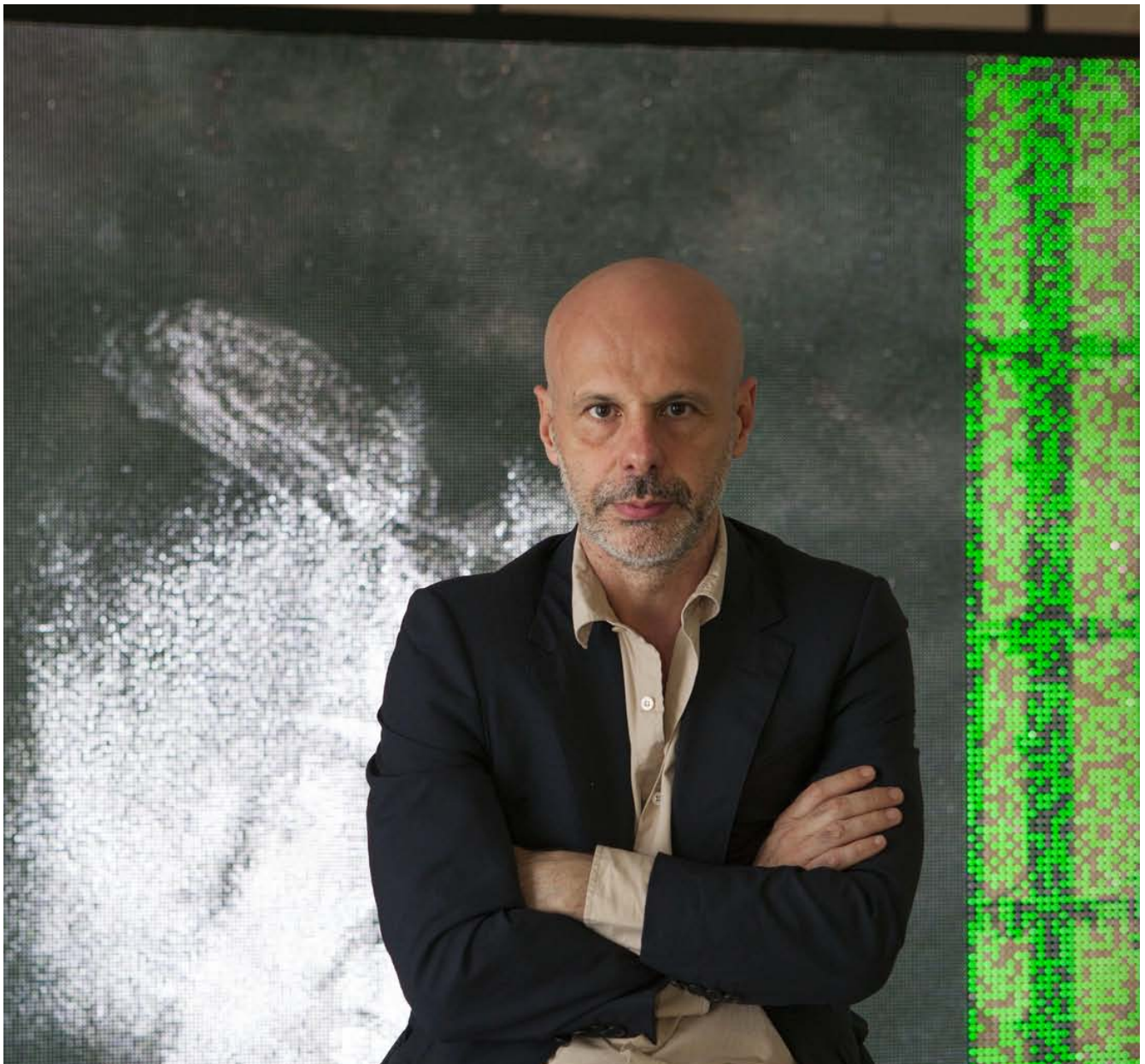


Making Sense of Philippe Parreno in His Multifaceted Park Avenue Armory Exhibition

ARTSY EDITORIAL
JUN 16TH, 2015 11:54 PM



“The show is pretty optimistic,” Philippe Parreno says, sitting in the dimly lit hallway of the Park Avenue Armory, where his first major U.S. exhibition “H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS” opened last week, occupying the building’s 55,000-square-foot Wade Thompson Drill Hall. “[My show at] Palais de Tokyo was a bit more dark. But maybe that’s because I’m finishing dealing with cancer, so there’s a bit of light coming back.” Parreno laughs but there is an undertone of relief in the remark, one that carries through the show.



In the United States, the French artist is harder to pin down than most of his relational aesthetics counterparts. Tom Eccles, the show’s “consulting curator” (Eccles was asked by the artist to join the project after it was commissioned by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Park Avenue Armory Artistic Director, Alex Poots), comments, “The wonderful world of Philippe Parreno is made up of many different parts. There isn’t a signature style.” However, “H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS” begins to make sense of the fragmented Parreno pieces most contemporary art lovers will likely have encountered—the glowing lights of one of his signature marquee pieces at the entrance of the Guggenheim during the 2008 exhibition “theanyspacewhatever”; or the flickering tubular lights seen throughout the Arsenale building in Okwui Enwezor’s “All the World’s Futures”; or the feature-length film *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, made with Douglas Gordon, that followed every movement of the legendary French footballer through one match; or, with artist and friend Pierre Huyghe, the act of purchasing the rights to a manga character, who they named Ann Lee. The character has since appeared in the works not only of Parreno and Huyghe but also those of Tino Sehgal, Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, François Curlet, Melik Ohanian, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, amongst other artists.



