

Ambition d'art

Alighiero Boetti, Daniel Buren, Jordi Colomer, Tony Cragg, Luciano Fabro, Yona Friedman, Anish Kapoor, On Kawara, Martha Rosler, Jeff Wall, Lawrence Weiner

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The Institut d'art contemporain is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2008 and on this occasion has invited its founder, Jean Louis Maubant, to design an exhibition, accompanied by an important publication.

The exhibition *Ambition d'art*, held in partnership with the Rhône-Alpes Regional Council and the town of Villeurbanne, is a strong and exceptional event for the Institute: beyond the anecdotal

aspect (an anniversary) and the setting – the inauguration of an exhibition in the artistico-political context of the 2000s – it is aimed at shedding light on what the 'ambition' of art and its 'world' might be.

The retrospective dimension of the event is presented above all in the two volumes (*Alphabet and Archive*) of the publication to which it has given rise.



Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne
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Any feedback in the exhibition is less to commemorate past history than to give present and future history more density. In fact, many of the works shown here have never been seen before.

Ambition d'art

For the exhibition ***Ambition d'art***, Jean Louis Maubant has chosen eleven artists for the eleven rooms of the Institut d'art contemporain. Most of them have made a strong mark on the history of the Institut and its programme of exhibitions: Daniel Buren was first shown in 1979, Tony Cragg in 1981, Anish Kapoor in 1983, Alighiero Boetti in 1986, On Kawara in 1996... without forgetting Lawrence Weiner who, invited several times by the Nouveau Musée, has made an original contribution to the openly contemporary trend in the Villeurbanne area (exhibitions, a public commission, a catalogue raisonné and artist's book, an 'artist's lesson' for the public, etc.).

Ambition d'art makes it possible to show certain works for the first time in France, whether created for the occasion (Lawrence Weiner,

Yona Friedman, Jordi Colomer) or because they have hardly ever been shown (Martha Rosler, Alighiero Boetti, Jeff Wall). Other works have already been shown at the Institut and now gain fresh visibility as a result of their positioning in space and their artistic company (Luciano Fabro, Daniel Buren, Martha Rosler, Tony Cragg, On Kawara).

At the two ends of the generation chain, invitations have been extended to both Jordi Colomer (who had a solo show at the Institute in 2004) and to Yona Friedman (an exception that proves the rule as this is the first time that he has shown work at the Institute). This is an affirmation of the primacy of the artist's vision (of certain artists, whatever their age) as capacity to change the world – starting by representing it – and the permanence of Utopia as momentum.

The exhibition shows Jean Louis Maubant's artistic predilections and convictions throughout: lively interest in the Italian art scene in the 1970s, in the new sculpture of the 1980s, for Conceptual and 'contextual' art, for the relation between art and architecture and more generally for politically

committed art that accepts its social and political dimension. The spatial layout of the exhibition also reflects the choice of hinging the rooms so each is a monographic space, allowing both a synchronic journey through the creative exuberance of the recent decades and a salutary focusing on the originality of each artist and his or her universe.

The title *Ambition d'art* indicates the determination to avoid euphemisms or jargon, false modesty or showmanship. Although the exhibition *Ambition d'art* is not prospective with regard to the artistic choices made, it intends to be so with regard to the fate of the art on show. It addresses once again the question of the role of art in society, stressing its critical issues one more time.

In 1978, Jean Louis Maubant founded 'Le Nouveau Musée', a different kind of setting. A museum without walls and with no collection, semi-private and totally dedicated to the plastic creation that was happening. It was in a way an American-style museum (like Marcia Tucker's New Museum in New York).

In 1982, this art centre was installed in a former Jules Ferry type school made available by the mayor of Villeurbanne at the time. The importance of the private partners who were involved in the adventure from the start, with the aim of civil society representation, led to the awarding of an *Oscar du Mécénat* (Oscar for Patronage) in 1982.

In 1984, it gained the name Centre International d'Art Contemporain during the cultural effervescence of the decentralisation of the plastic arts by the Ministry of Culture, when Jack Lang was minister. This was also when collections of contemporary art took shape in the regions, in particular with the setting-up of Fonds Régionaux d'Art Contemporain (Regional Collections of Contemporary Art, FRAC).

Sensitivity to educational questions developed little by little, whether in the showing of new forms of art to publics who were novices in the field or with regard to the need for research in aesthetics, correlated with that for archiving. Jean Louis Maubant defended the idea that 'you study art, you work on it', and this led logically to the place acquiring the name of 'Institute'.

In 1992, a partnership agreement was concluded between FRAC Rhône-Alpes and the Nouveau Musée/Institut and the two bodies merged fully in 1997. The Institut d'art contemporain has since managed and enriched the Rhône-Alpes Collection, that now stands at 1,557 works by 711 artists, while conserving its initial function of accompanying creation. More than 140 exhibitions have been held in 30 years.

Lawrence Weiner [room 1]

Born in 1942 in New York, Lawrence Weiner lives and works in New York and Amsterdam.

