

Laurent Grasso

Magnetic Palace

21 June – 19 August 2007

A French artist born in 1972, Laurent Grasso lives and works in Paris. The Institut d'art contemporain presents an important solo exhibition, centred on new projects. Laurent Grasso's work has been shown in many exhibitions, in particular at the following venues: Museum of Contemporary Art, Vigo, Spain, 2007; MIT Visual Art Center, Cambridge, USA; Espace

Paul Ricard, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Monterrey, Mexico; Busan, South Korea; Bloomberg SPACE, London; Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2006; Galerie Chez Valentin, Paris; Swiss Institute, New York; De Appel Foundation, Amsterdam, 2005; CREDAC, Ivry-sur-Seine; Galerie Agnès b., Hong Kong, 2004. Laurent Grasso is represented by Galerie Chez Valentin in Paris.



Institut d'art contemporain, Villeurbanne
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Laurent Grasso has made works hinting at the presence of ghostly spirits (*Radio Ghost*, 2003), that depict a paranoid monologue about a threatening reality (*Tout est possible*, 2002) or that refer to the possibility of mind control by electromagnetic waves (*Du Soleil dans les Yeux*, 2001). Other works focus less on the notion of marker, scientific message or false narration than with a direct and destabilising addressing of the retina, as in the entoptic vision in *Vertigo* (2005), a disturbing cloud in *Projection* (2005) and a flash of light in *Paralight* (2004). The artist can also use a film camera to change known or identifiable reality into an enigmatic image that muddles the viewer's landmarks (*Mes Actrices*, 1999; *Soyez les bienvenus*, 1999; *Missing Time*, 2002; *Paracinéma*, 2006).

'I call a device anything that in one way or another has capacity for capturing, directing, determining, intercepting, modelling, controlling and performing the gestures, behaviours, opinions and discourse of living beings' writes Giorgio Agamben in *Che cos'è un dispositivo?*

Laurent Grasso seeks to create tension in the comprehension of

the devices that he displays and that are both the driving force of the exhibition and one of the vectors of the control society, in line with the philosopher's assertion.

These devices also make it possible to project oneself into realities that are physically or mentally inaccessible.

The truly environmental devices that he uses involve image projection techniques and various electrical and electronic apparatus to explore the polysemic notions of 'projection' and 'vision'. The artist uses the moving image for its materialness, for its very nature. Cinema, and paranormal phenomena in particular, are involved as 'means' in the background, like certain realities that generate fiction. Likewise, electromagnetic and meteorological phenomena, quantum physics and the theory of chords that involve numerous studies and extrapolations interest Laurent Grasso for their potential for anticipation.

He thus sets up installations whose ambivalent play of capture and distancing make allusion to control devices and methods in order to generate states of awareness.

What interests Laurent Grasso is

the image produced by the device itself and its persistence in the viewer's brain.

In the exhibition of Laurent Grasso's work presented at the Institut d'art contemporain, the projection devices are installed in such a way as to generate 'porosity' between areas and strong links between all the works.

Magnetic Palace [1] is the name of the exhibition. It is also Laurent Grasso's first work installed in a projection area. The work **Magnetic Palace** sets the tone for a many-faceted journey governed by imaginary setting with mythical accents contained in the single word 'palace' (the whole range of applications to grand venues) and by the double meaning of the word 'magnetism' — intended to indicate both an occult force and a physical attraction effect.

Laurent Grasso sets most of his works within a time shift notion, seeking to create parallel space-times in which projections of the future would be as if engendered by images of the past. **Magnetic Palace** can thus also refer to the gigantic, innovative glass and iron **Crystal Palace** designed by Joseph Paxton and built for the first international exhibition in 1851, even though this was pre-electricity (the first light bulb dates back to 1879) but already industrial.

Two back-projections can be seen in **Magnetic Palace** through perforated metal sheeting. The films **Satellite** and **Paracinéma** — that can be seen properly on the other side of the surfaces, are thus first seen only as dots of light and what remains of a projected image which this is seen the wrong way round. The artist sets up the idea of going to the other side of an image or crossing different layers of universe.

In the film **Satellite [11]**, the actress Carole Bouquet seems to have escaped from a film that we shall never see and as if reactivated by a machine; the computer-controlled camera circles and watches her. The actress is 'lost in a fissure in time', but her expression and presence are nonetheless those of the dark, enigmatic atmosphere of the film.

Using the same reactivation process, **Paracinéma [2]** was made at Cinecittà during the artist's stay at the Villa Médicis in Rome. In a succession of 'scenes' accompanied by a sound-track, the famous cinema studio complex is de-produced and returned to its initial status of scenery. The ghostly set — that of Martin Scorsese's **Gangs of New York** — seems to have been brought back to life in paranormal fashion.

