

DAD IN CONVERSATION with

Sylvain Lainé

Lives and works in Villeneuve d'Ascq

“How have you interpreted/responded to the project title transmettre/transmit?”

At first I was very sceptical about the theme “transmit”. I didn't think my work was related to this notion in any way. I was just coming out of a period of work during which I was concentrating on a few words and phrases: do not throw away, reanimate, ritual, compulsion, absence and loss.

I couldn't see what link there was between absence and transmission!

My first impulse was to think of transmission of form. I like constructing forms (house, particularly at the moment, or various objects) out of the things that previously I marked as “do not throw away”, and it seemed to me that the idea of transmission was in there, in this gesture of form which transmitted itself to the trash, and in the trash which transmitted its matter to form.

And out of this came the video “*déploiement inutile*” in which a hand tries to give form to screwed up wrappings, which resist the attempt.

Who is forming what here?

What is being transmitted, the gesture or the form?

My concern here was to bring forward a breath, respiration, which, I think, can be perceived in the feeling that there are animal forms, which present themselves to view in the video.

I surprise myself but the work I want to show in Deal is the one I thought of first (and which I abandoned at the first exhibition for technical reasons), even though it had nothing to do with my thoughts about transmission through casting or moulding.

The work is a photographic project which I am currently working on concerning

a housing estate. The estate is in Chavagne, some fifteen kilometres from Rennes. It's the estate where my parents bought a house nearly thirty years ago.

Let me quickly describe this place:

You can see quite clearly from the architecture of the different "quartiers" the way in which the town has grown over time. First there is the rural market town, then the first post-war "modern" houses and a village which turns into a town as the estate becomes gradually built up in response to people escaping the expensive accommodation of the town after the previous exodus from the country.

Here the developers have had to take advantage of the need to divide the land quickly into plots at minimum cost. The façades and plans are repeated often in identical fashion along the road, the layout following only the dictates of accessibility and viability.

It is this house and this place where I spent a part of my childhood and my adolescence, which has been bothering me for a long time.

For ages I've wanted to photograph and even film this place.

I realise now that I thought of this for "Transmettre/Transmit" because of course it's a place my parents have passed on to me and will pass down to me when they pass away, but also less consciously because it is a place in which the individual and the collective are always in a state of tension. Out of this tension, it seems to me, comes a strong sensation of emptiness, of absence, particular to this type of "dormitory town" in which, at certain times of the year, it is quite normal for there to be not even a cat around, literally or figuratively. So I realise now that absence is at the very heart of the idea of transmission. One transmits that which will last beyond our absence.

Is it, I wonder, absence itself which will outlast our own absence?

I know, of course, that these types of estate cannot by themselves be the symbol of everything that is built elsewhere. However I am conscious of the fact

that this type of housing is symptomatic of our relationship to our surroundings. These places are built on a fantasy of private ownership, a patch of land which is summed up as a tiny patch of garden.

The reason for this is that a garden gives one a feeling of being at home and closer to nature. As if one feels at home in nature. A sort of nostalgia for the elements: the good earth, the fresh air, green spaces, solid construction.

My finding is quite the reverse – these places seem to be intent on turning their back on that which is supposedly their main argument. There is no nature, and the earth and the air (and everything else) have been greatly impacted by human activity.

Perhaps the fact that I didn't make this work for the first exhibition wasn't only for technical reasons.

My work, then, is increasingly moving towards an exploration of this emptiness which is so present in these objects around us, in which we nonetheless invest so many memories that we then 'transmit'.

In addition to your references to Transmettre/Transmit, how has the project's location in heritage sites impacted conceptually on your practice?

My work hasn't been influenced conceptually by the sites; the influence has been more about how to show the work.

I haven't made work specifically as a response to the sites or the theme, rather I've been thinking about how I can incorporate the piece I'm working on into the project.

The Chapel, as a site meant to inspire research and reflection, seemed to be a place that favoured the unfolding (aha) of a work which questioned the way we look at things.

What is interesting for me is how the site, physically occupied the work. The

darkness, the silence, the materiality of the scuffed walls, all of that seemed to take me towards showing the work as a video projection.

The quality of the silence in the site allowed me to hear the “respiration of materials” that I have been looking for in my work.

The smallness of the space in the Chapel, which initially made the projection difficult, became an essential ingredient of this feeling of being able to have a “tête à tête” with the materials that were resisting the form they had been pressed into.

Although I haven’t tried conceptually to make work adapted to or in response to the sites, it is because in my mind the site asserts itself of its own accord, provided you take the time to see.

What does showing with other artists and in two places at two different times mean to you?

I think that in principle a meeting can’t really be appreciated until it has taken place.

I have good memories of the first contacts with the English artists but also a feeling of it not amounting to much. The contact was too short. And it couldn’t not be – since we were exhibiting together, not taking part in a residency.

The idea of exhibiting in more than one place has been stimulating since it has given us the opportunity of responding in more than one way to the same thematic constraints. I think that it has pushed me to be more concise, since I knew there would be two shows and so still time to show what I hadn’t been able to show and to show what I’d had to put aside.