Lawrence Weiner is one of the major figures of Conceptual art, a movement that started in the United States and developed there and in England from 1966 to 1972. Conceptual art uses language as a plastic form and autoreference for critical questioning of the ends and means of the works themselves. As the artist's intention is the main material in a conceptual piece, the latter can remain at the project stage and exist only through its description.

Lawrence Weiner showed his work for the first time in 1964 at the Seth Siegelau Gallery in New York, which became the following year one of the hotspots of Conceptual Art, with the artists Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth.

Weiner's work took a decisive turn in 1968: at an exhibition at the Siegelau Gallery in that year he decided to show only *Statements*, a book containing a series of sculpture projects to be made mentally. All Lawrence Weiner's subsequent statements are based on the artist's 'Declaration of Intent', published in 1969: 'The artist may construct the piece. / The piece may be fabricated. / The piece need not be built. / Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership'. Weiner thus declares that the three possibilities of the

making of the piece are equivalent and, in addition, the building of the work depends intrinsically on its reception, and hence its context.

From the 1970s onwards, Lawrence Weiner's work has consisted essentially of the making of mural installations, or more precisely words painted on walls and describing potential sculptures. His *Statements* were in a neutral tone that became a noticeable trait in the style of his work: characteristic typography (sans-serif capitals) laid out in blocks with arbitrary line-breaks and a systematic exploration of colour, translation and parentheses (brackets, dashes and slashes). He subsequently called his pieces Works to affirm their status as sculptures.

A Handful of Chalk (*Une poignée de craie*) (1988), made by Lawrence Weiner for the exhibition *Ambition d'art* on the glassed entry to the Institut d'art contemporain, is characteristic of the artist's plastic vocabulary. It welcomes the visitor with the statement 'A HANDFUL OF CHALK / (WITH) SOME SAWDUST / (&) CHIPS OF ROCK / ON A SHINGLE' The syntactic construction that segments and juxtaposes noun groups (noun and complement) is an image of the process and gestures evoked: fractioning, reassembly and distribution. While objectively indicating the materials and their possible use, Weiner's work has an allegorical dimension and this evocation of the cycle of transformation of matter into aggregates of elements forms a very poetic reflection of the cycle of time.

Daniel Buren [room 2]

Born in 1938 in Boulogne-Billancourt, Daniel Buren lives and works *in situ*.

Daniel Buren's career has been closely linked with the history of the Nouveau Musée, which invited him as early as 1979. It was also at the invitation of the Nouveau Musée that Buren exhibited in public spaces in Lyon and Villeurbanne in 1980 with the project *Ponctuations, statue/sculpture* addressing all the statuary in the two towns.

In the early 1960s, Daniel Buren painted on coloured bed sheets or hessian after having made a great many collages and paintings on paper and canvas. In 1965, he used a material with equal, alternately white and coloured stripes as the medium for 'paintings with variable forms'. At a time when critical reflection on painting and the production of artworks was undertaken, Daniel Buren founded the BMPT group with Olivier Mosset, Michel Parmentier and Niele Toroni in November 1965. The group organised four events from December 1966 to October 1967 that affirmed this critical position with regard to painting, in other words a radical refusal of easel painting and a determination to reduce painting to its 'zero' state by working on formal repetition to let emerge the importance of the place in which the work is set.

Daniel Buren no longer considered the framework of an exhibition as a neutral receptacle and a work as an object, but as a setting out of properties. He thus moved from painting as an end to painting as a means, by the definitive adoption of a

plastic sign – stripes – that he called a 'visual tool'. This always consists of a chromatic alternance of white and coloured stripes, whose width had been set at 8.7 cm in 1967. The artist works without a studio as he makes his works *in situ*, that is to say in the actual places for which they are destined. The role of Buren's visual tool is to reveal, by its positioning, the characteristics of the places that he occupies. As a result, the *in situ* work also tends to change the place in which it is sited.

Peinture/Sculpture (1971) is one of the first large *in situ* works designed by Buren for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Buren constructed his first public commission in 1986. This is *Les Deux Plateaux*, in the main courtyard of the Palais Royal in Paris. The work is a place within which the spectator can walk and see the surrounding space from several viewpoints. This *in situ* work approach like 'a place in a venue' was determinant in the design of subsequent works such as *Cabanes Éclatées* [*Exploded Cabins*].

Although the first signs of *Cabanes Éclatées* appeared in 1975, the first *Cabane Éclatée* was exhibited in Düsseldorf in 1984. It is a sculptural, mobile work that can be reinstalled elsewhere and which, as in the theatre, is 'interpreted' differently. A cube forms the architectural base of the *Cabanes Éclatées*. It is also the simplest form of utopian architecture, like the huts built by children.

The shape of Buren's *Cabanes Éclatées* has evolved over the years, generating increasingly playful and sophisticated spaces.

Increasingly incorporated in his works since the 1990s, mirrors have little by little become a 'contextualisation operator' for the artist by using reflection to create optical effects and three-dimensional spaces. The visual tool has also been enriched by new use of colour. This has become essential in the artist's plastic vocabulary, accentuating the spatial function. The critical intention

remains dominant even though the plastic and decorative dimension is increasingly stressed, thus multiplying the visual effects.