Philippe Parreno
Danny La Rue, 2013
"Philippe Parreno: H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS" at Park Avenue Armory, New York (2015)

For those who weren't able to visit Parreno's highly acclaimed 2013 Palais de Tokyo show "Anywhere, Anywhere out of the World," which brought together Parreno's work in a labyrinth through the entirety of the museum's brutalist concrete building, the opportunity to make sense of the multifarious artist has not yet presented itself outside of Europe. Until now. "This show helps to start to understand where each of these elements come from," Eccles says. "[This] idea of a gamelan, which is an Indonesian instrument made out of many different instruments, suddenly does make sense."

The gamelan is a perfect metaphor for the show, which at first look feels quite bare in the immense space of the Drill Hall. However, when Parreno's choreography begins (when his gamelan has started), you're swept up into the hypnotic and sensorial elements of the ensemble and suddenly, the space is heaving with energy. While the components of the show—including 26 of the artist's marquees that come together in an ensemble entitled "Danny La Rue"—are each small relative to the space, when acting together as one living, breathing element, they are immense. "You can have one small marquee moving and somehow the whole space then comes down to that piece. It's like an accordion that can move in and out," observes Eccles. "In all Philippe's exhibitions, he says 'Stop, this is what you're going to look at now, this is what I'm going to show you now.'"



Philippe Parreno
Ann Lee, 2011
 "Philippe Parreno: H [N]Y P N(Y) OSIS" at Park Avenue Armory, New York (2015)



Philippe Parreno
Film Still from "Invisibleboy", 2010
 "Philippe Parreno: H [N]Y P N(Y) OSIS" at Park Avenue Armory, New York (2015)

The scene Parreno sets is almost uncanny—like a place one has been before. His 2015 work *Bleachers*, inspired by set designer Jacques Polieri, is timed to move in sync with the choreography of the exhibition’s rhythm and the onset of the films, taking those seated on the rotating, circular bleachers on a hypnotic tour of the exhibition. Meanwhile, just 20 feet away, classical pianist Mikhail Rudy plays Bach while Parreno’s 2012 film *Marilyn* runs simultaneously at the other end of the hall. The film almost takes cues from Rudy’s fingers hitting the keys, and moments of synchronicity between Rudy, the film, and the fulgent and flickering lights of the marquees vanish and reappear. The choreography Parreno has devised is both unsettling and comforting. Daylight slips in and out and attention moves between small gestures to big screens. Park Avenue Armory’s president and executive producer, Rebecca Robertson, noted that she was pleased that Parreno utilized some of the “mechanical tricks” that the space has to offer, including automatic blinds for the 127 windows that border the Drill Hall’s ceiling.

Parreno’s stay in New York this summer for the run of the show will be the most extended period of time he has ever spent in the city. Before this exhibition, he had only been to the venue a few times, but it was the space that he was particularly drawn to. “What I like is that it’s an open box; there is no architecture,” he says. “So I wanted to treat it as a block of Manhattan, to treat it as plaza, a place where things can happen.” Speaking to recent political upheaval and subsequent revolutions, many of which have originated in public squares or plazas, Parreno wanted to of his work to date with collaborators. The show features films he made with the help of Hollywood cinematographer Darius Khondji (known for films like *Se7en* and *Midnight in Paris*), who Parreno met when working on *Zidane*, and who he’s since brought on board as cinematographer for all four films in the show, including one premiere, *The Crowd*, which features the Drill Hall as its setting. As well as Rudy and Khondji, Parreno’s collaboration with set designer Randall Peacock, composer/sound designer Nicolas Becker, and artist Tino Sehgal (in the show, Sehgal employs child actors to play Parreno’s emotionless, robotic Ann Lee) are also incorporated into the exhibition.



Philippe Parreno
Still from "The Crowd", 2015
"Philippe Parreno: H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS" at Park Avenue Armory, New York (2015)



Philippe Parreno
Scene from "June 8, 1968", 2009
"Philippe Parreno: H {N}Y P N(Y) OSIS" at Park Avenue Armory, New York (2015)

But perhaps most notable (though least evident) is Parreno's collaboration with graphic design studio M/M (Paris), whose graphics have played a subtle if not critical role in Parreno's work, and a particularly poignant one in this exhibition. "I asked Mathias [Augustyniak, one-half of the M/M duo] to do a sign or a logo, not a title. I thought this is a project so the project should be a form, and the form became a sign and also kind of a title," Parreno tells me of the

(Paris)'s touch can also be seen on all the credits of the films, the graphics of the show's pamphlet, and pretty much every graphic one comes across in Parreno's work to date.

Like Parreno, their authorship takes backseat to the realization of the complete show, which is made up not only of many parts but many talents. This is likely the reason that Parreno is so hard to categorize. "There is something hysterical about authorship that I don't want to endorse," he says. "I'm suspicious of that. I came really slowly; I'm 51 now, but it became a long journey of this kind of authorship. That's why the show is called Hypnosis. My name is [secondary to] the project." By this time in our conversation, Parreno is visibly antsy to get back to the show where, like a puppet master, he will keep an eye on all the moving pieces to see that they are working as planned. "I still have a lot to bring into the show," he says excitedly. This enthusiasm and optimism carries through down the corridor and into the exhibition space, where there is a feeling of levity and playfulness—perhaps the closest one will get to the charmingly enigmatic artist.

—Marina Cashdan

"Philippe Parreno: H {N}YP N{Y} OSIS" is on view at the Park Avenue Armory, New York, June 11–Aug. 2, 2015.