

Cha-Cha-Cha 2000/01

Granite cobbled floor.

State commission, Crossroads of Pot d'Étain, Pont-Audemer (Haute-Normandie) (FR)

Interview: Sonia Criton and Élisabeth Ballet

1. You chose to deal with the square as a whole rather than with a spot, and to create a horizontal and not vertical work: could you enlighten us about this artistic choice?

I visited the site of Pot d'Étain in Pont-Audemer before the square was reconstructed. Many cars were just driving on the trunk road, some were coming from the town and spreading out towards the surrounding valleys and plateaus; others were trying to park close to the shops. The town had expanded on both sides of the trunk road, as if it wasn't involved in this flow of vehicles. The flow itself seemed to ignore the town. I found the general situation and the traffic very chaotic: the restructuring of the crossroads changed those flows. I was aiming for a general solution: putting a sculpture in the middle would have increased the confusion and created another obstacle. As I examined the site's restructuring plan, I noticed there was a programme of modification of cars and pedestrian areas, which stimulated my imagination and the conception of a work on the ground, in order to connect the elements together. I first thought of a sort of weaving.

2. What do you think of the location of the work within the town of Pont-Audemer, from a geographical point of view? What might be the significance of having a work in this specific place?

The image of a big carpet rolled out onto the roadway was superimposed on the restructuring plan, in a utopian as well as logical way. I had then to work on a plane surface, imagining a frame made of three kinds of flows: structures of roads going in all directions, distinct pedestrian areas, and my project of design on the floor. The motif was supposed to interlace the straight precise lines of the roads with random walking. I wanted to create a connection that was visually and mentally soothing. The conjunction between the motif's waves and the architecture's straight lines creates an effect of tension and slackening. The crossroads and the railway are set on a flowing and snaking design, which spreads out all over the 3,000 square meters. Roads and pavements merge with the design, just like mere objects.

3. What is the relation between the work and its architectural environment?

The conception of a project doesn't rely exclusively on the appreciation of the surrounding architecture. As I was working in Pont-Audemer, I adapted myself to a local situation. Elsewhere my approach would be different.

The urban fabric is made of three-storeyed houses, inspired by a vernacular architecture. The carpet rolled out in front of these houses isn't on their scale; its design is disproportionate. Its aim is to be a unique object, a square as well as a territory. Street lamps, benches, bins, markers and railway crossing gates take root in the project which is continuously spreading out.

4. What directed your choice of the lace motif?

The main idea was to link together, carefully and precisely, the scattered elements of the town. The whole charm of the project lies in the contrast between this delicate-looking work and the fact that lorries drive on it every day. Handmade lace represents delicate work, which is close to the process of designing. The delicate and uncertain white line spreads out into an unbroken line, in the middle of an empty space represented by black cobblestone.

The stem of the floral design runs on the ground, snaking; it branches out into leaves, buds and flowers, goes under the crossroads and reappears on the other side. The lace holds up and includes everything as it goes, its interlacing makes a comprehensible network to the pedestrian following these lines, or to the driving car.

A maple tree replaces the sculpture wanted at first: it is planted in the middle of the square. With their delicacy, the finely chiselled leaves of the tree suggest the lace's ornament design. Just like an obelisk, it is a temporal ornament, it changes colour with the season, and in autumn, its leaves fall down haphazardly on the paving. It gives shades and at the same time intensifies the place of the work.

5. Why did you use a pre-existing motif?

I had a very cinematographic vision in mind when I imagined the design of a lace enlarged to the scale of a real square, on which pedestrians, cars and trains were moving on. I absolutely wanted to use the traditional 12x12cm black and white cobblestone. I selected a lace sample that would enable me to transpose the whole motif into cobblestones, which brought about the design's general scale. I wanted the pedestrians, with their habits, to walk on the leaf or flower detail's complexity, and to feel included in a landscape on the scale of their steps.

Pont-Audemer is located in the heart of Haute-Normandie: the design evokes the continuation of a familiar and nearby nature, although this nature cannot be seen in this part of the town.

6. What is the compatibility between the work and everything that finds a place on it: street lamps and furniture, cars, pedestrians?

Pont-Audemer and its surroundings inhabitants move by car and do the shopping: a halt at the bakery shop, another one a few meters away at the butcher's and so on. All these short distances correspond to a lace's detail they can recognize.

7. How can one link this specific work with the rest of your work?

My work applies to any case in a specific way. For instance, I gave an exhibition in Scotland, in which the ground was covered with salt. Visitors left footprints as they passed and the design of their prints joined together the sculptures that were shown. Whether it's in a town or in a museum, I show the same intention. Working in a town relies on specific restraints whereas galleries or museums are mostly spaces for mental projections. I managed to achieve this work with the complicity of the mayor, who was totally committed to it. He gave me a team, so that the undertaking would be up to my ambition, and he supported me. When everything is combined, it is truly exalting and rewarding working outdoors for a public or private commission, even if it implies very important restraints. But what I'm saying could apply to a museum exhibition as well.