

Célia Gondol

Born in 1985 in Grenoble, France Lives and works in Paris, France

INTERVIEW WITH ANNE-LOU VICENTE

As we were preparing this conversation, you related your approach to the “phantom works” described by Jean-Yves Jouannais in his book *Artistes sans oeuvres*. I would prefer not to: “this typology of non-existing works [...] undeniably endowed with an objective existence [...] but that weren’t conceived for themselves, [...] that owed their birth to other motives than the desire the artist felt for them.” As it happens, at the time we are speaking, the works you will show in the exhibition don’t exist yet, since you are about to travel to Thailand to feed them. These works, which can only be evoked “at a distance”, are therefore doubly phantom.

Including my installations within the “family of phantom works” Jouannais writes of is also a way of not thinking of them in terms of produced objects, of “finished products”, but rather as a process and a work experience. What I want to make accessible and tangible are the gestures, which are invisible, as well as the invisible works that make up the physical, mental or projected territories of thought. But for all that, I want to make these phantom works objective, so that they’re not purely abstract. Along these lines, I like to consider exhibitions in terms of the composition of space. The exhibition space can be understood as a visual score, as a set of rhythmic accords or as the writing of life. What is “deposited” in space, in an almost induced manner, stems from a precise, profoundly necessary gesture.

Gestures do have major importance in your work process, but they are also a strong presence within your pieces. What types of gestures interest you?

I reflect on certain cultural gestures as somehow being artistic as such, or when you slightly shift them; as generating works of art. I’m interested in questioning the gestures needed to give shape to an installation – whose materials can be “abstract” or cultural, related to social situations or chosen simply for their formal qualities –, their relationship to reality, my own approach towards them. Conversely, I may wonder whether a material calls for a specific gesture, and what ultimately remains of that gesture. Gestures maybe present, either concretely through a performance that “reenacts” them, for instance, or implicitly, via their outcome: objects and materials. In Thailand, people have a strong relationship to offerings, to the ritual gestures of offering, of depositing. One after another, following an ancestral choreography, they deposit their offering on the statues of Buddha: gold leaf. This element relates both to the person and to the object. It is what is experienced between those two poles that makes up, in my opinion, the essence of my work, inasmuch as it feeds the final result.

How do you relate this artistic process with your practice as a dancer?

Of course, the dimension of gesture and my practice as a dancer are totally complementary. All that I do as a dancer isn’t necessarily dancing. It is also a matter of creating music on a stage, of creating a voice, of singing, of laying claim to texts, of finding how to fashion the language to say those texts, of truly exploring all the lines of thought that spring from the fact of setting yourself in motion to make things happen. My experiments with dancing consist in putting everything (back) into play every time, at the moment in which it exists, in which I make it exist as a dancer. That’s what I try to reinject into my plastic work. I couldn’t be further from delegating production. Just as I am the author of a gesture as a dancer, I want to be its author as an artist.

Could your pieces be “replayed”, reinterpreted?

Ideally, each time I show a piece in a different exhibition, I should “replay” the way I show it. I would also find it interesting to transmit the gestures of setting up an installation orally, installation to someone who would install the piece in my place. Not controlling the actual arrangement of the objects, just the intentions and history of the piece. The objects I offer are not built, assembled in a way that freezes their appearance and the way they appear. They are not self-constrained. By and large, there are no power struggles in my work, as illustrated, for instance, in a performance entitled Slow. Two people dance a slow number, “separated” by a banana tree leaf. We hear them whispering, the rhythm is slow, in a loop. It isn’t a performance that necessarily requires you to stop and look at it. Phantom works are born from this composition of space-time in motion. Some, whose existence is only proven by a remaining trace or gesture, exist for the duration of the exhibition, while others endure to vouch for the cyclical transformations of this ecosystem.