

## TRUE OR FALSE ?

INTERVIEW OF VÉRONIQUE BOURGOIN BY BERNARD MARCADÉ

**Bernard Marcadé:** The publication is presented in two volumes, would you say this corresponds to your two lines of activity?

**Véronique Bourgoïn:** The first volume is devoted to the private rooms in which I installed the “archives of true and false”. We assembled the archives with works I selected, done by famous and less famous artists. The second volume concerns the workshops which we had organised in Europe on the question of true and false.

**B.M.:** So the first volume assembles documents linked to your curating activities, in the classic sense of the term, whereas the second volume is concerned with more experimental work?

**V.B.:** The *Atelier Reflexe* is a project I started with Juli Susin, in 1994, on the question of photography and art. The program of workshops, exhibitions and publications are designed for photographers and participants including well known artists such as Antoine d’Agata, Joan Fontcuberta, Anders Petersen, Boris Mikhaïlov, Gelatin as well as several fringe artists.

**B.M.:** Could we say that you now consider the workshops as a work of art?

**V.B.:** Yes, in a sense, as I have devoted the second volume of this publication to them. In effect it takes on the form of a deviant newspaper (in this case *Le Monde*). It mixes all the archives collected in the past few years and asks us to reflect upon our contemporary world and its relationship to true and false...

**B.M.:** A way of editorially bouncing back to what takes place in your installation?

**V.B.:** In the installation (made of real works of art in a fake room), one can effectively consult these deviated newspapers. I would like the spectator to be part of the scenery, to be inside a person’s home and to be reading today’s newspaper, at ease in a dusty sitting room... A paradoxical space in which one would have the impression that time is suspended. It is as if one was in a space ship’s sitting room spinning around the universe at the speed of light. The room is furnished in the style of the times when one dreamt of those

impossible journeys across different dimensions, when you could imagine a fantastic future. I’m thinking of the years 1915 to 1930, of novels by Pawlowski, by Raymond Roussel, of Rondo-cubist furniture or by the Dutch expressionists (especially Michel Klerk’s furniture designs, “poet of shining novelty”, a utopist who held on to the cult of construction and who mastered the meeting of art and science). These rooms are presented in the installation at the *Foto Museum* in Rotterdam. The book, just like the installations, is shown, in the manner of a tracking shot. The passage through these intermediary spaces where the relation between true and false becomes more ambiguous and conniving are similar to time travel where one hears bribes of stories between visions squashed by the short lens of an observer distant by millions of years and those, more organic, facing infinite space...

**B.M.:** Is there an evident common ground between the texts and images?

**V.B.:** Yes, they reflect the gnawing violence at the heart of our contemporary societies, hidden behind the iconographies and the references produced by official “fantasy”. Today’s violence is insidious, disguised, but it is so much more terrifying than ordinary violence (that of war for example), for which it is easier to be understanding. This begins with questioning the increasing erasure of frontiers between true and false. This is the dimension which appears in all the workshops that I have organised, during which I define these ideas by their associations with the collected images. This questioning points to the importance of a reading and of a point of view, in an epoch in which one thinks increasingly according to images succeeding each other, like publicity announcements, in the great cinema hall which our brain has become...

**B.M.:** In which context do you organise these workshops?

**V.B.:** It is variable, but always in partnership. We are not an institution. These workshops are nomadic. They can take place in my space in Montreuil-sous-Bois as well as abroad. In Greece we work in partnership with the *Photography Museum of Thessaloniki*, in Latvia with the *International*

*Summer School of Photography*, in Turkey with the *IFSAK*, in France with *Le Bal*, *La Maison Populaire*, *Les Instants Chavirés*... Each question is based on a contemporary vision. It is very important to confront oneself to the actual society in which we currently live. Like a mirror reflecting the other side of the mirror, uncovering what cannot be directly seen.

**B.M.: What is the guiding line?**

**V.B.:** More than a school, it would rather be an open experimental project focused on photography. It started informally and developed little by little; with time we have constituted a “constellation”, around a core of interns and regular participants...

**B.M.: You started with reflections on photography, and this field widened?**

**V.B.:** At the beginning, my photographic experiment was linked to painting. I am not at ease with “stolen” or informative photography. For me photography has always been a medium through which reality can be revealed rather than a roughly sliced cut. Even if the term “reveal”, which corresponded so well in the analogical and chemical epoch, becomes an obsolete metaphor with the advent of jet ink printers, the reveal still has a purely mystical connotation. I’ve always needed time to “watch”, to see the image appear... I also need time to establish complicity with the model...

