



# Christine Macel

CHRISTINE MACEL IS CHIEF CURATOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE CENTRE POMPIDOU IN PARIS. SHE IS CURRENTLY PREPARING, WITH JOANNA MYTKOWSKA, A MAJOR EXHIBITION ON ART IN THE FORMER EASTERN BLOC IN RELATION TO ART TODAY, TITLED "THE PROMISES OF THE PAST, 1950–2010," AND ORGANIZING, IN COLLABORATION WITH NEW YORK'S MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, A RETROSPECTIVE OF THE WORK OF GABRIEL OROZCO.



Roman Ondák, *Loop*, 2009, mixed media. Installation view, Czech Republic and Slovak Republic pavilion, Venice. Photo: Kate Lacey.

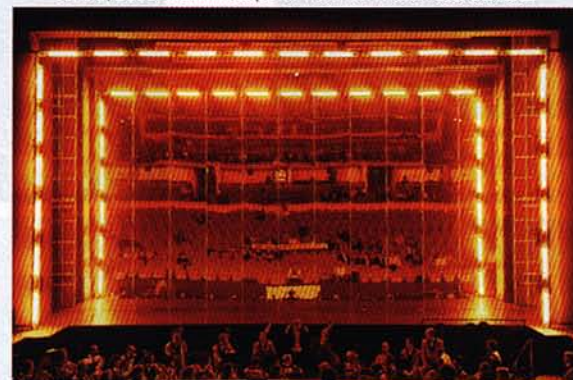
**1** **Roman Ondák, *Loop*, 2009** (Czech Republic and Slovak Republic pavilion, Venice Biennale) The best pavilion at the Biennale was also the most discreet. Indeed, one hardly noticed it, since Ondák paradoxically distinguished himself via the technique of camouflage: He perfectly replicated the pavilion garden in minute detail *inside* the pavilion itself and thus cloaked the art space with a verdant layer of reality. In this manner, Ondák (and his curator, Kathrin Rhomberg) brilliantly short-circuited everyone trying too hard to stand out. No name, no text labels, no printed information; The visitor was spared all the usual pomp of a Venice pavilion and could delight in the fact that art might still "create an illusion" to such an extent.



Sion Sono, *Love Exposure*, 2008, still from a color video transferred to 35-mm film, 237 minutes. From left: Nana Nagao, Koike (Sakura Ando), Mami Nakamura.

**2** **Sion Sono, *Ai no mukidashi* (Love Exposure)** With this November 2008 release, the Japanese director successfully invented a new, imposing film style—but without pretension, something midway between mythical story and B movie, in tune with the great individual and social phenomena of our time—and all with an HD camera! The film's four hours seem like nothing thanks to an explosive sense of humor and a farcical originality. Sexual perversion, the clash of generations, and the proliferation of sects are all embraced in this monumental portrayal that will make you cry with horror and laughter. Yet its ultimate message is love, nothing but love.

Olafur Eliasson, *Echo House*, 2007. Rehearsal view, Theater Basel. June 9, 2009. From "*Il Tempo del Postino*." Photo: Peter Schnetz.



**3** **Gabriel Orozco (Kurimanzutto, Mexico City)** Orozco has returned to his roots, crossing Mexico in search of natural elements like cacti, sponges, and dried flowers. Incorporating such flora into sculptures and confronting them in paintings, the artist formed an unexpected and refined score in which the organic and the abstract were brilliantly merged. Orozco is at his best when his earthy sensuality sparks a dialogue between conceptual speculation and its relationship to the human body and nature. This exhibition re-revealed his capacity to construct such supremely evocative installations.

Gabriel Orozco, *Altar de Parabras con Balazo* (Altar of Windshields with Bullet Hole), 2009, color photograph, 20 3/4 x 27 1/2".



**4** **"*Il Tempo del Postino*" (Theater Basel)** The first exhibition ever curated as an "opera" took up the notion of time over and above that of space. Under the direction of Philippe Parreno, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Anri Sala, and Rirkrit Tiravanija, twenty artists appeared successively onstage or in the theater, mounting performances that seemed to run the gamut from the most conceptual to the most narrative. This event was actually a second installment, following its initial version in Manchester in 2007, and it provided extremely enjoyable moments: the opening of Tino Sehgal's dancing curtain; Sala's Japanese opera singers performing *Madame Butterfly*, occasionally acting as if "freeze-framed" without sound; and the incredible vocal concert imagined by Doug Aitken, an ironic ode to the collapse of the stock market amid contemporary art folly.