Project 4-brane [6] appears as the nerve centre of Laurent Grasso's

exhibition. The title is inspired by the theory of chords¹. This theory of everything, that should give better understanding of the universe and make it possible to model it, is the source of numerous cosmological predictions. The inclusion of 'branes' in chord theory induces the definition of portions of universe with several spatial dimensions plus a temporal dimension.

Electricity is another fundamental notion in the approach of Laurent Grasso's works, with, in particular, the findings of the Serbian-born engineer Nikola Tesla².

Certain scientific observations and theories thus enable extrapolations concerning the possibility of changing the climate, for example, or acting on the brain and thus affecting behaviour.

Project 4-brane consists of a black box — a twin metaphor for a transformer and the wave generating brain — and a film.

Shown inside, the firm is called **Haarp** in reference to HAARP (High Frequency

Active Auroral Research Program), the third US ionosphere research installation in Alaska. The observatory is used for the study of the properties of the ionosphere or upper atmosphere, covering for example the way in which ionospheric disturbances or magnetic storms can affect world radio communications, satellite navigation systems and long-distance electricity conveyance systems.

The film **Haarp [7]** shows the field of aerials at the base in Alaska with electrical arcs, a phenomenon still studied by many scientists. Although arcing is generated by man-made electrical installations, the conditions governing it are still not fully known.

Although Laurent Grasso does not seek to document or illustrate these research fields, the latter form a set of knowledge that is rich in hypotheses that allow him to set up his experiments on the question of the position of human action in a macro-world and on how to construct projections from an inaccessible reality. HAARP is a gigantic tool for viewing via waves and ideally matches Laurent Grasso's artistic problematics focused on the conditions of the appearance and capture of images.

HAARP gives rise to many rumours insofar as these hypotheses of remote actions set up a vast 'invisible fiction'. For Laurent Grasso, this goes well

1. The theory of chords is a current line of work in theoretical physics in which quantum mechanisms and the theory of relativity are combined to explain all the physical phenomena at both microscopic and macroscopic levels.

2. Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) a gifted inventor working at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. His achievements included the use of alternating current and the discovery of the wave reflection principle (the basis of what later became radar). Interested in high-frequency current from 1889 onwards, he developed a wireless energy transmission system after many electromagnetic experiments in the Colorado Desert. He is often considered as the father of contemporary work by HAARP.

beyond the visible fiction of a science fiction film.

Shot in Berlin in a futuristic landscape of aerials and shown in a room whose walls are lined with black Perspex, **Polair [5]** reconstitutes the spread of a cloud of pollen. Here, pollen seems to be captured by all the electrical sources in the city and especially the Berliner Fernsehturm (television tower, the tallest structure in the city) shown by the artist using a low-angle shot.

Project 4-brane thus projects on the exhibition space in different forms – sphere, model, silk screen prints.

525 [3], in the shape of geodesic sphere, uses the configuration of the satellite reception stations of the Echelon electronic surveillance system³, a world-wide system for the interception of private and public communications. Laurent Grasso's sphere is also designed along the lines of the geodesic sphere developed in the 1950s by the architect Buckminster Fuller⁴.

One of the few 'sculptural' objects in the exhibition, Laurent Grasso's 'silent' sphere can be seen and walked around. Like all the forms re-activated by the artist, the sphere uses the possibility of representation (mathematical and mechanical in this case), giving visitors the possibility of making a link with its

applications (military for example). Interacting with the entire environment of the exhibition, for Laurent Grasso the sphere has a strong representation that can be extended in his work and networking projects.

Echelon [10], a model of the Echelon base is presented in a black box, forming a kind of 'archaeological object of the future' that here again represents the inaccessible — whether materially or mentally.

In addition to being a conveyance for expression, electricity materialises the notion of interference that interests Laurent Grasso. This can be in the form of a neon light — **Eclipse [4]** — whose form, material or title brings up the question of dazzling or obscuring and the notion of interposition screening the visible.

3. The Echelon system was set up in 1947 following the UKUSA agreement (USA, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). The Echelon system station at Menwith Hill (UK), the largest listening facility outside the United States, was set up in 1956. It has some 30 satellite antennae — some more than 20 m in diameter — housed in geodesic domes.

4. Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983), American architect, designer, inventor and writer, invented the geodesic dome concept. The dome with the greatest impact was the Montreal Biosphère, constructed in 1967. It is 80 metres in diameter and houses a museum of the environment. A triangulated geodesic sphere is constructed on the basis of an icosahedron, a polyhedron with 20 faces and 12 vertices. The 20 faces are equilateral triangles, subdivided into smaller triangles. The term 'geodesic sphere' is used for a full sphere whereas a 'geodesic dome' is an incomplete sphere. The 'Honeycomb Figure' can also be used in dome construction.

