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A Kaleidoscopic Prism: Conversation with Gaëlle Choisine

Gaëlle Choisine and Wong Binghao

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C-MAP Asia Fellow Wong Binghao continues their dialogue with artist Gaëlle Choisine about the details and entryways to her practice. This text serves as a record of Choisine's artistic and conceptual process, and is part of the Fellow's ongoing research about curatorial approaches to art.



Gaëlle Choisine. *Temple of Love—Love To Love*. 2021. Installation view, New Museum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni. Courtesy the artist

Wong Binghao: In your artworks, you imaginatively congregate a diverse, cross-pollinating, and ever-changing array of intellectual and countercultural references (Black feminism, Haitian anti-colonial histories, permaculture, music, pop culture, queerness), media (sculpture, photography, video, installation, text, sound), and sensorial experiences (smell, hearing, taste, touch, emotion). You've described your work as a "kaleidoscopic prism with multiple entries of meanings and signs."¹ You are an architect or facilitator of these permutations. How are these creative connections and networks important to your practice? What do they do or manifest?

Gaëlle Choisine: This kaleidoscopic artistic prism is, of course, influenced by postcolonial cultural studies, where action and thought are open to a multiplicity of domains through which one can interconnect truths and experiences that will be authentic to historicity. I see this as a way of embracing the world and its complexity. I am especially interested in soliciting our wide range of cognitive and sensorial capacities. Before the Enlightenment, there already existed visions of the world that were less cut, chopped, and fragmented; science embraced astrology, chemistry, and divinatory arts. As beings belonging to a larger universe, we already exist within a network, in which all branches learn from each other. I work in a very large field of social and cultural experimentation, transmission, learning, imitation, and reproduction, and I translate it through my prism—a wide array of creation and encounters that always mixes with my intimate and personal stories. What interests me is, of course, how universes meet, dialogue, or reject each other. Everything lies in the experience. I am on the ground, I talk to people, I am interested in them, I listen to them, and I let them deploy their own creative field if we decide to work together. For instance, *Temple of Love—Attente* (Waiting; 2020) is a project I proposed for La Villette in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou in Paris. I invited students from École des Actes, a French language school for newly arrived immigrants, to produce the set design for an upcoming video work. Partnering with them during one week of a paid workshop allowed us to create a moment of intense collaboration,

apprenticeship, and solidarity. Another example is *Temple of Love—Atopos*, presented in 2022 at MAC/VAL (Musée d'art contemporain du Val-de-Marne) in Vitry-sur-Seine near Paris, where we invited people with reduced mobility and young people from the neighborhood to attend and get involved in somatic dance sessions with choreographer and voguing yoga dancer Emanuelle Soum. I personally will be part of one of these sessions to offer moments of energetic healing and meditative relaxation.



Gaëlle Choisine. *Temple of Love—Attente*. 2020. Installation view, gr_nd, Berlin, Germany. Courtesy the artist and gr_nd, Berlin

I also create in deep relation with my spirituality and my shamanistic learning, which is growing more and more, and opens doors related to a more omnipotent intuition. In a more concrete way, I build and realize these networks with the *Temple of Love* project. My primary intention has always been to talk about political issues, but also to open up these issues as much as possible through forms, or situations, or devices as various as dance floors, a massage table, projection rooms, furniture . . . I put forward formal devices dealing with postcolonial and racial issues, social injustices, or issues of minoritized people, such as queer communities.

WBH: *Temple of Love* (2018–) is your long-term, ongoing series of immersive and sprawling installations, each inspired by various chapters in Roland Barthes's book *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (1977). There are currently thirteen iterations. In what ways has *Temple of Love* changed (or not) since you first embarked on it, and why?

GC: Here is the manifesto of *Temple of Love*, which I wrote in 2018:

"*Temple of love is an inclusive ecosystem around the notion of love. It seemed essential to put forward the concept of love as a new political deal and to make it predominant in a heterosexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic society dominated by an authoritarian and predominantly white patriarchy. This radical, inverted communitarianism must be quickly challenged by cultural and governing institutions.*
The "Temple of Love" project began in 2018-2019 in Bétonsalon in Paris, as a preface to a geographically indeterminate cycle.
It takes shape as an uninterrupted, multidisciplinary, systemic space.
The temple must be considered as a sacred space, i.e., linking the spaces of men and Gods and spiritual entities. This implies a questioning of our way of thinking about the world, the universe, the Nature that surrounds us.
It is of public utility.
It contains its own rules and customs.
It allows the questioning of the museum space as an entity coming from the colonial heritage.
The temple of love is ecofeminist by embodying a queer and therefore inclusive empowerment.

T.O.L is a space of resistance. It activates itself through meeting and sharing.

Temple of Love is defined through its modes of appearance and its genesis according to its invitations and its location. It is adaptable.



Gaëlle Chaisne. *Temple of Love—Love To Love*. 2021. Installation view, New Museum, New York. Photo: Dario Lasagni. Courtesy the artist

WBH: How does your relationship with Haiti and the diaspora influence your work (or not)?

CG: My relationship with Haiti is quite complex. I discovered the country really late. The only connection I had to it was through my mother and my aunts, their expressions and behaviors, the Creole language used sometimes at home, and most of all the food. I went to Haiti for the first time in 2012, and it came as a double shock.

The first shock was my understanding of how my work was connected to this country without even knowing it. This organized chaos, this baroque and variegated way that I create forms and installations; the fragility of things, their ghostly presence, suspended in time and ready to disappear, in a place where elements vibrate singularly before our eyes. Colors, odors, landscapes, ways to do things and know-how—everything felt so close and yet so far.

The second shock was to discover a country still standing up after an earthquake that tore cities and families down. Haiti is brave. She never has time to recover: dangers and disasters are always at her front door. Despite multiple jeopardizing scenarios, the country has a strong and intense philosophy of life based on the importance of existence.

I'm also inspired by Haiti's history and its stories, from urbanism to Haitian and voodoo culture. One can see these themes and topics in many ways in my work. Photography took on a new meaning when I went there for the first time. I wanted to offer images of the country that were deeper than the journalistic and touristic points of view used in Europe. Sharing and re-creating bonds between my personal, fragmented life and this Haitian life brought a lot of answers. It's a concentrate of world diplomacy, in which one can quickly and intensely witness the direct consequences and repercussions of capitalism, international corruption, and political dishonesty. Haiti is also the embodiment of cultural blending. It is a country invented by colonization, where cultures and customs interwove themselves through slaves who came from all across Africa—but, most importantly, from Congo and Benin. This diversity and cultural interweaving take root in my work.