



la maison rouge - fondation antoine de galbert

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gregor schneider

süßer duft



View of the installation

Born in Germany in 1969, Gregor Schneider came to public attention with *Haus ur* (House ur), the house in which he lives and works in his hometown of Rheydt in the Ruhr. A work in progress between 1985 and 2007, he continually altered and rebuilt the house, incorporating new rooms and secret passageways, building rooms within rooms, blocking windows, building walls in front of walls and isolating rooms from the rest of the structure, to the point where the work developed a life of its own. During the 1990s he

identically replicated parts of the house in museums and galleries. In 2001 he was invited to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale, for which he "unbuilt" most of the rooms of *Haus ur* to rebuild them as a disconcerting, labyrinthine space inside the German pavilion. This work, *Totes Haus ur* (Dead House ur), was awarded the Golden Lion. With *Die Familie Schneider* (The Schneider Family, London, 2004), Gregor Schneider began to detach himself from *Haus ur* to create other, more complex spaces that were derived from his first work. In his recent work he moves away from domestic space to explore other spaces with social implications, such as the Ka'bah at the Mecca in *Schwarze Quadrat, Hommage an Malewitsch* (Black Cube, Hommage to Malevich, 2007) or the maximum-security camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba with *Weisse Folter* (White Torture, 2007).

Süßer duft (sweet smell) is the first time Gregor Schneider has turned his attention to a different type of public space: that of exhibitions. The empty white cube of the exhibition venue is symbolically positioned at the centre of an installation which both masks and circumvents it. Visitors are drawn beyond the white walls into a new space. Existing space – rooms taken from past exhibitions – and new space are configured in an installation he has imagined specifically for and in response to the venue.

"I believe actions speak louder than words"

This comment by Gregor Schneider has been highlighted to encourage visitors to enter the work and experience it first-hand, before reading any further. Because it heightens our awareness of time, light and darkness, colour, smell, temperature, texture and the transmission of sound, to describe, and in doing so divulge, the different moments in the work would take away from its discovery and diminish visitors' perception. So that experience can take precedence over commentary, the following text is intended to provide points of reference and ideas for further consideration, rather than an explanation of the work.

Contrasts

Gregor Schneider's installation for la maison rouge exposes visitors to an ongoing series of contrasts that will structure their experience of the work. Whether contrasts of enclosed and open, light and dark, low and high ceilings, old and new, hot and cold, dirty and clean, they provoke multiple sensations that keep visitors' senses constantly alert.

Disappearance

Hiding inside a plastic bag is enough to melt into the background and disappear, as Gregor Schneider demonstrated in the window of la maison rouge on the day of the exhibition opening. This performance is characteristic

of an approach in which he extracts himself from his work by removing all traces of his intervention and never seeking to give his work a recognisable style. Hidden inside his bag, he vanishes as an artist to become a mere accessory in the staging of his own disappearance.

Outside/Inside

The work has no external form other than two doors, an entrance and an exit, in a windowless wall. Nothing on the outside suggests the form of the inside just as, on leaving the work, it is virtually impossible to mentally map out the sequence of spaces. Visitors are incorporated into the work, absorbed within it, unable to put any distance between it and themselves.

Individual/Community

Gregor Schneider's exhibitions require visitors' active participation in order to be "viewed" and yet his work is diametrically opposed to "relational aesthetics" - a widespread concept in contemporary art over the past fifteen years whereby a work prompts interaction between its viewers – as it does not create a context for social exchange. His work does, however, generate a sense of community "after the event": the awareness of belonging to the small group of people who have experienced one of Gregor Schneider's works.

Instructions

Visitors wishing to enter the installation must comply with certain rules: sign a release, wait their turn, enter one by one and not turn back. By imposing a framework that goes against both the public's usual experience of exhibitions and one of the roles of art venues (to bring works to the widest possible audience), Gregor Schneider asserts his authority and, bypassing the venue, strikes up a privileged, albeit one-way relationship with the viewer who is sole witness to his experience of the work.

