

## **Sept pièces faciles 2007**

[*Seven easy pieces*]

Le Grand Café, Contemporary Art Center, Saint-Nazaire

At the Art Center of the Grand Café, I meet up with a team and a place. The architecture's certain real qualities – light, acoustics, room's arrangement – give my work a precise direction. I have the desire to make something new, and I try to forget everything I have already done.

I am attached to the world of the harbour, and was myself born in Cherbourg. Saint-Nazaire aroused my interest, for the manual, industrial and intellectual work, and its counterpart: idleness, reverie and dream as being metaphors for the process of creating. One enters the Art Center through two glass halls. The entrance hall opens onto a small room on the right, and another one on the left. The materials are scanty, the room is empty and white, and the backlighting effect is very strong. Two large panoramic windows look onto a town's crossroads. In the middle, a right-angled staircase leads to a big bright and sunny room, artificially divided by a light partition into two parts with a well-varnished floor. As soon as I have explored the place, I make a pocket model that I can fold up and carry with me anywhere I go.

Using this model during the summer brought to my mind the idea of light sculptures, free from architecture. Thanks to its small size, I have a view overlooking the first floor put on the ground floor – I haven't built the staircase. I wanted to keep this feeling of ease and weightlessness in the pieces to build in the future, whatever the materials used, which led me to work on them in detail, more than ever: collection, quality of surfaces, simplicity in making, location in the room and arrangements had to convey an impression of simplicity. I imagined sculptures concretely joining the upstairs rooms and the downstairs rooms together, or horizontally extending to the outside, without caring about architectural restraints. The model of the Grand Café – the sculptures, the images – was nothing but crumpled, stuck, designed, folded paper.

I'm interested in the combination between abstraction and subject taken from the reality. The very first works I have shown in 1989 take up the design of a gate (*Que l'esprit ajoute*), or a kitchen range (*Des idées*). At that time, I could understand only vaguely what I had made, but it was still too hazy. Therefore I made up a rule of play, consisting of making models of sculptures from what I could see around me. I was interested in the most simple shapes, related to the question of sculpting: material, colour, moulding, design, etc. Which produced 'Face-à-main' in 1990: it was my first set of works. Today I look further, I don't have rules anymore, and I still have the desire for more freedom in the treatment of ideas, shapes and materials.

## **FLICKER**

Though it is the first piece one can see in the exhibition, it was the last one I thought about. It refers directly to the swirling movement of the crossroads visible outside. The sculpture with a circular outline is truncated by a third, the missing part echoes the layout of the orthogonal room, cut off by two windows forming an angle.

In the visual space and in the sculpture, there is no measurement. Sculpture cannot really be apprehended with geometry, and what are its real limits? Where does the inside start and how is the outside a part of what I can see? How far? I can describe what I can see, but this isn't enough to give the idea of the sculpture, for the environment is also a part of what the sculpture refers to.

Four colourless plexiglas sheets are arched and make up concentric circles of different diameters, opened on one side. They are 150-centimeters high. In order to keep them steady, a series of buttresses of the same height have been carefully stuck around, in the middle, or outside each arched sheet, at regular and close intervals. The widest circle has a diameter of 250 centimeters, and the buttresses are pointed to the outside. The next ones are stuck, enclosed by two sheets, whereas the smallest circle's ones are directed towards an invisible point, in the center of the geometrical figure thus formed.

The three constructions are arranged in ascending order, at close intervals, on the same axis. On one side, the truncated figure of the sculpture shows its face, so wide open that one can enter in the centre of the sculpture, and has the impression of being in the centre of a cylinder cut in two. On the other side, the circle is closed. In an optical illusion, one has the impression that the circle is unbroken; it seems perfectly round and much wider than its actual measurements. The missing third of the sculpture is rebuilt in the reflection of all the parts regularly arranged in its construction. A perfect circle then appears.

I called the sculpture *Flicker* because I had this impression of an intermittent movement, corresponding to the flickering the eye can detect by pivoting around its perimeter. The swivel set of the transparent buttresses breaking off the smooth surface of the plexiglas recalls the moments of shuttering between the 24 images per second that, in a film, adjust the perception of moving images.

## **FLASH**

Since my exhibition *BCHN* at the Modern Art Museum in Paris in 1997, it became necessary to me to create my own path for Sculpture, of which Architecture is the setting. I drilled a hole in the ceiling of the ground floor, in order to pass the ladder vertically linking both rooms, without needing to take the staircase. Our immediate memory relates a sculpture to another, then a room to another, and then the ground floor to the next floor up. Set against the sunlight, just in front of the Grand Café's windows, *Flash* cannot be entirely seen, since it disappears through the ceiling; one has to take the staircase to see the rest of the exhibition. From this first proposition, all the other pieces of the exhibition will be related from the ground floor to the second floor.

