



JEAN DUPUY SANS QUEUE NI TÊTE

18.09.2020 – 17.10.2020

Jean Dupuy: on ne se perd pas de vue... sans queue ni tête
Patricia Brignone,
Pierrefeu, Nice, July 2020

If there is one expression that Jean Dupuy particularly likes to use when taking leave of friends it is a knowingly delivered “On ne se perd pas de vue.”¹ Much more than the pat “We’ll stay in touch,” the words carry a particular resonance in this artist’s mouth that those unfamiliar with his *modus operandi* would struggle to imagine. They refer, in fact, to a series of works he made under the same title in the mid-1990s and showed, notably, at Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris, in the exhibition “Sans queue ni tête.” Bringing together the artist’s explorations in the field of modest machines and their capacity to entangle the gaze, this installation demonstrated in condensed form his taste for humble mechanisms involving meticulous bricolage and the poetics of the ordinary, which he had begun to develop years before.²

So it is that with him the most unusual things flow from the simplest of principles. Like the doubly reversed visual palindrome “inouï” (unheard of), which is characteristic of his approach (written on a rotating disc that endlessly unspools its power to amaze), there is the resonance of that Picabia-esque³ pleonasm whose effect of redundancy is redoubled by its activation: “sans queue ni tête” (without head or tail), spelled out in ample variations throughout the installation, traced on a sheet or on a round pebble for a looped, endless reading.

Making visible the unexpected, scrambling perceptions but also juggling with inversions are what this multifaceted device is all about. The instruments of vision are there to shake up certainties, like the *Table à saluer* (Table for Greeting, 1992) evoked by an image of the artist’s skull, tilted forward, eye to the periscope integrated into the piece of furniture, affording the view of a surprising landscape, that of the crown of his own head. Its linguistic pendant, a series of six colourful, anagrammatic canvases in French, English, Japanese, Spanish, Italian and German, judiciously titled *Connais-toi toi-même (Socrate)* [Know Thyself (Socrates)], sheds all the necessary light.

If anagrams are of such interest to this artist, that is because, by their power of condensation (similar to that of dreams in their shifts of meaning), they serve as revealing agents. The finest one of all is to be found in his homage to his friend George Maciunas (*Post flux*), whose portrait in the form of a postage stamp is stuck on a vinyl disc revolving at a rate of one revolution per minute. It is accompanied by these sibylline words: “Ce gag noir amuse” (This dark gag is amusing), which, through the playful permutation of letters, shows up the *mise-en-abyme* of the whole trick, and can be read as a kind of leitmotif applicable to the entire exhibition.

Jean Dupuy approaches the anagram as a kind of daily discipline and experiences it as a constant source of wonder, just like the vision machines and spectacles that he dreams up. The viewpoints to which they direct us, what with the blurring of distances and disconcerting visual and cognitive expectations, constitute experiences that sing the praises of perturbation, of disruption within eyeshot, for the one and only purpose of our delight. This incitation to open our eyes to the hidden face of the real, which could not be imagined from our habitual field of vision, may bring to mind the immersion in the instrument described in great detail by Raymond Roussel in *La Vue*, evoking a “view inlaid [...] placed in a glass ball,” combined with the effect that “[...] the whole thing swells up when the most curious eye comes sufficiently close.”⁴

In contrast to the ending chosen by Roussel, in which the brightness of the glass tends to decrease and it grows darker, rediscovering the constituent elements from the spectacularly precarious installation at Galerie Loevenbruck can only illuminate our knowledge of Dupuy’s work, which is speculative throughout. Aside from artist’s obvious links with the master of *La Doublure*, it will come as no surprise that in the past, once, on arriving in New York, he conceived the ambitious desire to translate the untranslatable author of *How I Wrote Certain of My Books*.⁵

In a score that combines the “self-bearing exhibition” with something of the chiffonier, to borrow Christian Bernard’s pertinent words,⁶ *On ne se perd pas de vue* also echoes those fairground attractions devoted to entertainment where all comers are invited display their talents. This was the game of interpretative projections that the same Bernard entered into in 1998 when he invited the artist to take part in the “Patchwork in Progress” cycle put on by the Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain in Geneva (Mamco).⁷ The prism of these hangings was intended to reflect the museum’s specific spirit, oriented towards the idea of a “permanent process and a non-dogmatic open structure working with parataxis.” In this regard we can only acclaim the fine convergences of visions giving pride of place to one of our most sagacious artistic members of the awkward squad.

1. He adopted this expression as a young man, when at the Lycée Henri-IV school in Paris, and instituted it with his best friend at the time. As for its characteristic impishness, it evokes the “teasing” spirit that Dupuy has never lost (conversation with the author at Pierrefeu, 19 July 2020).

2. This inclination resulted in one of the artist’s most magnetic works: *Heart beat dust (Cone Pyramid)*, conceived in New York in 1968. It was exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum and won Dupuy the prize awarded by the Museum of Modern Art. This was when Pontus Hultén was at MoMA preparing the exhibition “The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age.”

3. We are not far here from the aphorisms of Picabia le Loustic (particularly appreciated by Dupuy): “If there is one thing I take seriously, it is not taking anything seriously,” and: “A free mind takes liberties, even with regard to liberty” (see *Picabia*, exhib. cat., Paris, Didier Imbert Fine Arts, 1990, n. p.).

4. Raymond Roussel, *La Vue* (1904), Paris: Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1963, p. 9.

5. Conversation with the artist (see note 1).

6. From an exchange of emails with Christian Bernard (22 July 2020).

7. After his exhibition at La Station in Nice, in 1997-98, which featured this same ensemble under the title *Gambetta (titre-rébus)*. As for the show at Mamco, it was one of a series of hangings more precisely titled “Poésie & Principes” (Poetry and Principles) in which Bernard brought together “Fluxus items and other avant-garde postures (micro-publishing, etc).” These were extended by the group shows by Ecart (co-founded by John M. Armleder, Claude Rychner and Patrick Lucchini in Geneva 1969, its name based on a reversal of the word trace, and its archives, as well as work done in relation to Robert Filliou and Marcel Broodthaers).

Exhibition history:

- Jean Dupuy, “Sans queue ni tête”, 18.09.2020–17.10.2020, Paris, galerie Loevenbruck.
- Jean Dupuy, “On ne se perd pas de vue,” exhibition in the “Patchwork in Progress 3” cycle 11.10.1998–23.12.1998, curated by Christian Bernard, Geneva, Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain (Mamco).
- Jean Dupuy / Luc Kerléo, 18.10.1997–10.01.1998, “Gambetta (titre-rébus)”, curated by Pascal Broccolichi, Nice, La Station.

Visual: installation view (detail) de Jean Dupuy, “On ne se perd pas de vue,” Geneva, Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain (Mamco). Photo Ilmari Kalkkinen © MAMCO, Genève.

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Gallery opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11am-7pm and by appointment