Smells

Süßer duft (sweet smell) is the first time Gregor Schneider has used man-made smells in his work. Imperceptibly, they alter our perception of the space, our behaviour and our mental images. Visitors perceive two very different types of smell, an opposition which Gregor Schneider prefigures using the invitation to the opening: the evocative title *Süßer duft*, sweet smell, is covered with a silver film which, when scratched, releases an unpleasant smell of burnt rubber.



View of the installation

Original/Added

One of the ploys Gregor Schneider uses in his art is to blur the boundaries between what was already there and what he has added. Compared with the domestic space of *Totes Haus ur*, sowing this confusion is a more difficult exercise in an exhibition space with which many visitors are already familiar. The work is all the more powerful as it is indistinct from its surroundings yet melts into the existing structure to the point where visitors lose all notion of where they are. For his installation at la maison rouge, Gregor Schneider has incorporated spaces (maintenance and equipment areas) which would normally be closed to the public. At certain points in the work, elements such as ventilation shafts have been transformed, creating barely perceptible anomalies.

Fear

Gregor Schneider's work plays on the psychological mechanisms of fear. The unknown, solitude, silence, darkness and disorientation create a sense of unease among visitors. Despite knowing that this is an exhibition and that there is no real danger, they project their own fears and phobias onto the work.

Invisible presence

Gregor Schneider's works have a psychological charge. They give the impression that some disturbing incident has taken place there, or is waiting to happen, without being able to define the exact nature of this event. They also suggest hidden spaces, some of which are inaccessible but whose presence can be felt, and others which visitors physically experience yet are unable to situate within the whole.

Silence and solitude

That visitors enter the exhibition one by one implies silence. Spontaneous remarks, shared impressions and communication with the public are excluded from the scope of the work and the duration of the experience. Visitors' silence and solitude heighten their senses; their unconscious mind and imagination are in a state of alert.

***Weisse Folter* (White Torture)**

In summer 2007 in the basement of K21 in Düsseldorf, Gregor Schneider built a series of clinical rooms suggestive of the isolation cells at Guantanamo Bay, pictures of which were shown on the Internet. Two of the rooms in the installation at la maison rouge (what appear to be a sort of shower-block and a cold room, although there is no way of asserting their function) are taken from this work. These rooms, with their abstract and rigorous architecture, clearly suggest the sensory deprivation and isolation used in "white torture" – a "clean" torture that leaves only psychological traces.

Gregor Schneider is represented by Luis Campaña Gallery in Cologne and by Konrad Fischer Gallery in Düsseldorf and Berlin.

For more information: www.gregorschneider.de

pilar albarracín

mortal cadencia



Lunares, 2001

Pilar Albarracín was born in 1968 in the Andalusian capital of Seville, where she lived and studied, and her Andalusian origins feed her work. Her photographs, drawings, embroideries, sculptures, installations, videos and performances explore from within images of "Spanishness", an identity common to the great Spanish nation, instrumentalised by Franco (1939-1975) and which she deconstructs through parody, irony, excess and humour. More than thirty years after the dictator's death, elements of Andalusian folklore, sucked dry by the Francist regime, continue to symbolise Spain in the eyes of the world,

despite the existence of other regional cultures in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Aragon or Galicia, for example.

For *Mortal Cadencia* (Mortal Cadence), her first solo show in France which takes its title from Georges Didi-Huberman's text in the exhibition catalogue, Pilar Albarracín proposes an imposing installation, *Techo de Ofrendas*, and four video performances. In these films, as in most of her work, she uses herself as a medium to portray clichéd images of Spanish folklore (food, flamenco, religion, bullfights) and to criticise women's role in Spanish society. There is no need for her to adopt disguises: her appearance, which she intentionally instrumentalises, confronts us with the stereotypical Spanish beauty, made popular by Bizet's *Carmen* and done to death by the film and advertising industries: jet-black hair, red mouth, smouldering eyes and force of character oozing from every pore.

