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Interview with Valérie Hasson-Benillouche, gallerist and founder of Charlot Gallery

Interviewed by Alexia Antuofermo

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autonomy singular »

About the Charlot Gallery

The Charlot Gallery was founded by Valérie Hasson-Benillouche in 2010. The artists she represents develop a reflection around new media, technologies and sciences. Among them, pioneers of digital art (Manfred Mohr, Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer). The Charlot Gallery also supports young artists and regularly participates in international contemporary art fairs (Art Paris Art Fair in Paris, Moving Art Fair in New York, Volta Basel in Basel, etc.). The gallery exhibited Eduardo Kac's work *Télescope Intérieur*, born from a collaboration with French astronaut Thomas Pesquet from June 8th to July 27th. The Charlot Gallery recently inaugurated the Tel Aviv Charlot Gallery with the exhibition *The Artside of Algorithms*, which runs until October 31, 2017. The next exhibition *Dataclub.Online Paris* will take place from September 8 to October 7 in Paris.

How did digital art and, more specifically, the generative art develop within your gallery?

Digital art encompasses many practices: photography, video, sound, and so on. The Charlot Gallery is one of the few galleries in Europe to promote generative works made from computer programs. These works created from algorithms have a direct link with scientific and technological research. In seven years, digital art has undergone an extraordinary evolution in Paris, especially in terms of apprehension and the eyes of everyone. Initially, I associated in the exhibitions the works realized on classical supports (paper, canvases ...) alongside digital works. For about four years, the clients were mainly interested in paintings and drawings, and gradually discovered digital art and especially generative works. More recently, this has reversed; Most of the works presented are digital, but the classical mediums are always present. Digital artists also produce preparatory drawings and photographs from their works.

We use digital tools on a daily basis, but it is difficult for collectors to buy a generative work. Its intangible side despite the sometimes presence of a screen and technology through its computer program, can be a brake on an acquisition. Nevertheless, some artists like Manfred Mohr, Antoine Schmitt or Anne-Sarah Le

Meur use these algorithms to realize Plotter drawing. This process is positioned between drawing and printing: a mechanical arm draws with a pencil or pen an image selected from the digital work at a time T by the artist. The generative work is constantly evolving and the images generated by an algorithm have a minute possibility of repeating themselves; the work escapes the control of the artist. It develops a form of singular artistic autonomy. The need for artists' freedom is part of this creative process. They go beyond the limits of their initial training, whether they come from fine arts, mathematics studies, computer science or architecture, etc. the works have an abstract form in their concept although they rely on mathematics and develop an artistic philosophical form.

What is your point of view on the evolution of digital art in France and abroad?

In France, we have the disadvantage of our advantage. We have a very rich and diverse art history, it is recognized all over the world; this is a chance, but it is also a constraint. The square is partly occupied by our historical artistic past, and contemporary art, be it digital, pictorial, etc. asks for more perseverance; the recognition process is slower. In the United States, digital art is more accessible because this artistic tradition is not as entrenched and present. Artists such as Jackson Pollock or Sam Francis have already brought a form of contemporary art that jostled and revolutionized art in the 1950s.

What does the term " Post-digital " mean for you in the presentation text of the Charlot gallery?

The term "Post-digital" reflects the evolution of art towards and through digital technology inspired by the past. Manfred Mohr or Laurent Mignonneau and Christa Sommerer are pioneers of digital art, the works they develop today are timeless. They use today's technologies but are influenced by older artistic movements such as cubism, abstract expressionism and sometimes even impressionism.

The artist Davide Quayola is inspired by works of the Renaissance by working with contemporary technologies. It draws on historical references that, by associating with the use of certain technologies, take on a new meaning. The artist Allahyari Morehshin develops committed works related to history and heritage, combining archeology with technology. It reproduces ancient Syrian sculptures threatened with destruction in the form of resin miniatures inside which it inserts a memory card containing the history of the sculpture, in other words its DNA. These works reveal a concern about our common memory and the loss of our data.

Archeology is a trace of history, a base, a foundation, from which a contemporary reflection associated with new technologies opens a complementary creative perspective, a safeguard, a new artistic vision ... The use of new technologies , contrary to the accepted ideas, allow an answer to the notion of fragility, of "ephemeral" of some old or contemporary works.

In your gallery, how are links being forged between digital artists and artists who do not use these technologies?

Links are created spontaneously between the artists. I am thinking of Pontus Carle, a Swedish artist, whom I have been representing for a number of years now. His paintings are astral, musical, and in his works there is an undeniable connection with generative art. Visually and graphically, links are formed between his paintings and the last work *Les mots silenciers* by artist Eric Vernhes. Digital artists produce drawing, painting, and some artists like Manfred Mohr have a strong connection to these practices. Artists mentally visualize an idea before developing it. Anne-Sarah Le Meur began by working on the red color and the decomposition of light. She then developed a work based on this concept. Artists develop their ideas, refine them and then realize them through a digital medium or a more traditional medium.

Can you talk about the exhibition *The Artside of algorithms* which runs until October 31, 2017 on the occasion of the inauguration of the gallery Charlot Tel

Aviv?

The artside of algorithms is the first exhibition of the Tel Aviv Charlot Gallery. In Israel, the use of advanced technologies is usual but digital art is not yet very developed. This exhibition brings together a panel of artists from different generations who use the algorithms through a search for the absolute in an attention to detail. The use of digital tools requires rigor to go beyond the limits of this tool; in my opinion, it comes from the necessity of freedom of which we have spoken previously ... going beyond frontiers.

How was the work *Télescope Intérieur* by artist Eduardo Kac in collaboration with French astronaut Thomas Pesquet conceived?

To realize a work in the space is an idea which lives for a long time the artist Eduardo Kac. His goal was not to create a work on earth but to bring it into space, but to create a work in space. Thomas Pesquet seduced by this artistic concept, agreed to carry out this experiment during the Proxima mission. The realization of this work imposed them several constraints: Thomas Pesquet had to use materials already present in the space shuttle, the work had to be simple to realize; apart from its profound artistic significance, it must be able to be read from every visual angle, given the exceptional atmosphere of weightlessness in which it evolved. Eduardo Kac chose to use a sheet of paper and a pair of scissors. Visually the work consists of a paper tube combined with the letter M, which refers to "Me", "Me", and symbolically takes on a human appearance. The development of this work was of a great complexity and moved us by its absolute simplicity. *Inside telescope* invites us to observe and take distance from the earth, but it is also an introspection. This work, full of poetry, only makes sense in weightlessness and in a world that is foreign to us. She invites us to reflect on our place in the universe. This distancing makes us aware of the fragility of things and our own vulnerability.

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