1619 [8] is a film of aurora borealis (also designed by the artist using digital images). The title is a reminder of the year in which the phenomenon was first mentioned by Galileo and sounds like a back-to-front science fiction title: '1619: A Time Odyssey'.

Caused by colliding conducting fields, polar auroras result from the formation of ionised clouds in the upper atmosphere and take the form of a light phenomenon with strongly coloured vibrations such as rays or curtains of colours in the night sky. They strongly disturb high-frequency communications.

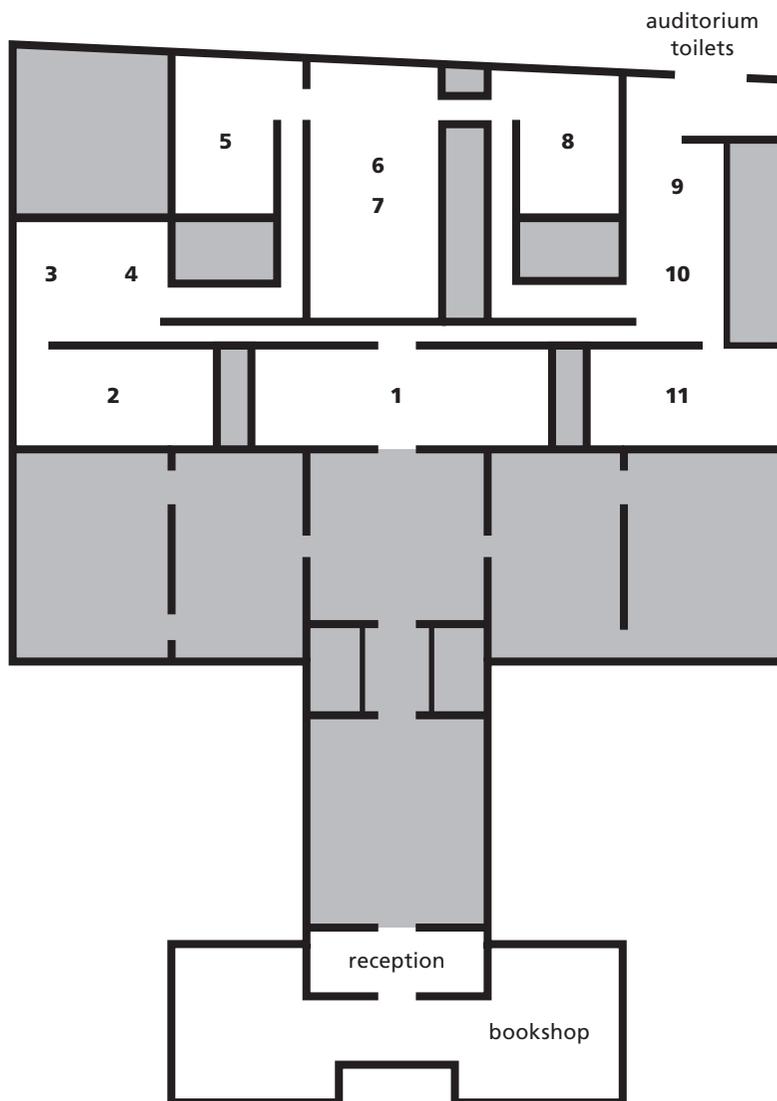
Rétroprojection [9] is a set of six screen prints taken from nineteenth century images. Until the eighteenth

century, science depended mainly on observations, yielding numerous writings, classifications, dictionaries and illustrated encyclopaedias. The phenomena studied — eclipses, aurora borealis, comets, etc. — were shown mainly in engravings. The foundations of modern science were laid in the nineteenth century but often appropriated earlier iconography.

Laurent Grasso has reworked these old engravings to give them the status of 'projections of the past into the future'.

- [1] *Magnetic Palace*, 2007
- [2] *Paracinéma*, 2006
- [3] *525*, 2007
- [4] *Éclipse*, 2005
- [5] *Polair*, 2007
- [6] *Project 4-brane*, 2007

- [7] *Haarp*, 2007
- [8] *1619*, 2007
- [9] *Rétroprojection*, 2007
- [10] *Échelon*, 2007
- [11] *Satellite*, 2006



Information

Laurent Grasso *Magnetic Palace*
Exhibition June 21 to August 19 2007

Institut d'art contemporain

11 rue Docteur Dolard
69100 Villeurbanne

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(Cité-Nouveau Musée stop)

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Close to the Lyon Part-Dieu TGV station

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Entrance fee Full rate € 4, reduced rate € 2,50

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