Les trois cabanes éclatées en une [Three exploded cabins in one] or *La cabane éclatée aux trois peaux* [The exploded cabin with three skins] (1999-2000) was made and presented by the Institut d'art contemporain in 2000 at the exhibition *Mises*



Daniel Buren, *Les trois cabanes éclatées en une* ou *La cabane éclatée aux trois peaux* (détail), 1999-2000 © Blaise Adilon

en demeures. The work is significant with regard to the new developments that Buren has imprinted in his work since the 1990s. The spectator is encouraged to enter the cabin to discover different viewpoints and walk in a kind of kaleidoscope, adjusting his view and movement to the constructions made of reflective, coloured surfaces and lit apertures. The cabins are 'exploded' insofar

as the emptied surfaces are transferred accurately to the walls of the surrounding space. The imbrication of the three cabins also magnifies the space of perception and strongly underlines the moving presence of the spectator.

On Kawara [room 3]

On Kawara was born in Kariya (Japan). He lives and works in New York.

On Kawara is considered today as one of the main players of Conceptual art, with the *Date Paintings* series started in 1966. Since the mid-1960s, On Kawara's work is based to a considerable extent on the biographical data of his experience of space-time.

On Kawara left Japan to live in New York in 1959. He painted the first of his *Date Paintings* on 4 January 1966. Each day, he uses white acrylic paint on a monochrome canvas (blue, grey, red or green) to inscribe the date on which he made the painting in the language of the country in which he was on that day. In addition, each series was kept in a specially designed cardboard box that also contained a whole page or part of a page of a local newspaper dated on the same day and which was never larger than the canvas. Each painting has a subtitle. The making of a series of paintings, forming the ongoing *Today Series*, is performed according to a strict procedure followed by the artist – every painting that has been started and not finished by the end of the day is always destroyed.



From 1966 to 1968, On Kawara also started various series that form an autobiography with a series of points of reference combining social (*I Met*), cultural (*I Read*), time (*I Got up at*) and geographic (*I Went*) events. Lists of people met, collections of press cuttings read, postcards sent from 1968 to 1979, collections of itineraries followed – everything is kept in transparent plastic folders carefully assembled in files. The telegram series *I Am Still Alive* was started in 1969 by the sending of three telegrams for the exhibition *18 PARIS IV 70*. The artist subsequently sent telegrams (*I am still alive On Kawara*) all over the world at regular intervals as signals of life in response to questions concerning his work or his private correspondence.

One Million Years – For the Last One (Future) 1993-1001992 (1980-1992) consists of ten files each containing 200 typewritten pages in which the series of dates for the million years to come are listed page after page and line after line, starting in 1993.

The work echoes that entitled ***One Million Years – Past-For all Those who Have Lived and Died-Future – For the Last One*** (1999) with the dates of a million past years (from 998 031 BC to 1969). A two-volume edition is presented here.

On Kawara has accomplished this vertiginous census as a global dedication to the human race.

The room devoted to On Kawara at the exhibition *Ambition d'art* is designed in such a way that 'you shift between the present and the past, and turn round to contemplate the future' (Jean Louis Maubant).

Process, situation and time are essentials in On Kawara's work and hinged as a kind of discourse on life in an objective relationship between his experience and the world.

Keeping away from all socialising, including that concerning the openings of his own shows, it would seem that On Kawara wishes to become a sort of abstract recorder of the world as Jorge Luis Borges put it, making this entering of individual parameters the condition for accession to a form of humanity. Jean-Luc Nancy wrote that he 'proposes a technique to make spacing itself take place' and also that 'space opens time, it stretches time, it stretches the actual instant to obtain this present that does not pass, and that is time itself, negativity placed here for itself. Space is thus at the origin of time. It is both the zero point and the whole extension of its successivity. It is the opening of time, the simultaneousness of its spacing. On Kawara's art is a technique of this spacing.' (Jean-Luc Nancy, *Technique du présent: essai sur On Kawara*, Villeurbanne, Nouveau musée/Institut d'art contemporain, 1997, coll. Cahiers – Philosophie de l'art, pp. 6-7).

Alighiero Boetti [room 4]

Alighiero Boetti was born in 1940 in Turin and died in Rome in 1994.

Alighiero Boetti started his artistic career by participating in the Italian movement Arte Povera, a term used for the first time by Germano Celant in September 1967 as a title for an exhibition in Genoa. The notion of 'poverty' should be understood more

as a voluntary detachment from cultural established experience than the choice of using natural or discarded materials.

The Arte Povera artists claimed a socially committed attitude and were openly critical of the cultural industry and the consumer society. In the same spirit, they put the creative process and gesture above the finished object. Like most of the players in this libertarian art movement, Alighiero Boetti distanced himself from it in 1972, the year he left Turin to live in Rome.

The question of doubles and duality in general runs through all Boetti's work. In 1968, he made *Gemelli [Twins]*, a photomontage showing him hand in hand with his double, and the poster *Shaman Showman* in which his image is doubled and inverted. This was when he decided to separate his forename and name by 'and' ('Alighiero e Boetti'). The notion of dual identity led to calling into question the very principle of the identity and individuality of the artist, an approach that he took to the extreme by rejecting the effect of style and hence of a recognisable signature.

