**« Monologues »**

**By Francis Montillaud**

By means of sound clip arrangements drawn from a language lesson, Francis Montillaud has constructed Monologues, a videographic story featuring characters who exchange witty quips, giving particular attention to the distortion of means of expression. In a wall scenography where the mechanics of the theatre meet the conventions of the museum, he has built a bridge between the distortion of self-image, the malfunctioning of video, and the caricature of statuary.

Project description

Taking inspiration from vaudeville, I have reinterpreted the voices from the lesson with masks, costumes and accessories in front of a camera. In this manner, I play four characters who exchange witty quips from the lesson while paying special attention to the ways in which modes of communication can be distorted. Reduced to the level of puppets, the characters are trapped in a whirlwind where decorum and good manners are undermined by nebulous speech, exaggerated gestures and indecent postures. A powerful charge emerges from the absurd caricature of the different ways one can present oneself and interact in society.

To craft these scenarios, I framed them within processes of linguistic expression such as repetition, redundancy and rhyme. Through this, I developed a body language that is equally graceless and funny in itself, while revealing a certain unease stemming from problems in communication. By borrowing voices from real life and expressing them through exaggerated body language, I try to create a disconcerting experience, sowing the seeds of confusion between memory and imagination, the authenticity of these original voices and the absurdity of the created situations.

 The elements of this performance project are presented within the space of the Goethe-Institut Toronto through a mural stage set where the mechanics of theatre encounter the conventions of the museum in order to build a bridge between the mockery of the image, the warping of video and the caricature of sculpture. Two synchronized videos are presented on flat-screens in the manner of paintings. In addition, wall-mounted busts express the nature of these characters and their flawed stances during these power plays. This project has spanned almost 3 years and I work on it whenever my public art works give me free time.

This is an open project that morphs every day and I do not imagine there to be an end in sight. I am delighted to see the shape it is taking, since this is the first time it is on display. This is an instinctive project and includes many “live” performances and improvisations that I subsequently try to make sense of. It is very dense…

**The first video** is a monoband, and in a way is the project’s starting-point. Inspired by vaudeville, I created a little story with no real beginning or ending using sound clips from a language lesson. I play four characters that embody the voices of the lesson with masks and costumes in front of the camera. The characters, prisoners of a tragi-comical whirlwind, distort good manners through extravagant gestures and indecent postures.

**The second video** is shown simultaneously. It shows a remix of pre-production shots that served to develop the cinematographic language of the first video. They are exercises of camera movement and framing that were done with a number of pedestals in which the characters’ plaster faces come together. The goal of presenting a narrative behind the original piece is to show another time and space.

**The third video** shows sessions of **impression moulding**, which were used to design faces out of plaster as well the character’s masks.

To enhance the experience of the piece, and to bring the characters to life, a series of busts are hung on the wall. Each bust represents a character in a position that sums up the character traits expressed in the exercise.

Finally, **the four figurines** presented were the inspiration for the character’s costumes.

The artistic approach:

The artistic approach: Through this project, I intend to invite the public to an immersive experience in the core story of the creation of an art work. My exposition is a twisted perception of the reality to emphasize the difficulties to communicating, to untangling words meaning and to expressing one’s thoughts...

In sculpture, I diverted the canons of statuary and techniques used to pay homage to great men. This is aimed to privilege the most extreme expressions such as the scowl and gestures that are nearly rebellious. With the video, I caricature the ways to behave in society. I play with social codes and rules of etiquette to create strange and comical circumstances. Through characters, I exploit language of a disarticulated body and excessive expressions.

By nature, I am curious being and I am fascinated by the way things are done or manufactured. I seek to explore new techniques and materials for each project. I dislike doing same things over and over.

The creative process is very important for me. I leave traces of the work in the Studio so that they fuel the narrative of the work. I attach a great importance to do so, at the hand of the artist. Reality matches fiction.

I work a lot with the body to carry out my work. I videotape it, I sculpt it, and I mould it and presented it in a gallery or a public space. To this end, it requires several advanced technical know-how which I have developed over the years: casting, assembling by welding, bronze casting, passing by the laser cutting and other industrial techniques.

My preferred themes are irony, humour, caricature and grimace to question the symbols and the balance of power and hierarchical structures that are present throughout our lives.

For projects in Gallery, my choices are more virulent or strange and critical topics, but when it comes to a permanent work of public art, I prefer unifying and optimistic themes. I think of men and women who daily exposed to the art work...

Biography

Francis Montillaud lives and works in Montreal. His creations have been displayed at art events and in galleries in Quebec and France.

The Maison de la culture Maisonneuve (Montreal), CIRCA (Montreal), The Galerie Sans Nom (Moncton), l’Œil de Poisson (Quebec City), and the 3rd Manifestation internationale d’art de Québec are some of the venues where his work has been exhibited. He was in video production residency at Le Labo in Toronto and PRIM in Montreal. He has created temporary installations in Montreal and Quebec City, at notable sites like the Place des Arts (Esplanade), Place Gérald-Godin (Paysages Éphémères), Palais des Congrès (Art Souterrain), and the Petit-Champlain District in Quebec City (Unusual Passages). His permanent pieces can be seen at the Mies Van Der Rohe Station on Nun’s Island, in the Dollard-des-Ormeaux Park, in the Leo Mol Sculpture Garden in Winnipeg, and at the École Aux-Quatre-Vents in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. He was also active in theatre. In fact, he worked on the video and stage design of Elsewhere, Kevin McCoy’s theatrical and documentary piece on immigration. This contribution earned him a nomination at the 2007 Soirée des Masques.

“I used to spend my summers in Europe where I would work at music festivals, setting stages. I would come back in the fall to resume my studies. Those times were periods of discovery. I then worked in theatre and film. I would have liked to continue, but I ended up giving preference to my artistic career. Together with another visual artist, we bought a studio in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve district of Montreal. That is where I create most of my art. We are well-equipped to work with wood, metal and moulding. We are very fortunate to possess such a unique workshop!

Since the beginning of my career, my work has been exhibited at many art events and in galleries in Quebec and France. Since 2007, I have designed several temporary installations in the Island of Montreal, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Winnipeg.”

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