

MAC VAL

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Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne

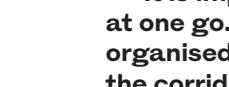
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Opening hours

Tuesday to Friday, 10 am–6 pm. Saturday, Sunday and public holidays, noon to 7 pm. Last admissions 30 minutes before closing. Closed on 1 January and 25 December.



See below a selection of texts written by the artist "afterward", once the work was produced and shown to the public, as part of its experience. She describes the conception steps, details the work's technical and physical characteristics, the various forms in which it was successively exhibited, its relationship to a series, its inspiration and finally the intention behind.

NB: EB's texts are not to be mistaken with the descriptive labels of the works displayed in the exhibition. Here cut in order to adapt to the comfort of motion reading, they are reproduced in their entirety in the exhibition catalogue.

To prolong your visit, discover Elisabeth Ballet's work included in the exhibition of the collection artworks entitled "Sans réserve", and on its website: www.elisabethballet.com

BCHN, 1998–2017

BCHN, only work specifically produced for the exhibition. It revives for the MAC VAL the work exhibited at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1997.

My exhibition at the ARC is an extension of a work titled *ZIP* installed in Austria. Although its form is renewed, this is not due to the change of location. This ensemble includes a video and sound apparatus. In Linz, two corridors raised on a wood floor run alongside a succession of windows giving onto the city. Their conception here responds to the qualities of the space (noises from the city, the run-down room), whereas at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the space with its thick walls and overhead lighting, is cut off from the urban setting. In Paris, the interpenetration of the museum spaces with the autonomous ones of the sculpture re-establish the notions of exterior and interior. (...)

The sculpture is an obstacle that cannot be crossed, it delineates a formal territory that is circumscribed and informed by my observations in the street. (...)

Bande à Part (*Vie privée* series), 2000–2002
Frac Basse-Normandie collection

It is impossible to take in *BCHN* at one go. The elements are all organised around the floor plan of the corridors, which meet at right angles. Their trajectories define new spaces. They follow the space but do not work to hide or forget it; on the contrary: the lateral spans not covered with plastic sit alongside the concrete presence of the walls 30 centimetres away. They guide our steps in the tunnel. Each connection composes a black, white and red geometrical abstract painting that is perfectly framed. Especially at the beginning of the exhibition. (...) The red carpet induces visitors to enter the passage. From the room they can see only the wall on their left; confined by the depth of the tunnel, they slowly adjust their steps to their thoughts. (...)

The sculpture is an obstacle that cannot be crossed, it delineates a formal territory that is circumscribed and informed by my observations in the street. (...)

Bande à Part (*Vie privée* series), 2000–2002
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(...) Manufactured in a workshop in New York using thick aluminium tubing, the sculpture titled *Mouth*

came up against the wall of a gallery. I later added a low construction in grey breeze blocks that detached it from the architecture. I changed its name. I didn't want it to be subordinate to a supporting wall any more: the wall had to be evident, with what it hides, empty spots, other walls. (...) At the Carré d'Art, the breeze blocks were white, the museum's fine marble floor tiles on which the piece stands were turned over and reset in the original metal frame to show the galvanized steel back. The silvery tone of the aluminium barrier reflects its surroundings, it mingles its reflections with those of the floor. The powdery texture and whiteness of the breeze blocks blend in with the wall. The enclosure acts as a barrier to crossing one part of the room without concealing it. The piled-up rows of breeze blocks form an interlacing; as they cross each other they create a new composition of internal space within the sculpture, which becomes completely independent of the museum architecture.

(the site is being completely renovated). I saw the staircase as an independent object, which had no practical use but was nevertheless necessary in that it revealed the existence of a basement area. In all public buildings emergency exit signs are placed above doors to guide users in the eventuality of imminent danger. I decided to use this symbol enclosed in a glass cylinder in order to reactivate the staircase. (...)

The sculpture does not speak to us only of architecture: the floor on which we tread as we walk connects us with the long corridor where we could also walk if it was accessible. This is not a box, but a cover placed on the floor. We can imagine ourselves inside it. The pictogram combined with the dynamic form, inspired by the legendary camera of the title, reflects the surroundings at the same time as its own image. The total closure of the piece and its transparency contrast with the matt, concrete real space. The sculpture is an impassable obstacle. It is a mental object that resists political space, the one outside it of which it offers a distant echo. This sculpture is the most explicit of a series of pieces in which real physical space

is reflected by the abstract, more mental space that has been part of my sculpture from the very beginning.