**B.M.: The model? Which model?**

**V.B.:** The model, the living or still element, a person, a creature, an animal, a tree, a room, a street, which will metamorphose into a work of art... I like seeing the elements of my daily life evolve into off-the-wall situations, opening “metaphysical” spaces. In the manner of the surrealists, when I loose track of the initial meaning, the title readjusts the meaning for each of the images or series. I have formed a band, the Hole Garden, for the animated extension of my images. With this band, I try to invest in the “concept” of the occidental woman made in China... These are videos where the occidental icons are confronted by Chinese manufacturing...

**B.M.: Let’s come back to your “real works of art” in your “fake room”...**

**V.B.:** We could turn the idea around. At first it was actually a real room, mine, in which I imagined installing the art. Then

the room became movable... Just like the “Boite en Valise” by Marcel Duchamp... The room thus became fake. And the works became real...

**B.M.: Are these works that you install in your nomadic rooms personal choices?**

**V.B.:** I first concentrated on the family of artists who called upon me regularly in this sitting room, in the tradition of the end of the 19th century... Then, I refined my choices with artists implicated in the question of true and false, such as Joan Fontcuberta, for example. The themes appeared step by step: the falsification of history, forgeries, social value, mimetism, plagiarism, cloning... From this point of view the example of Martin Kippenberger is illuminating. He was obsessed with the figure of William Holden. He identified with him physically, to the point where he sent a series of postcards signed William Holden Company to Africa (where the W.H. Foundation is based)... He anticipated, in his (very artistic!) manner the actual appropriation of identity such as one can see it on Facebook...

**B.M.: Do you also include “non-artistic” documents?**

**V.B.:** In each of these categories, one can relate works of art with documentary forms. For example retouched photographs of criminals published in the *Petit Parisien* in the ’20s-’40s, Chinese lighters decorated with an image of La Joconde...

**B.M.: Is this method equally at stake in your deviated newspaper?**

**V.B.:** The newspaper implies the notion of columns. For example take the element “Fashion and Conflict” in which I associate pictures of war with documents showing the aesthetic inspiration taken from war zones and terrorism in fashion shows by *Prada* and *Galliano* where one could see a hooded convict, wearing only underwear, whip marks and a noose tied around his neck...

**B.M.: Does this brings us back to the muted violence you mentioned?**

**V.B.:** Real war tends to look more like a Hollywood show, whereas the actual shows tone down this violence, by deviating it. The result is the banalisation of violence. The act of arranging these images and documents, in a domestic context, signifies that this violence has infiltrated every inch of our existence, in the most insidious and “normal” manner possible.

**B.M.:** Do I sense your strong link to the situationist philosophy?

**V.B.:** The situationists used spectacular methods to combat the spectacle, just as modern power had done before them to combat revolutions. As a consequence to the world of forgery described by Guy Debord in his *Society of Spectacle*, they themselves used the technology of illusion as a subversive weapon. I'm thinking of the famous book written by Gianfranco Sanguinetti under the pseudonym "Censor". This "fake" by Sanguinetti was a scandal in Italy, as it denounced, under a masked identity, the spectacle of the false terrorism practiced with total impunity by the bodies of power against the population or some of the members at the time and thus provoked disorder confusing the elite in power. More than a century back in time, the pamphlets of Paul Louis Courier underlined this same rebelliousness. I'm also thinking of Adolfo Kaminsky, another great expert in Fake, who developed infallible falsification technology, aimed not at "saving the world", but at saving the lives of thousands of people. By forging "fake papers" for 30 years,

without uproar and in total clandestinity, by being involved with the Resistance during the Second World War, with the NLF in Algeria, with the opposition during Spain's dictatorship... I believe that numerous decisive contributions by the situationists were made prior to 1963, when it was still permitted for them to be artists. I am far from agreeing with Debord who finally excluded the artists for the sake of revolutionary principles. Even if this thinking is effectively important and decisive for the understanding of our world, I feel much closer to the ideology of Annie Le Brun. Along with the race for rationality, the increasing control of technology, the realm of pretence, the immaterial body, we are witnessing the disappearance of imagination and body as a laboratory and infinite space, and while forests are being sacrificed for the sake of planting transgenic corn, numerical references are coding into our minds, the sensitive sphere is demarcated by the frenzied raking of the "mental forest", as perfectly expressed by Annie Le Brun.