Thomas Demand, *Klause 1*, 2006, color photograph, 108 1/2 x 67". © 2009 Thomas Demand/VG Bild Kunst, Bonn.

**5** **Thomas Demand** (Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin) For his first retrospective in Germany, curated by Udo Kittelmann, Demand created a concept exhibition using a selection of his photographs about German history and its interpretation by the media, from the Nazi era through the birth of the Federal Republic to the fall of the wall. We are treated to a scenography of hanging curtains in dialogue with Mies van der Rohe's architecture, discursive texts by Botho Strauss that focus on the works without disclosing them, and an aesthetic and political debate launched by the artist through a symposium—all forming a flawless performance in which any decorative excess is carefully avoided, reinforcing the enigmatic and icy character of the images.

**6** **Alina Szapocznikow** (Warsaw Museum of Modern Art) A major figure in 1960s and '70s sculpture, Szapocznikow was completely deserving of this broad exhibition, which highlighted her work with bodily fragments—such as the resin sculpture in which were suspended two black-and-white photographs, one of the artist as a child on holiday, another of a woman, killed in a gas chamber—a piece charged with Holocaust trauma and loaded with eroticism. Curators Joanna Mytkowska and Agata Jakubowska also included work by such pioneering artists as Mária Bartusová, Louise Bourgeois, and Eva Hesse, a comparison that revealed Szapocznikow's profound originality and visceral intensity.

**7** **Danh Vo** (Kunsthalle Basel) In his second solo show at the kunsthalle, curated by Adam Szymczyk, Vo combined his personal story as a young Vietnamese immigrant in Germany with the archival and documentary materials of collective memory. Monumental and discreet objects alternated throughout, accompanied by text in gilded brass displays that recounted stories as important as the objects—that of the chandelier from the Hôtel Majestic in Paris (where the Vietnamese peace accords were signed), moved to and hanging in a huge, empty room at the kunsthalle, or that of a Christian missionary in Vietnam. Such pieces offered a narrative and physical sensibility recalling the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres.

**8** **Karla Black** (Migros Museum, Zurich) Reexamining Minimal and post-Minimal art, the young sculptor from Glasgow achieves ephemeral works that are almost pictorial in their material and color, deploying powder, cosmetics, cellophane, and even plaster. These haptic pieces, specially conceived for the show (curated by Heike Munder), stir up delicate and profound sensations, and Black's formalism, based on substances relating to our daily environment and to the female body, proves to be sensually Venusian in a manner one rarely encounters.



Karla Black, *Principles of Admitting*, 2009, plaster powder, powder paint, sugar paper, spray tan, chalk, concealer stick. Installation view, Migros Museum, Zurich.



Alina Szapocznikow, *Petits Ventres (Small Bellies)*, 1968, plaster study for the *Grands Ventres (Large Bellies)*, height: 16 1/2". Photo: Roman Géslewicz © Piotr Stanis Xawski.

**9** **Etienne Chambaud**, "Color Suite" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris) With this solo exhibition (curated by Daria de Beauvais), Chambaud, one of the young artists in the Parisian neo-Conceptual scene, showed that you could count on him for things to come in the appropriately named "suite" (in French, *en suite* means "in sequence"). He clouded the issue of pre- and post- by colorizing a series of films from early cinema and by rendering photographs of prewar film-colorization workshops as screenprints on canvas. Chambaud elegantly engages in a temporal dialectic, but without coming to any definitive conclusion.

View of Etienne Chambaud, "Color Suite," 2009, Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Photo: André Morin.

**10** **Franck Leibovici**, *Des Documents poétiques (Poetic Documents)* (Éditions Al Dante)

This timely tome defines a new literary genre based on textual sources, from press releases to websites to administrative notes. Although the book was published in November 2007, its scrutiny of Colin Powell's PowerPoint presentation to the UN, for example, seemed all too pertinent this past year. Hovering between the documentary and the poetic, and rearticulating the political and the aesthetic, Leibovici also pitches in with his own textual opuses, including scores for performances (for example, the one inaugurating the Centre Pompidou's New Festival this past autumn) and mini operas. To be continued! □ Translated from French by Molly Stevens.

Cover of Franck Leibovici's *Des Documents poétiques (Poetic Documents)* (Éditions Al Dante).