Alighiero Boetti first made Mail art, with multiplication of the possible compositions of stamped, franked envelopes, and explored the themes time and space through the combined effects of combination and the random.

In 1971, after a journey to Afghanistan during which he discovered the weaving tradition, Alighiero Boetti started to delegate the making of his works. He entrusted the making of carpet/pictures to Afghan

women as with the series *Mappa [Maps]* that showed the artist's political commitment and his approach to works of art based on the removal of his subjectivity to the benefit of external collaboration.

His attitude to writing and codes is another major aspect of Alighiero Boetti's work: alphabets, cartographic symbols and numbers are arranged in systems of arithmetical order.

Legnetti colorati – Aiuola (Flower Bed)

(1968) by Boetti is shown for the first time. Dating from the artist's Arte Povera period, this sculpture consists of about fifty bundles of coloured woods assembled on the ground. He used natural material in a way that makes an ironic allusion to the classic theme of the column. Alighiero Boetti made several ground sculptures on the ground at the time, consisting of identical components juxtaposed or placed on the other and also in a chequerboard manner, with a variation and permutation of decorative patterns. The latter effect is seen here in the coloured surface and the mosaic effect.

Mappa. Mettere al mondo il mondo [Map.

Giving birth to the world] (1984) is a map hand-embroidered on linen. It was made in Afghanistan and has never been exhibited in France. It is representative of the work that Boetti started in 1971 using a political planisphere. The artist had decorative motifs of flags placed within the frontier of countries so as to clearly show geostrategic divisions.

All the versions of maps allow for changes

in states, frontiers and flags. The border of Mappa displays the signature, the date, the place it was made, a possible dedication and narrative elements, sometimes in Farsi (the Persian of Afghanistan).

The rigour and austerity of the code set by the artist are combined with artisanal technique. Alighiero Boetti developed a political and critical attitude to industrialised society, positioning himself as a citizen of the world, a facilitator between the West and the East, a creator of 'artistic geopolitics': 'I have all my embroidered tapestries made by Afghan women (...). Their country stopped making them between 1920 and 1930, and the first hand-made embroideries that re-launched the tradition were my commissions.'

Da mille a mille [From thousand to thousand] (1975) is a series of drawings in Indian ink on squared paper. Alighiero Boetti blackened the small squares to produce forms that are always different and whose number and size are determined by a numeric progression set by the artist. Each sheet has a thousand squares and the first thousand squares are isolated, the second thousand are combined in twos and the third in threes, etc. The forms become increasingly articulated and sophisticated, making a kind of controlled disorder (classificatory) in rational frameworks. Here, the determinism of the code is combined with a jubilatory movement of the graphic surface, together with meditative rigour and rhythm. In many of his works, Alighiero Boetti made a poetic transposition of rational thinking.

Jordi Colomer [room 5]

Jordi Colomer was born in 1962 in Barcelona, where he lives and works.

After studying history of art and architecture, Jordi Colomer has had an international career for about 20 years with sculptures incorporating video. He treats the main components of his work – architecture, objects and space – as supports for fiction to better address the real political, sociological and psychological questions of daily life and life in contemporary cities.

Influenced by the theatre, literature and certain films (Buñuel and Godard), Jordi Colomer likes to set the scene and use this to build a representation space that the spectator can enter fully.

The *Anarchitekton* series (film, models and photographs) made in 2003 crystallised Jordi Colomer's interest in modern architecture and its mistakes. Trained in commitment to the modernist ethic symbolised by Le Corbusier, the artist was also a witness and participant in the critiques made by the young generation of architects and artists in the 1980s.

Jordi Colomer takes a critical empathic look at peri-urban districts and the new typologies of collective housing. He is interested in the intermediate areas in which accommodation and décor can blend into each other and, in his works, creates situations that explore this ambiguous boundary between documentary and fiction, between action and theatrical representation.

Jordi Colomer presents two new works for *Ambition d'art*:

Pozo Almonte (2008) is a series of 33 photographs taken in a Chilean cemetery. Tombs and graves were built by their owners as architectural imitations, with some imitating the formal vocabulary of the main currents in history of architecture. Jordi Colomer has a permanent interest in the relationship that people establish with their environment and shows here a form of vernacular creativeness that is a clue to the way in which the dead had inhabited their lives.

Like most of Jordi Colomer's videos, ***En la pampa. L'errance en rase campagne est...*** [*In the pampas. Wandering in the middle of the countryside...*] (2008) is shown in a space fitted out like a theatre set, with a cardboard environment. For Colomer, the ephemeral architecture of an exhibition that visitors can occupy temporarily is a fully-fledged social space. The artist works with the fluidity of the space, between what happens on the screen (for example, the landscape as a character) and what happens in the exhibition room (the colour of the walls...) during showings or not.

Anish Kapoor [room 6]

Anish Kapoor was born in 1954 in Mumbai (India). He has lived and worked in London since 1973.