This is evident in *Véronica* (2001), the opening photograph chosen by the artist. It combines two of the most iconic and photogenic clichés of Spanish culture: the flamenco dancer and the bull. Objects of admiration, both are dominated by men whom they valiantly try to resist in a combat they have little hope of winning.

The title of the work plays on ambiguity: Veronica is the saint who, during the Passion, wiped Christ's face with a cloth which became imprinted with his image. In reference to her gesture, a veronica is also a two-handed cape pass

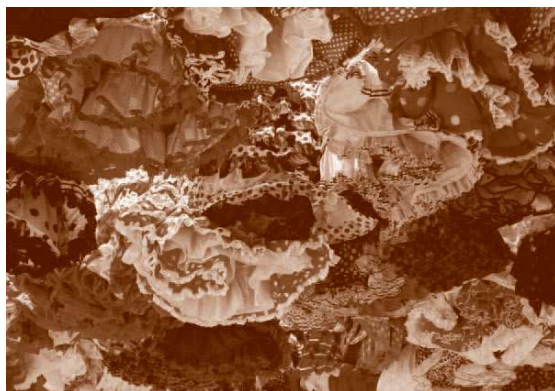
in bullfighting. Through this religious association, the artist draws a parallel between the Passion of Christ and the sacrifice of the bull in the ring. Like the saint, Pilar Albarracín lavishes her compassion on us in her version of the "authentic image."

Folklore is absent from *Tortilla a la española* (1999) which is set against the anonymous backdrop of an industrial kitchen. Imitating the cookery programmes eagerly watched by housewives, the artist prepares a "Spanish omelette", that symbol and staple of Spanish cuisine. Except Pilar Albarracín makes one important change to the recipe: instead of potato, she enthusiastically slices pieces of her dress into the mixture, which she calmly cooks. This act of daily life, passed with incongruous solemnity from mother to daughter, becomes a metaphoric parody of cannibalism in which the housewife "sacrifices" herself in the accomplishment of her duty. Pilar Albarracín intentionally follows in the line of women artists who have played a pioneering role in performance history. One immediately thinks of *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) by Martha Rosler but also Yoko Ono's historic performance *Cut Piece* (1964) in which, motionless on stage, she invites the audience to come forward and cut pieces off her clothes. In Pilar Albarracín's performance it is the artist herself who, victim and executioner, both inflicts and resigns herself to her fate.

Guardian of the home and customs, traditionally the Spanish woman is also the custodian of morality. The sense of honour, piety and devotion we lend her are all the more essential as they underpin her role as the intercessor between the family and God. This role is explicitly developed in *Techo de Ofrendas* (Ceiling of Offerings, 2004). This protective canopy of a thousand flamenco dresses, of which only the underneath is visible, is inspired by a tradition still practiced in certain Andalusian churches. Women offer up their most beautiful dresses – wedding dresses and *vestidos de feria* worn for celebrations – to the Virgin, hanging them from the church ceiling in exchange or as thanks for a blessing or an intercession. This symbolic "woman to woman" relationship creates an unexpected intimacy between the earthly and the divine. The mother of Christ understands better than her son how great a sacrifice a woman makes when giving up her most beautiful attire, these dresses that symbolise femininity and beauty, celebration with all its excess, and vanity. Seen from an angle that reveals a normally hidden detail, the dresses lose their function and some of their extravagance. They become a floating, multi-coloured sculpture, sumptuous and seductive relics that tell of the happiness of moments past and the pride of the women who wore them.

Unlike the *traje de flamenca*, the dress worn for any festive occasion, in *Lunares* (2001) Pilar Albarracín wears a *bata de cola*, the dress with train worn only for exceptional performances and only ever worn at night by dancers. To

the rhythmic sound of a *paso doble*, played by musicians half-hidden in the shadows, the artist pricks her skin through the fabric to bleed drops of blood onto her immaculate dress (*lunar* means both dot and beauty spot in Spanish). Like other women artists before her, such as Gina Pane, Ana Mendieta or Marina Abramovic, she carries out this self-inflicted pain with great determination, dramatising and demonstrating the spiritual suffering of the women she incarnates. The dress becomes a metaphor for social conventions: though it may hide the wounds, it cannot prevent blood from ultimately rising to the surface. The parallel between woman and bull, conveyed by the music, characteristic of bullfights, the *estocada* (thrust) of the needle and the *mise en scène* of this sacrifice, is one of the leitmotifs of Pilar Albarracín's work.



