

JE PRÉFÈRE ÊTRE DÉRANGÉ

SELECTION OF WORKS FROM THE BRUNO HENRY COLLECTION

SESSION 23 OF THE ÉCOLE DU MAGASIN

FROM THE 2ND TO THE 19TH OF DECEMBER 2013

With Robert Combas, Isabelle Crespo Rocha et Stephane Billot, Richard Fauguet, Raphaël Haie, Vincent Gontier, Matthieu Manche, Mathieu Mercier, Anita Molinero, Richard Monnier, Philippe Parreno, Laurent Perbos, Raphaël Zarka.

Curators: Claire Astier, Neringa Bumblienė, Paola Bonino, Giulia Bortoluzzi, Selma Boskailo and Anna Tomczak - Session 23 de l'École du MAGASIN

Je préfère être dérangé is an exhibition that describes the peculiar relationship between a collector and his collection, seen through the lens of six curators. As a case study, Bruno Henry and his collection have been examined according to this elective affinity that only the collector himself is capable of revealing. This unconventional relationship is considered as the necessary condition for the emergence of the artworks. The frame drawn by the collector around his collection, whether exhibited in a public or private space, determines its existence as a *parergon*¹, what makes it happen. The Bruno Henry collection finds its structure in the different perspectives that tie the artworks to their owner, who in a tacit agreement, offers himself. These intimate affinities now being revealed, offer invisible stories and imaginary galleries.

Je préfère être dérangé | about inconvenience and passion for contemporary art |

It was in the 1980s that Bruno Henry first approached a contemporary art painting: a "horrible"² canvas by Robert Combas. Shortly afterwards, being a great admirer of the Italian Renaissance art, he discovered in Florence the altarpiece *Deposizione* (*Deposition from the Cross*) by Jacopo Pontormo. The painting, nowadays considered a masterpiece of the Mannerist art, was barely appreciated by its contemporaries, who found its deformed bodies and non-natural colors disturbing. "The thought struck me that Pontormo's contemporaries must have, in their turn, found his painting horrible, too".³

The revelation was crucial for Bruno Henry, who started collecting contemporary art constantly seeking this thrilling feeling of being disturbed. What if the beauty of an artwork lies in its power to call into question the viewer?

Je préfère être dérangé | about life overlapping with art | After the invention of perspective, Bruno Henry considers the Duchamp's readymade as the second turning point in art history. What legitimizes an everyday object as an artwork – a readymade – is the action of the artist, who chooses to present it in an art gallery or a museum. A collector's home is not a gallery, neither is it just a regular home. The works from the Bruno Henry collection emit invisible discourses, flirting with the wooden floors or the mirror in the bathroom. Art works and daily objects are intertwined in an intimate scenography, everything that one sees, passes or sits on might be an artwork or just a piece of furniture. Functional use and aesthetic language belong to the same plane leaving daily friction to reconstruct these unprecedented narratives between the works, the house and their owner.

Je préfère être dérangé | about an invisible collection | There are two potential degrees of invisibility within a discourse on private collection. Bruno Henry's paintings, sculptures, video, installations, mixed in with daily objects, are mostly accessible for collector's invitees. Even if shown in a public space and although the collector believes to just be its keeper,

the collection will remain private. Also, some of these artworks, due to technical limits of their media, are liable to remain not visible, hidden. The demonstration might never happen, transforming the artworks into passive objects, phantoms on the edge of the private collection: invisibles in a way, kept in packaging. Does collecting artworks make them exist? Is it necessary to show the collection to make it exist? Or is the idea of owning it enough to guarantee its existence?

Je préfère être dérangé | about abject bodies |

Considering Bruno Henry's profession as a maxillo-facial surgeon it's not surprising to discover how the issue of body is present in his collection. Through his medical practice he is often confronted with different kinds of deformed and disabled bodies. In art history, exposure of sick bodies consistently carried the tag of abject⁴, despised. The contaminated "Other" of the human body, its illnesses, is usually seen as something that unsettles and exceeds limits. Numerous works in the Bruno Henry collection deal with the notion of body, whether it is about pornography and censorship, gender and representation, sexuality and mortality. Some focus on the transformed, modified body, especially the embodiment of illness and physical transformation.

These works address the issues of identity and power and the ways in which the concepts of the body are socially constructed. Displaying certain consequences of sick body, through the use of irony and parody, indicates the possibility of resisting all conventional visual metaphors of it.

Je préfère être dérangé | about memories |

In his essay *Unpacking my library*, Walter Benjamin wrote "every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories"⁵. Some collections tell a story of living with obsessions, with something that bothers us and at the same time we are familiar with, something that echoes what Freud called *the uncanny*⁶. Some collections are collections of memories etched on bodies and tell endless stories: of the artist, of the materials with which the artworks are made, of the viewers, of the spaces where the collection has been exhibited, of the owner, of the house... The chaos of memories finds in the collection its contemplation, delineating a story that is never assigned. Thus Bruno Henry's collection reveals a personal memory open to interpretations and renewed meanings, maintaining, with the viewer, a private relationship of disruption.

1 The notion of parergon was developed by Jacques Derrida, in the book *The Truth in Painting* (1978), starting from the study of the preface to the *Critique of Judgement* (1790) by Immanuel Kant. According to the French philosopher the parergon designates an externality which is also a foundation, a kind of boundary between the outside and the inside.

2 Essay by B. Henry: C. Brilloit, G. Fuchs, *De leur temps* (2). *Art contemporain et collections privées*, Grenoble 2007.

3 Ibid.

4 Cf. J. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

5 W. Benjamin, *Unpacking my library: Walter Benjamin. Selected writings 1931-1934*, edited by M. W. Jennings, H. Eiland, G. Smith, p. 486.

6 S. Freud, *The 'Uncanny'*. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. and trans. James Strachey et al. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955.

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