Anish Kapoor settled in London when he was 17. After a stay in India in 1979, he chose to

affirm in his works the traditional culture of his birth while integrating the statements of international avant-garde movements. He was first recognised on the international scene for the use of pigments in his 'powder pieces'; these were geometrical, organic sculptures covered with very brightly coloured pure pigment. He then worked in stone with his 'void pieces'—large blocks of stone with cavities hollowed out and filled with dark pigment, creating a feeling of infiniteness. The artist wished to 'dematerialise' sculpture and defined himself above all as 'a painter who makes sculpture'.

Anish Kapoor is more interested in the relationship between space, the work and the visitor that by metaphoric or symbolic meaning. The space or the work shown totally absorbs the spectator, integrating him or her physically. He now makes large curved, circular mirrors that show a reverse image and capture the surrounding space with deformed reflections. For Kapoor, two-dimensional space is that of the spirit, and three-dimensional space that of the body, and he feels that he brings them into contact with each other.

However, Anish Kapoor's approach does not exclude spirituality. A reversal process underlies his entire work, marking respect for the Indian world concept based on a balance between opposing forces: concave/convex, presence/disappearance, inside/outside, masculine/feminine, sky/earth, water/fire, full/empty. The latter approach is very present in his works. He pays attention to the creation of void, of void as volume, as a universal presence.

C-Curve (2007)

This is a monumental sculpture consisting of a concave reflective surface in stainless steel that reverses the surrounding space. The spectator's body is thus trapped in a play of sensations governed by his position in space.

C-Curve is a good example of the mirror works that Anish Kapoor started making in the 1990s and that make the spectator's look and presence their true activators.

The reflective potential of polished steel and the use of mirrors combined with a circular form radicalise the principle of illusion of depth. The mirror inverts reality and reassembles it in fragments, resulting in a destabilising perception of space, movement and one's own body.

1000 Names (1979-80)

1000 Names is a generic title that the artist has given to a series of works set on the ground or coming out from a wall and covered with pure pigment. Here, he refers to a principle combining a variety of forms that are both elementary and organic. The colours of the pigment are inspired by roadside temples in India and refer to both the tradition of monochromaticity and the symbolism of Indian rites and arts.

Sans titre [*Untitled*] (2008) is a new work by 'Anish Kapoor cut into the surface of the wall and consisting of yellow resin. Looking both chalky and spongy, the material traces and digs cracks that capture light. Oblong and irregular, it looks like a secret geography that is neither totally interior nor truly exterior. It sculpts emptiness and serves as

a threshold – two fundamental notions in Anish Kapoor's whole artistic and spiritual approach.

Tony Cragg [room 7]

Tony Cragg was born in 1949 in Liverpool. He lives and works in Wuppertal (Germany).

Tony Cragg had a job as a technician in a natural rubber laboratory when he decided to become an artist. In the mid-1960s he went to art school and specialised in sculpture, although he continued to make drawings, his first passion. A friend of Bill Woodrow and Richard Deacon, he soon became associated with 'New British Sculpture' in the 1980s, with David Mach, Boyd Webb, Anthony Caro and others and chose to live in Germany to teach at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf. Tony Cragg turns ordinary materials and consumer debris into unusual objects. Reacting against a society of mass production, his approach consisted of collecting used items and industrial rubbish. This phase of systematic collection was followed by selection with the aim being recycling – regenerating the disposable. He used manufactured objects that he took apart to accomplish their metamorphosis in several stages (*Four Plates*, 1976). He aimed at going beyond the object and matter and deciphering them. Plastic was a favourite material, leading to figurative compositions, kinds of multicoloured mural mosaics something like a jigsaw puzzle. Tony Cragg's sculptures also tend towards questioning concerning relations of scale:

they may be very large or, in contrast, very small, and this seems to kindle the curiosity of the public as regards the possibilities offered by the conditions of recognition of a form. These plays of volume in space can invite the spectator to wonder about his relationship with objects, our civilisation and its manners of production. In the 1980s, Tony Cragg abandoned the strict horizontalness of his mural compositions and made piles and works presented on the ground. He also showed interest in other materials such as stone, metal and wood. He also returned to drawing – an essential parallel activity as is often the case for sculptors.

Drawings (2004-2007) is a series of works in pencil or gouache not previously exhibited in France. Using the pattern of various recipients or silhouettes and a multiplication of profiles, Cragg delivers energetic, rich drawings that condense his problematics as a sculptor: alternative solid and empty volumes, the repetition and interlocking of volumes and fragmented tubular forms. The dense network of lines and the numerous figurative hints result in metamorphic drawings.

Making Sense (2007) is a sculpture in fibreglass (glass fibre reinforced by polymer resin), an industrial material used for insulation and strengthening or lightening heavy structures. The general appearance is something of an articulation of technological and plant forms. The use of polymer resin allows very great plasticity and, in this case, a degree of translucence. The sculpture is vertical,

symmetrical and at a human scale and, to paraphrase the title, 'makes sense' in Tony Cragg's experiments that play on the tilting of forms, following a principle of anamorphosis in their progress.