Techo de ofrendas, 2004-2008

While the artist confronts these "rituals of cruelty" with calm dignity, the next two videos shows a woman losing all self-control, giving in to her impulses and overcome by emotion.

In *La Cabra* (The Goat, 2001), dressed in a typical gypsy dress with its spots and ruffles, for a fleeting moment she could be one of the plastic flamenco dolls that crowd souvenir shop windows before letting herself become carried away in a dance that rises into a trance. To the pounding beat of a gypsy *pachanga*, she engages in clumsy movements as she struggles to keep hold of a goat wineskin. Liquid pours from it as she lurches from side to side, smearing her clothes with red, the colour of blood. Under the influence of the music, the alcohol and physical exhaustion, the dance becomes increasingly orgiastic, frenzied and obscene, connecting the body to rhythms that tell of eroticism and death. Violent and pathetic, the dance is transformed into a comical but also grotesque performance, leaving the spectator suspended between surprise and disgust.

We find the same tragic-comic effect in *Prohibido el Cante* (No Singing, 2000). The title refers to the sign that could be seen in taverns, hung there on Franco's orders, forbidding flamenco singing which could become an outpouring for the suffering and anger of the working class. In this performance, the artist literally abandons herself to her lamentations, similar to a *cante jondo*, the deepest and most serious form of flamenco singing. Her

inarticulate wailing could be cries of pleasure or screams of pain, building up to an unexpected conclusion that symbolises the ultimate self-sacrifice.

In a very visually and thematically coherent progression, *Mortal Cadencia* opens with the image of a submissive woman, a consenting victim, to end with the cathartic cries of *Prohibido el Cante*, in a trance that helps lift the yoke of social, sexual and representational subordination.

Pilar Albarracín is represented by Filomena Soares Gallery in Lisbon.

For more information: www.pilaralbarracin.com

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catalogue

Mortal Cadencia, Pilar Albarracín, in French, Spanish and English, jointly published by la maison rouge / Éditions Fage / Seacex. 128 colour pages with texts by Cécile Bourne-Farrell, Georges Didi-Huberman, Xavier Arakistain and Lourdes Mendez.

marie maillard

wall 0208



View of the installation

Installation proposed and produced by

les amis de la maison rouge

Each year *les amis de la maison rouge* produces a work specifically for the patio at the foundation. Members are invited to put forward a name and then vote for one of the three artists selected by a committee, this year presided by Jean-Pierre Criqui.

Riding the boundaries of contemporary art, design and architecture, Marie Maillard's work takes over space to transform it into a sensitive fabric.

For this installation at la maison rouge, Marie Maillard revisits the venue's past incarnation as a factory built around a red house. A transitional space,

visible before entering the exhibition rooms, this inner courtyard lets in the daylight while its red brick recalls the building's former function. Marie Maillard has reproduced it, on a smaller scale, in a work that she places in the centre of the patio. This doubling-up, added to the inversion of materials (glass and brick), causes visitors to lose their bearings. The enclosed space is fragmented, opening up to a multitude of dimensions. *Wall 0208* thus breaks down the strict separation between real and virtual, concrete and imaginary. Despite its small size, it forms a maze which visitors can mentally trace, like a projection area, both intimate and inaccessible, secret and familiar.

Fabien Danesi

Fabien Danesi holds a doctorate in art history. He has taught at Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines and at Université de Picardie Jules Verne. He is currently a boarder at the Villa Medici (French Academy in Rome).

Marie Maillard was born in Besançon in 1973.

She lives and works in Paris.

She is represented by Aline Vidal Gallery in Paris

and by Luxe Gallery in New York.

For more information: www.video-wallpaper.com

To join *les amis de la maison rouge*: amis@lamaisonrouge.org

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