Leica, 2004 (*C'est beau dehors* series), 2004
Fonds régional d'art contemporain collection, Ministry of Culture and Communication

The sculpture *Leica* was built for my exhibition 'C'est beau dehors' at the cent8 gallery in 2004. (...) The idea was to create a permanent work in response to this staircase, [From the Swiss Cottage Library, building designed by architect Sir Basil Spence in 1962–1964] which is now closed to the public

(Ardèche). It constitutes an observation post high in the valley, and also a listening chamber. The stop has its back to the factory and the river and now stands along *la voie douce*, the largely pedestrian pathway that has replaced the former railway line, along which walkers can explore the valley with its mills, farms and other factories.

Recordings were made of the machines on various production sites and interviews were carried out with the women who worked in the factories over a period of two years. (...)

This piece sets out to do justice to the work accomplished within these walls, to

describe and make it visible in our present. We had forgotten this activity and even the name of the people. The noise of the machines mingles with voices to bring back the aural atmosphere of the factory, but also its human and technological organisation; the machines are once again heard in action, in the valley landscape around the old factory.

Schlüterstrasse, neige, (Vie Privée series), 2002

The camera lens is trained on the closed window, curtains hopelessly drawn, of the man I am waiting for. It is snowing hard, the front of the building almost disappearing behind the flakes that form a screen between me, my neighbour opposite and the viewer watching the film. Imperceptibly, the snowfall eases off and stops, and at the same time the frontage hidden behind the falling snow reappears clearly in the foreground. My

camera was set to auto mode, it focused on the snow, and when the snow stopped it focused on the tree and on the front of the building. This very short video is about the image of passing time. The light and weather variations at different times of day give things and events a fleeting quality.

Basically, I am interested in the time we take to cross a space, in the way one sculpture reconfigures into another, and in the time we allow ourselves to see.

Schlüterstrasse, matin et après-midi (Vie privée series), 2000

idea of sculpture: you can walk round it. The cardboard box immediately conveys the idea of packing, moving, precariousness.

The staircase seems to be waiting to be carried off. The boxes exude a very special kind of time, one that deadens any movement. The interior calls up the façade, urgently. Although materially fragile, these objects are hard. Taking a long look at them, we have no

sense of transparency but merely a stronger awareness of their inner silence.

Schlüterstrasse, matin et après-midi (Vie privée series), 2000

The man has a silent relationship with me, he stands up, as if on a theatre apron with the curtains drawn – curtains half-drawn – curtains right open. I work on the first floor of this building, which is otherwise completely deserted at weekends; I am alone with him, I wait, and I film him. He came to me and inevitably this was the beginning of a story . . . at the CNP, with 'Entrée dans la cour', and now today at this 'Vie privée' exhibition at the Carré d'Art in Nîmes. This man in his nakedness refers me back to the interior of my apartment, to a mirror image of myself.

[Video featured in the exhibition of artworks from the MAC VAL collection]

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The picture shows the façade of a residence in Berlin on the courtyard side that has a rather luminous orange rendering.

Between my windowpane and the building facing me stands the bare trunk of a horse chestnut tree. There is no wind, no birds, no sound; the action takes place in the middle of winter.

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Élisabeth Ballet's works usually originate in the experience of a specific site; they are elaborated and constructed out of the constraints and specificities of the occasion for which they are produced. In the case of a retrospective, which by definition is an assemblage of heterogeneous elements, how can original, strong interdependence with the originating locus be conveyed in a secondary space whose architecture is itself very resonant?

We worked out several hypotheses, several scenarios. We made choices. 'We concentrated on the sculptures independently of the context of their making. They were sampled from the series *Vie privée*, *Sept pièces faciles*, *Night Roofline* and *Face-à-main*. The material and personal constraints are essential in choosing, creating and conceptually shaping an exhibition.' And we opted for a retrospective view, preferring autonomous works, simply placed there, as if nonchalantly laid out, in a dandyish arrangement where they reflect the question of place and orchestrate movement. She says: 'I imagine the works rather as the pieces in an electronic billiards game. Seeing the exhibition is like rebounding from one piece to another.'