Stealth (2008) is also in fibreglass. An organic volume turns on itself and induces a shifting, circular gaze that is not channelled by any formal predominance.

Tony Cragg uses this material freely, demonstrating opposing potential in these two sculptures – from translucent to opaque, from constructed to formless and from building to expansion.

Jeff Wall [room 8]

Jeff Wall was born in 1946 in Vancouver (Canada) where he lives and works.

The leading figure of the very prolific arts scene in Vancouver, Jeff Wall has an influential position in international creation through his pictorial and cinematographic setting of photographic images – talking in terms of 'cinematography' rather than 'photography' – and in-depth analysis of representation.

After studying history of art at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and writing a thesis on Dada photomontage and the cinema, Wall devoted himself entirely to his own works, and in particular *Transparencies*, begun in 1978. His first photographic works were very large cibachrome prints mounted on light boxes lit by fluorescent tubes. This

type of lighting is generally used in back-lit advertising panels in public spaces.

Wall's urban landscapes involve scene setting and acting, although at first sight these street scenes can generate an effect of reality and a feeling of familiarity. His greatly enlarged photographic images respond to aesthetic criteria stemming from painting (paintings of history in particular), while using aspects of the photo-documentary tradition. His work opens up new pathways in photographic documentary (inherited from Walker Evans) and invents a new form of 'neorealist' photographic tableau. What interests Wall in the making of these pieces is the construction of elements that are both real and symbolic and the representation of micro-gestures which, even theatricalised, are anchored in a deeply social reality. Jeff Wall works on setting up a balance between urban advertising and the iconography of great Western painting. These two influences converge on the project formulated by Baudelaire in the nineteenth century, that of 'the painter of modern life'.

Milk (1986) shows a man in the street having trouble with a bottle of milk. The stiff posture and expressionless face of the figure contrasts with the explosion of the object. In an imitation of instantaneousness, the artist guides our eyes to the splash of the liquid. A large proportion of Jeff Wall's work is based on complex natural forms. The milk spilling from the container makes an indefinite form that can trigger associations and metamorphoses. The gestures in Wall's works seem mechanical

or compulsive but finish by forming an image of social conditioning or even alienation – a lucid awareness of the true absence of reality.

No (1983) is part of the same tone of images in the artist's work. A false snapshot showing characters once again, resulting in a monumentalised street photo. The work displays the documentary genre in the subject and the fluid handling of the image, while forming a mannerist composition making reference to pictorial figurative work of the past centuries. This gives a feeling of device, paradoxically combined with the experience of something real. Much of Jeff Wall's work is aimed primarily at representing the human body both as a whole and in a fragmentary manner, in particular in the line coming down from Manet's work.

Cyclist (1996) is a dark tableau in all the meanings of the world. A man on a bicycle seems to have collapsed against a wall in a deserted space (the corner of a street?) where rubbish has accumulated. The architecture is cold, the scene is cold and seemingly without issue. But the man may simply be asleep on his bicycle – the hypothesis put forward by the artist in his comments on the work. This reversible interpretation gives the tableau its dynamism and mystery.

After 'Spring Snow' by Yukio Mishima, chapter 34 (2000-2005) refers to a short story written by Yukio Mishima in 1968 and whose main theme is the crisis in Japanese society and its Americanisation.

It was adapted for the cinema in 2005 by Isao Yukisada.

Jeff Wall's whole work is in competition with historical painting. He seeks to update classical painting (that of Velázquez, for example) with the light of a television set.

Luciano Fabro [room 9]

Luciano Fabro was born in 1936 in Turin and died in 2007 in Milan.

Luciano Fabro first showed his work in 1965 in Milan.

Although Fabro came from the Arte Povera movement and had participated fully in reflection of the dialectic between nature and culture, his work is also unclassifiable. Using a great variety of means of expression (sculptures, environments, actions, theoretical writings, etc.), his work also involves a host

of both mundane and precious materials. Interested by their physical qualities, he put them in relation with each other in his sculptures, generating unusual affinities. Luciano Fabro considered the role of the artist to be a revealer of reality and that 'art can only be sensed'. With this importance awarded to the intuition that precedes knowledge, Fabro viewed the artistic approach as a mode for the progressive knowledge of the world. He said on the subject of his works that '... their subject is the experience that forms between the spectator, the artists and the work'. These preoccupation led him to serve what he called 'the feeling of space'.

The works have evocative titles, with references to mythology, religions and history. Fabro's work is complex and paradoxical and is not always based on apparent formal coherence. This led, for example, to Germano Celant saying that a



Luciano Fabro, *Prometeo*, 1986-1987 © DR

solo Luciano Fabro exhibition looked like a group show!

Prometeo [*Prometheus*] (1986-87) was made shortly after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986. Two materials and two forms come face to face: marble columns prolonged by surveyor's stakes, and large surveyor's straight-edges defining a complex space (interpenetrating triangle and pentagon) under tension.