The metal structure of a very high industrial ladder, made of three six-meter high stainless steel pieces, is built on a two-castered frame; the whole set can be made level by four jacks with levers. The ladder seems more like a sort of four-meter high scaffolding (with no rung), designed for the passing of a six-meter high sliding ladder, fitted with two handrails. On the upper part, at the front and at the back, seven rungs are placed every twenty-eight centimeters. The set can audaciously be more than twelve meters high. The sculpture doesn't take the barrier of the architecture into account; it is too high to hold under the ceiling of the ground floor, and passes through a hopper I have made pierced in the floor. It breaks through the floor, even though it keeps the visitor at a distance.

The concrete reality of the sculpture's materials, like steel, rubber, etc., compels me to find the right balance between the flexibility of the idea in a moment when everything is still open, and the actual realization, when I have decided to make it. It has to stay fine, precise and slightly delicate. Its physical presence and the sensation of extreme weightiness of the steel have to be forgotten about, and give way to the desire that originated my idea; materials, conception have to generate sensations, curiosity, attention. At the top of the sculpture, everything meaning we are in the presence of a ladder technically exists: it has everything, rungs, folding system, and the ladder is fitted with two handrails, so that one can keep their balance for a possible ascent. The steel went through gradual polishing, to go with the

metamorphosis of the scaffolding into a ladder. The unpolished, dull and rough grain of the metal, that is at the base of the sculpture, gets progressively more and more refined, and becomes a deep polished mirror, extremely bright on its top, that reflects its environment.

## EYELINER

*I wish there were roads ending nowhere, in the middle of a field in the middle of nowhere...*  
(Fernando Pessoa)

Roads evoke adventure and freedom, they call to mind unscheduled days, winding paths, going through landscapes, observation, both vagueness and preciseness, imagination, pleasure, music, sounds, smells... and so many other sensations. How can one reduce a road to a few meters, compressed and isolated on the floor of a room, the limits of which can easily be noticed? While literature, cinema and photography have dealt with it so many times, as I see it, it is 'almost' just like any object; the road can stop in the middle of nowhere, for it never has a well-defined starting point or arrival, you just take the road somewhere and leave it somewhere else. That's why I took a fifty-meter long portion of road, starting with intermittent lines, broken by three arrows cutting in an unbroken line. I imagined it soft, scented, both supple and heavy, weighty and nonchalant. A narrow strip folded on itself, on the right side, and on the wrong side. Its back is equally important; it symbolizes continuity and the other places one cannot see. The road has a code, a means of signalling, a layout, a perspective.

When setting up the sculpture *Eyelinier*, there's no need to make an effort, one has to be simple and let themselves be carried away by the material qualities of rubber; it winds up and creases up to a certain extent. It was difficult to control it because of its weight lengthways, and I wanted to express the road's continuity, throughout time and space, and also its materiality.

## LES IDÉES

A neon sign made of letter-shaped white Plexiglas boxes, diffuses a soft, though visible light on all the surface of the wall. It appears alone, faraway and dominant in the scenery. Ideas are traditionally associated with light. Ideas are above everything, they arise from contradictory observations made outwardly, with intuition, pleasure, imagination. Here I associated both sets of words: *LES IDÉES* and *LAZY DAYS* – work and relaxation. The second sign is located on the next floor up.

The four pieces *Petite Dépression*, *Lazy Days*, *Eye Shadow* and the top of the ladder *Flash* take place on the second floor. Daylight and curtain-filtered light mingle. The sculptures, just like their titles, are a response to the more material ones which are located on the ground floor. The ladder radiates, its polishing transforms its common use into a mirror deceiving our perception at any moment. In the room's shadowy light, time ticks over in a soft atmosphere; I wanted one to be carried away by the wind's embrace (*Petite Dépression*), and by the shade and light's sparkling (*Eye Shadow*).

## LAZY DAYS

It is when you relax, on lazy days that ideas arise. A wooden ladder, the model of which I had seen in some industrial furniture shop, stands against the words *LAZY DAYS*, airbrush-painted in shadow with a stencil.

The back capital letters, the lines of which are sharply designed, seem immaculate, as if the sunlight had consumed them, letting nothing remain but their blurred, staggered and blackened shadows. The words' over real silhouette seems to stick out from the white surface of the wall; the ladder hangs and seems shifted.

## **EYE SHADOW**

The stirring trees' silhouettes reflect through a window, in the shadowy-light of a house. It is fascinating, like a cinema at home, and one is carried away, in a half-sleep state.

The video shows the shadow of some trees stirred by the wind, reflected on a whitewashed wall. In an anamorphic projection on the surface of the cyma, it dies away on the floor and on the room's glass door; without lining up on a precise frame's axis, it overflows in the three-dimensional space of the room. A mask put around the projector's lens enabled me to suppress the frame, and obtain grey blended edges. I didn't want a regular screen: it has no narrative interest, no idea, no action. Behind me, as I am filming, there are very close trees, then a gully, a view, the sun... and lots of wind; between what I am filming and myself, there is a road.

## **PETITE DÉPRESSION**

As for a nap on a lazy day recalling childhood, a milky, white-coloured pongee silk curtain is gently and quietly waving in front of a large closed window. At dusk, the purplish light of an electric street lamp reflects the outline of the window frame on the waving cloth, in a blackened shadow.