An exhibition tells a story/stories. A spatial and mental narrative. This goes beyond the simple fact of bringing together disparate works in the same space. For Ballet, each exhibition is a *replay* ground.

Each of the works here is a fragment, part of a narrative constituted by the series and/or the exhibition for which they were made. The retrospective exhibition

samples sections and heterogeneous elements from these narratives, organising them and modulating them in other narrative weaves.

All in one plus three.

The notes that accompany each work and each exhibition, written by the artist after the event, relate their origins, their movements and their making. They are related, narrated and placed in an overall narrative, a 'biographical' chronicle that is itself made up of the assemblage of all these related gestures, but never assigns a meaning, a direction, a significance other than that of their necessary presence.

Ballet's works are grounded in the place of sculpture. Often, these

works designate a space that they do not occupy. They frequently contain movement that is suggested, induced, represented. They are islands, narrative archipelagos that are anchored in, translate and formalise something of a singular experience of the world.

Each work functions like a syntagma. Reassembled, reconfigured, reordered, they produce new sentences, new utterances. Fresh stories.

The work shapes a journey, a personal and unique way of using the real. It activates something of a quasi-psychanalytic economy, or one that is analytic, at the very least. It suggests the 'proposition of a new, more psychoanalytic reading in which this emptiness, this degree zero, may have a more personal source, a kind of space of memory intentionally left vacant (for reasons of survival in general).'

She says: 'The staircase, the ladder, the corridor, are sculptures

of the passage from one place to another; cardboard indicates the ephemeral, moving; the box, that which is hidden, preserved.' And also: 'Absence, silence... occupy my work.' She adds: 'The enclosure-sculptures are full of self-absences, as if withdrawn from the space they occupy. It is the place of a silent story. I meticulously draw each detail as if they were seen through a magnifying glass. Their gravity is in their external contours and in the assemblages, while their centre is silent.'

There is something of vacancy here. An emptiness, a suspension, an absence, an availability.

Each of Ballet's works is a materialisation of ideas in gestation. The mind and body in motion. They also activate the reflection of those who look and circumvent.

Orienting the gaze, perspectives, bodies. Drawing, organising trajectories, the pleasure of disconcerting, imparting rhythm to space. Surrounding, insetting, nesting, superposing, imbricating, enclosing, delimiting, protecting, isolating, surrounding, outlining, sampling, preserving, apprehending, qualifying, designating...

Measuring, circumventing, ambulating, walking, crossing, covering, entering, leaving, butting.

Ballet's works invite individual

experience. Visitors are confronted with objects, situations and places. Places of projection and designation.

Thresholds, transitions, stages, barriers, corridors, enclosures, balustrades, covers, screens - she specifies: 'Everything that separates'. She prefers spaces of passage, of transition.

Neither one nor the other. Both one and the other.

Building materials, materials for transition, movement, protection. Cardboard, breeze block, metal, plastic film, etc. A particular world of materials.

What is represented (like so

many fragments breaking off from the real, remade, reprised, reproduced), the materials used and the titles (of each work individually and of each series) together activate poetic deflagrations, semantic suspensions that produce as many new narratives.

Although Ballet's work is

grounded in an inner, personal

experience of the real and in its

possible transcriptions, although

the artist resists any socio-political

interpretation of her works, at

least when it comes to describing

their intentions, these variations

centred around motifs such as

enclosure, threshold and frontier

resonate to singular effect with

current events.

As beautiful as the chance

encounter between a kitchen hood

and a breeze-block wall on a

toposcope.

Frank Lamy

Curator of the exhibition

"Tout En Un Plus Trois"¹: with this title, Elisabeth Ballet suggests the idea that the exhibition is an elaborate narration that goes beyond and exceeds the sole gathering of artworks. "Tout en un" (*all in one*). "Trois" (*three*) is the answer to a

riddle. It could refer to some missing pieces or to the exhibition cata-

logue, the real transfer of her

thought and work into an editorial

object published in collaboration

with the Syndicat collectif.

In *L'Art de la mémoire*, Frances

Yates underlines the importance of

building a mental house to orga-

nize our thoughts. Each of Elisab-

eth Ballet's sculptures is like a door

opening on one of the rooms of this

mental house.

Motion is one of the exhibition

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Elisabeth Ballet is no concep-

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