The artist said this about the work: 'Prometheus brings into focus a fall. All of our formal concepts derive from a geological concept to which the myth of Prometheus is connected: the relationship between the earth and the gods, conflict and separation. Prometheus is the earth, our capacity to reason: geometry is no more than a rationalisation of the earth.'. (Luciano Fabro, interview with Francesca Pasini, 'Prometeo irradiato', *Il Manifesto*, 29 October 1986, quoted in the catalogue *Luciano Fabro*, Tate Gallery, 1997, p. 24).

In Greek mythology, Prometheus created human beings and gave them fire but also had the power to destroy them. He finally called on Zeus to exchange his gift of immortality – that caused him too much suffering – for mortality.

In philosophy, the myth of Prometheus is accepted as corresponding to the metaphor of bringing knowledge to humans. It is also used by the philosopher Hans Jonas in *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1979) to make an allusion to the foolhardy risks resulting from certain human behaviour and certain technical choices with regard to the ecological, social and economic balance of the world. The

myth is also evocative of hubris, the human tendency for overweening arrogance.

Zefiro [*Zephyr*] (1987) is a vertical sculpture in marble and wood.

In mythology, Zephyr is the personification of wind, the gentle west wind.

Massive and sharp-edged, the piece can be seen as a marine metaphor through its sail shape.

Arcobaleno [*Rainbow*] (1980) places a rainbow on the wall.

Luciano Fabro's work can be summarised by Jean Louis Maubant's excellent definition of 'an addition of the elementary and extreme sophistication'.

Yona Friedman [room 10]

Yona Friedman was born in 1923 in Budapest (Hungary). He lives and works in Paris.

Yona Friedman studied architecture at the Technical and Economic Sciences University in Budapest and then at the Technion in Haifa, Israel, where he worked as an architect from 1949 to 1957. From his first housing projects onwards he sought to withdraw from responsibility for design by delegating this to the future users, a procedure he called 'autoplanning'. As a response to post-war population problems and the issues of the reconstruction period, from 1953 onwards he devised projects for spatial structures on piles, establishing the principles of '*Architecture mobile*' (1958): 1) minimum contact area with the ground;

2) possible to dismantle and move; 3) be changeable as and when desired by the individual occupant. These structures with indeterminate characteristics enabled him to develop the principles of the 'Spatial City' (*ville spatiale*), a resolutely innovative urban organisation based on a nomadic way of life. On the subject of the indeterminate nature of his structures, Friedman stated that the building was mobile insofar as any type of use by the user or by a group should be possible or achievable. At the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) in 1956, he undertook the calling into question of the postulates of modern architecture, leading him to becoming the joint founder of the Groupe d'Etude d'architecture mobile (GEAM) in 1958, and then the Groupe International d'Architecture Prospective (GIAP) in 1965.

Yona Friedman has built very few buildings. These include Lycée Bergson in Angers (1979), a real 'autoplanning' experience conducted with the teaching community, and the Museum of Simple Technology (1987) in Madras, India, constructed in local materials such as bamboo. He has also written many books (even cartoon books and teaching manuals for UNESCO), including *Utopies réalistes*, a book in which he sets out his main lines of reflection and architectural work. His publications and teaching have considerably influenced many architects since the 1970s, and especially those interested in experimental building projects such as Archigram, that change both buildings and the related ways of life.

However, Yona Friedman has also been appreciated for several years in contemporary

art for the large number of drawings, plan, section and elevation drawings and also models, marked with plastic dimensions (forms of intention, circulation, projections, sculptural qualities, volumetric views, etc.) and a remarkable aesthetics of mobility.

Musée du 21^{ème} siècle [*Twenty-first Century Museum*] (2000) consists of eight photomontages and a text. **Expériences** (2008) consists of a model on a quasi-nature scale, as Yona Friedman put it. These pieces show Friedman's thinking as regards cities, even if it is right to consider, as Jean Louis Maubant noted, that 'he is an unshowable artist as his thinking can never enter an exhibition room'. Indeed, the totally open and mobile, peripheral dimension of his work makes it difficult to show at its true scale.

Martha Rosler [room 11]

Martha Rosler was born in 1943 in New York, where she lives and works.

Martha Rosler studied painting at Brooklyn Museum School of Art and also attended Ad Reinhard's teaching of history of art at Brooklyn College. She associated with the avant-garde poetry circle and in the 1960s freed herself from academic art that was too formal in order to combine her preoccupations in art with political and social questions.

Painter, photographer, video maker and poet, Martha Rosler had a critical view of the use of the image of women by art and

advertising at the time, problems of exclusion, the relationship between public and private spaces, US imperialism in Vietnam and international relations. She wished to shed light on the cultural mechanisms that result in the curtailing of freedom, manipulation and discrimination. Also interested in the representation of criticism and the role of photography, Rosler differed from the conceptual photography of the time to turn towards the history of American social photography and to develop a new mode of language with direct reference to the human body and everyday life.

She made photomontages from 1966 onwards (*Beauty Knows No Pain*, 1966-1972, *Bringing The War Home*, 1966-1972), and then worked on installations (*B-52 in Baby's Tears*, 1972) and video (*A Budding Gourmet*, 1975). Her works may also combine sculpture, performance art, video, literature and factual data such as statistics.

