.

FB And so, we found ourselves in a model house after having converged from Strasbourg,

Monaco, Echirolles or Villeneuve! Fortunately, the gallery was on two levels and very close to Cours Saleya (the market, cafés, restaurants) and the sea. We used to go to the beach a lot, and we didn't have defined opening or closing times. If we think of the circumstances in the Situationist sense, do you think that this project was a bit of situation design? The subtitle was "A film in real time", the invitation card was a small piece of blue plastic between a credit card and a membership card; were we actors, directors, extras? Or simply living beings?

PJ The idea that seemed important to me, it somehow relates to a situation design, is the idea of photogeny, of photogenic space/time. The gallery, everything it contains and what happens there, was likely to be viewed, heard, photographed, and filmed. In this sense, we were all actors or extras despite ourselves. Also, it seems to me that it was impossible to visit "Les Ateliers du Paradise" as a simple spectator, you necessarily interacted with one of the five of us and thus participated in the *dispositif*. We also conceived the production of five hundred T-shirts, partly distributed on the day of the opening, each with an embroidered word. These words—the seagull, the cigarette, the protein, winter, memory, apnoea, emptiness, the 21st century—acted as roles for the people present and provoked surrealist encounters, intrigues, and collages. Marion Vernoux, now a film director, hidden behind a Macintosh SE, observer of this exquisite corpse on a human scale, took the opportunity to write a scenario in real time: "... The Good holds palms tight. The Devil holds palms tight. The Apocalypse is not up for the task. I wouldn't say the same about Masturbation. The Ocean is troglodytic ..."

FB In the end, there were only a few photographs and one film directed by Georges Rey, *Les enfants gâtés de l'art* (The spoiled children of art) (1991). On the other hand, there were many encounters: Liam Gillick came from London (in a Citroën DS, I think) because he heard about the project, also Éric Troncy, who came back to Nice the following year to do his mythical "No Man's Time" (1991), and Nicolas Bourriaud, who immersed himself in the experience, which later formed the basis of the idea and book *Relational Aesthetics* (1998). So, we unknowingly made a historical exhibition while we were experiencing a non-exhibition

with a great deal of intentional carelessness. It was the opposite of the DAU project, this other real-time film that has just been shown in Paris [by filmmaker Ilya Khrzhanovsky].

PJ For my part, it is very difficult to separate what belongs to the moments inside the gallery from the activities that took place outside: the images of the sea overlap those of "Les Ateliers" as if in a kind of fade, the memories proceed in the manner of a film, with sequences. The soundtrack oscillates between The Clash, Vanessa Paradis (!), and the music of *Le Grand Bleu* (1998), a film by Luc Besson. The Big Blue is the Mediterranean, and we were there, we were fine in it, in the film and in the water!

FB We all have postcards in our heads! To resume the comparison with DAU (real-time film, immersion), it is clear that both the context and the horizon differ significantly. There were no financial transactions between us, we were not locked up, and we never wanted to reconstruct or report the experience afterwards. It was some kind of gratuitous act. The collective form was not hierarchical. I believe this is a notable fact that seems to be a precursor to a mode of artistic production: an open collaboration of three artists that has created an ideal production context in which only a few individual works were made.

PJ It was even relatively difficult to discern what could be isolated as a work of art in the middle of everyday objects or decor. A trampoline, climbing holds? A poster, a library? There was a continuum between objects and works, between the inside and outside of the gallery, between the visitors and us. I remember Catherine Issert, a gallery owner in Saint-Paul-de-Vence, asking me one afternoon for the price of our red Bang & Olufsen television set and the dancing Coke cans (a gadget) we had put on it. I replied a little hastily and naively: "but it's not a work ... it's not for sale!"

FLORENCE BONNEFOUS co-founded Air de Paris with Edouard Merino in 1990. They have been based in Paris since 1997.

PIERRE JOSEPH, born in Caen 1965, is an artist and lives in Paris. He is represented by Air de Paris since 1990.