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July 2015

CÉLESTE BOURSIER-MOUGENOT

"Experimenting – that's all that interests me."



Nice-born artist Céleste Boursier-Mougenot represents France at the 56th Venice Biennale and is also transforming the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. We report on both projects in detail, with the help of those involved.

Jean de Loisy, chairman of the Parisian contemporary art venue the Palais de Tokyo, put it clearly at the Tokyo Art Club on 15 April: "Two absolutely decisive exhibitions in [the] career" of Céleste Boursier-Mougenot are showing in 2015. He followed up with enthusiastic praise for this erudite artist, little known to the general public, "whose work has long fascinated me". Indeed he booked Boursier-Mougenot for the Palais de Tokyo even before the artist was chosen to represent France at the 56th Venice Biennale with his *Révolutions*. These completely crazy projects both immerse visitors in a total experience that in the artist's own words "is beyond the reference system of art". For these two installations the artist has also designed *Les Marches* (Steps), a hybrid, modular work he dreamed up in collaboration with Smarin, a furnishing designer and maker.

Révolutions at the Venice Biennale

Until 22 November 2015

Boursier-Mougenot has shown he can work all kinds of alchemy. Here he has worked on the trees of the Giardini (the tree-lined avenues of the Biennale site) and three specimens brought into the French pavilion, fixing it so that they move, "slowly, in phase with their metabolism" explains Emma Lavigne, curator of the Révolutions project. No you haven't misread: these trees move. They also sing, producing "their own sound patterns based on the low-tension electric currents they generate." Visitors can immerse themselves in this "dreamlike organic island", relaxing on sofas, letting themselves be lulled by the "ocean of sound" and the upside-down images of the surrounding trees and clouds projected by two camera obscuras.

acquaalta at the Palais de Tokyo,

Until 13 September 2015

"This installation transforms the Palais de Tokyo's vast interior and in so doing changes what it means to 'visit an exhibition,'" says the exhibition's curator Daria de Beauvais. "Céleste has invented a narrative, inviting visitors to share an immersive, dreamlike experience that merges the artificial with the natural." In the semi-darkness of the exhibition space visitors are invited to move around in flat-bottomed boats on an artificial Venetian flood, following a route organised by the artist. At intervals on this sensory odyssey they see images of their fellow boaters, projected live onto the walls of the exhibition space.

"Take the visitor by the hand"

"What I wanted with both these new projects was to be able to show a darker side of my work," says Céleste Boursier-Mougenot. "Luminous works like From here to ear helped me become known but they locked me into a comfort zone that people didn't necessarily want me to move out of. With these two projects the notion of interactivity really comes into its own. I like this idea of taking the visitor by the hand and immersing him or her in a total experience. The visitor breathes life into the artwork, as it were. With the two curators, we wanted there to be a certain resonance between the exhibitions but no repetition. Experimenting – that's all that interests me!"

Born in Nice in 1961, Céleste Boursier-Mougenot lived in our region, mainly in the village of Magagnosc, until he was 25. He now lives in Sète. After training for a musical career at the Conservatoire National de Nice, he worked as composer to stage director Pascal Rambert for nearly ten years. With Rambert he began to create "autonomous sound structures partnering spaces" and his music merged with three-dimensional visual art. His "living" sound forms, as he calls them, unfold in installations that go far beyond musical performance. By extracting potential music from the most diverse situations and objects he creates fascinating works that often play on the illusion of "live" performance. All the artist needs is a breeze or the movement of water to play the music of dreams and poetry. His most famous piece, From here to ear, created in New York in 1999 and since "replayed" in various forms, involved an aviary full of mandarin ducks and electric guitars. The birds, perching on the instruments, produced random sounds that were more or less "solicited" by the public as they walked around among the ducks. Another installation that won over the public involved china bowls floating in an inflatable children's pool and clinking together as they moved with the slight current.


Par Mireille Sartore


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