A committed feminist and political militant, Martha Rosler wishes to share her questionings with the public to achieve a salutary awareness of all forms of enslavement, exclusion and alienation.

Beauty Knows No Pain or Body Beautiful (1966-72) assembles images of female bodies from wedding dress catalogues, pornographic magazines and advertisements for underwear. Martha Rosler recomposed them in quasi-surrealistic collages in unusual contexts. Stressing certain anatomical details she points with humour at the representation of women that are delivered by the media and our society – a manipulable object of desire.

Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975) is one of Martha Rosler's videos that virulently addressed the domestic sphere and the roles assigned to women. The artist shows herself in a kitchen, imitating the routine of preparing dishes, enumerating utensils to the absurd in order to criticise the frustration felt by women trapped at home. Martha Rosler gives a sarcastic treatment to televised treatments of the domestic environment. This was also the bric-a-brac period with sales of everyday objects that sometimes led to public discussions.

Prototype (God Bless America) (2006) is a recent, hard-hitting film. Sixty seconds for a scathing portrait of the United States of America: imperialism, vainglory, militarism, hype, ridiculousness, etc – everything is there in the gesticulations of a puppet on a base.

The Gray Drape (2008) is a collage with two planes of representation: a woman in an evening gown in a contemporary décor (straight out of a Hollywood comedy?) on a background of images of the war in Iraq.

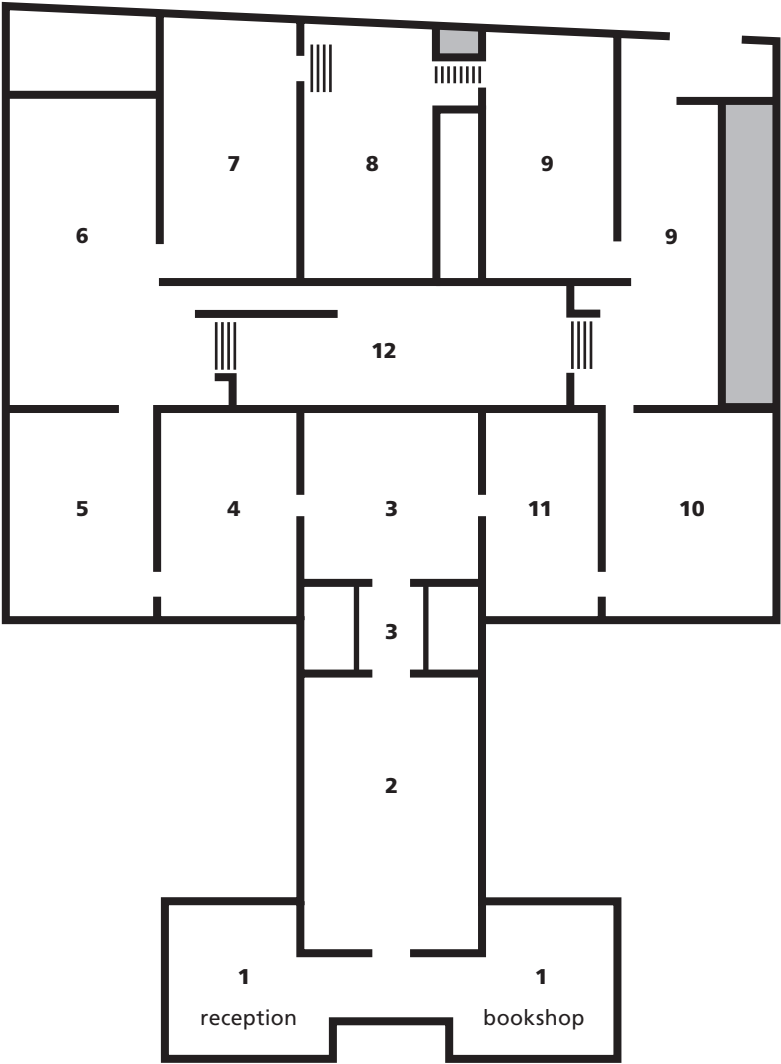
Archives [room 12]

For the exhibition *Ambition d'art*, the archives of the Nouveau Musée/Institut use the space generally occupied by the bookshop. Unique documents are on display – unique because there is only one copy or original or unique because they have been forgotten.

- [1] Lawrence Weiner
- [2] Daniel Buren
- [3] On Kawara
- [4] Alighiero Boetti
- [5] Jordi Colomer
- [6] Anish Kapoor

- [7] Tony Cragg
- [8] Jeff Wall
- [9] Luciano Fabro
- [10] Yona Friedman
- [11] Martha Rosler
- [12] Archives

auditorium
toilets



Practical information

Ambition d'art

Exhibition 16 May to 21 September 2008

Institut d'art contemporain

11 rue Docteur Dolard
69100 Villeurbanne

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(Institut d'art contemporain stop)

Metro line A (République stop)

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Bicycle loan rack (vélo'v) one minute
on foot

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Entrance fee Full rate € 4, reduced
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