

# My word against yours

*Lise Viseux: The question of relation to space that this exhibition of the Frac Bourgogne raises is based on an interior/exterior dialectic introducing a notion of displacement, and circulation. The concept of space expressed in your work seems to be very close to that of Land Art artists, based on the journey inherent in the process of making works. In this regard, can you explain how these artists have influenced you?*

Régis Perray: In the mid-90s at the Beaux-Arts museum of Nantes, I began experimenting with the ground, essentially by doing maintenance on the wooden floor of my studio with sand paper, sponges, scrapers and water. It was a manual job that took a long time, and it occupied both my work space and the span of a year to result in little more than the refurbished floor of a place that had been trampled by generations of students. Paradoxically, I was fascinated by artists who employed considerable machinery to do their pieces. Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty and Michael Heizer's Double Negative were important projects that helped me to define my own work while intervening superficially in closed spaces. After that, my work space became a room, a field, a museum, a desert, or wherever I found myself. To these influences I can also add the paintings of Jean-François Millet, the appearance of landscape and human activity in books and paintings of the Middle Ages, or even ancient Egyptian constructions: pyramids and temples as well as the sculptures, paintings and small models that accompanied the dead on their eternal voyage. This in fact gave me a link to Land artists and their way of presenting works which were often made in isolated areas, far from museums and galleries. Obviously, photography and video became important elements in the elaboration of my work, as a second chance to see and show what I was doing.

*L.V.: In her book, En chemin, le Land Art, Anne-Françoise Penders refers to a piece that Walter de Maria made in 1968 for the Heiner Friedrich gallery in Munich, for which several tons of earth were hauled into the space; enough to disrupt the flow of visitors walking through. Did you have this piece in mind when you made Centre d'entraînement pour retourner au Pilat et à Sakkara (1)? Can you be explicit about what it meant to you to transport the sand from outdoors to indoors?*

R.P.: My main concern for this project was to find out if I was able to transport all that sand into the gallery with only two buckets and a shovel, in order to go back to the archaeological sites of Egypt, or along the Atlantic coast to dig out the blockhouses buried in sand for the sake of discovering what it's like for architectural structures to be invaded by Nature. This is the second time - after training on the portable ice-skating rink I constructed whilst in residence at the Beaux-Arts of Nantes - that I've done a training course over a lengthy period. Like any sportsman, I try to be methodical and regular in order to

see the project through. I began hauling sand three weeks before the exhibition opened, in order to be in the middle of the project, and had already moved 30 tons of sand into the second room, half the distance. The volume was huge, but it didn't fill the whole space of the gallery warehouse where eight other artists were showing their work. What Water de Maria or Richard Long did with natural elements in their show spaces didn't interest me. However, their interventions in Nature; on the landscape were pertinent. What hangs on the walls recounts what was done «in situ» and, in my opinion, reinforces the significance of that other place. The perception of the «primary matter» is then enhanced or strengthened on the original site.

*L.V.: One of the fundamental traits of your work and the one that connects you most with Gordon Matta-Clark is the rhetoric of subtraction which dominates it. The actions that you create stem in varying degrees from gestures of taking away rather than adding (i.e. to clear, throw out, put away, sweep, clean, wash, polish, Little autumn gathering in my garden at Petit Mars, Return to earth, Clean Brick, Erase a Nazi Tag, etc.) What does this ascetic clearing express?*

R.P.: It expresses a determination to be always in synchronization with your surroundings and to respect their structure, their identity. Recently in Lublin, Poland, I worked in Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish and Protestant cemeteries, each time with a different activity and a different perspective, although my intention was to clean systematically the most abandoned tombs, or the most damaged ones. In such places, and in a country like Poland where religious identity is vital, I wanted to be restrained and discreet, and to adapt to the particularities of each place. Gordon Matta-Clark's interventions were often very radical and tough on the building structures. Although I am admiring of and moved by the scale of his works, I prefer to intervene with broom, sponge, scraper, or mop.

*L.V.: It seems to me that your work has taken a methodological turn, in the sense that actions which involve a Sisyphean logic are fading out in favour of those with a more contemplative approach to the world. In fact your use of photography as a way of reporting announces a tendency to close the gap between the creative act and the contemplative act by «leaving the place be» rather than imposing your will onto it.*

*How did this marked change in your way of working come about?*

R.P.: You're right about the evolution of my work, although lately I have been yearning for a site and the kind of activity it would involve. After doing what I thought was important to get my work established: sweeping around the Pyramids of Gizah, artistic ice-skating at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes etc., little by little I have been extending my ground experiments by the incorporation of elements I'd put aside to give them time to mature, or to get a certain distance from them, or even to find a place to show them. I think a lot about what is under our

feet, like the bodies of our kinfolk or the rugs which I collect and move around sometimes in order to redefine a space or to set up an activity on this moveable and circumscribed territory. Photography or video that witness my actions become the means by which those realities are recorded or are named in order to expand my terrain and daily ground work. Nowadays to contemplate means to give one's self time, time to rest.

Extract of the interview between Lise Viseux and Régis Perray for the groupshow's edition *1:1 x temps quantité, proportions et fuites* in Frac Bourgogne. 25 october - 20 décembre 2003.

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<sup>1</sup> - Action and video (Poitiers 2001) made at the Confort Moderne consisted of carrying 30 tons of sand for 49 days from one room to another, over 1 500 m<sup>2</sup> of exhibition space using a shovel and two buckets for the group show *Le détour vers la simplicité: expériences de l'absurde* (Detour to simplicity; experiments in the absurd). The site of Pilat is reminiscent of the unearthing of the blockhouses at the foot of the dune of Pilat (Jan. 2001) and of the unearthing of the monument at the site of Sakkara - (March 1998).

Translation: Sherry Thevenot