

Challenging Signifiers

Philippe Parreno

PHILIPPE PARRENO TRANSFORMS THE PALAIS DE TOKYO, AN EXPERIENCE RATHER THAN AN EXHIBITION,
ANYWHERE, ANYWHERE, OUT OF THE WORLD IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS

Philippe Parreno, one of the international art world's most prolific innovators, has become the first artist to occupy the entire 22,000 square metres of the Palais de Tokyo, Paris. Working across Europe and the USA, the French artist and filmmaker has spent the past 20 years redefining the idea of the exhibition, considering it as a single artwork in its own right. Parreno's shows employ everything from sound to drawings, film to sculpture and performance to light installations, with all elements functioning together cohesively, often conveying historical and sociological themes.

Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World is described by Randall Peacock, set designer and collaborator, "As a logical progression of Parreno's practice and a distillation of his ideas." The show at the Palais de Tokyo incorporates *Marilyn*, a film made in 2012, which laments the loss of the infamous Hollywood star, Annlee, the Manga character that Parreno bought with Pierre Huyghe in 1999, and multi-channel projection *Zidane, a 21st Century Portrait* (2006), as well as featuring the artist's earlier works.

Parreno repeatedly exhibits certain artworks, as his practice is entirely site-specific: when pieces are repositioned and recontextualised, they take on new meanings. *Speech Bubbles* (1997), is a prime example: a mass of blank helium-filled cartoon speech bubbles, each initially intended to carry trade union slogans during a demonstration. Over the years, Parreno has re-used these simple Mylar balloons – spraying them red, white and gold, leaving them to float or lighting them from above, seeing the piece transformed from jovial to ominous. In *Alien Affection* (2002), Parreno explains that these balloons mean that "everyone can mark their own demand, while still participating in the same image," an idea that expresses his entire methodology: to produce single installations that allow for endless unique experiences.

Randall Peacock comments that each of Parreno's works incorporate multiple narratives and signs to ensure that "the meaning of the show is generated by the individual: as you perceive the space, you reflect your experience onto it – each person reads the signs differently." In fact, with

such an expanse of bizarrely contradictory sounds and images, it is difficult to determine any discernible themes – *Anywhere, Anywhere* is more of a sensory overload than anything straightforward.

The discordant mass of signs that formulate this show are brought together by a single soundtrack, Igor Stravinsky's ballet, *Petrushka* (1911). Parreno has long been preoccupied with the ideas of puppetry and automaton movement and, played automatically as if by phantom hands across four Disklavier pianos, this Russian ballet tells the story of a magician's puppet who comes to life. The original score was intended as a piano duet, however keen to incorporate yet another layer of genius into the exhibition, Parreno chose to use Mikhail Rudy's impressive solo performance – the frantic dancing of keys creating an anxious tension.

Discernible in every room of the Palais de Tokyo, *Petrushka* is, according to Peacock, "a red herring in some ways, in that it's not an overarching narrative for the exhibition" but more a conductor of its parts, choreographing movement through the Palais "with the puppeteer as a central controlling system for the show." Peacock continues, "It is not the key, but just a clue to the meaning of the piece, which is entirely subjective."

To ensure that the concept of the showcase remained open-ended, Parreno and his team carefully considered how much to lead the viewer and how much to give away. Peacock reveals that he and Parreno are of the opinion that "the most important element is one's own individual relationship with the artworks. Museum signage often tells visitors where to look, what to do, and why the works are important, but by avoiding the use of this kind of instructive and didactic text, people are more entitled to create the artwork for themselves." Parreno's team did not just avoid adding signage, but also

embarked on an extensive superficial transformation of the Palais to create a near-blank canvas for the exhibits

Working with such a monumental and historic space on the right bank of the Seine came as a double-edged sword: its art deco features and peeling paint, enormous windows and cavernous ceilings provide fascinating viewing, yet according to Peacock also meant a “cacophony of signs,” which threatened to distract from Parreno’s installation. Luckily, Parreno, Peacock and the team (the scale of which compares to a film crew) dedicated an entire year to designing the installation. The process began with Parreno inviting Peacock to “go to the Palais and talk about it,” and progressed through architectural drawings and 3D models, before embarking on the final construction. Having been built in 1937 as an open exhibition space and extended by 14,000 square metres last year, Peacock says “The Palais doesn’t do justice to small works and its dimensions were something that needed to be considered, we needed to focus the viewer’s eye.” The exhibition relies on a series of props or “quasi-objects which are not artworks themselves but function to facilitate the art” – ranging from window coverings that put the outside world into soft focus, to replacing every single piece of the Palais’ original signage.

The most noticeable of Parreno’s set pieces appear before even stepping inside *Anywhere, Anywhere*: one of the artist’s notorious marquees hangs above the entrance, followed by a blinding white wall behind the front reception desk. Both works immediately recall cinema, contrasting popular culture with the grand façade and takes visitors out of their comfort zone, ensuring that their awareness is heightened before even entering the first room.

Although these modifications seem trivial, they relate to another of the artist’s long-standing preoccupations: the notion of organising the interior space as a garden. Throughout the exhibition, there are moments when people are not meant to be looking at anything. Peacock comments “The spaces between sounds are as important as the sounds (or artworks) themselves.” This composition of voids and concentrated spaces is comparable to the flowerbeds, lawns and walkways of a grand Parisian garden – with Peacock also describing *Anywhere, Anywhere*’s light installations as mirroring “the darkness between street lamps while the Palais’ columns become trees.”

Parreno has a particular fascination with the way in which a garden produces silhouettes. This is immediately realised at the front desk: as reception staff are propped against the glowing white wall, and this theme is continued throughout the exhibition – most noticeably by a pitch-dark “street” lit by several ceiling-suspended marquees. First seen hanging over the Palais’ entrance, they perform a haunting dance, sending out warped shadows as the room flashes from darkness to dusk to bright daylight. This is just the beginning of the assault on the retinas that characterises much of *Anywhere, Anywhere*, with viewers led by flickering lights into a series of dim spaces, lit up by blaring projections, booming Jumbotron screens or sometimes a welcome burst of natural light; each space is a dramatically different to the next.

Perhaps the most surprising element of the show relies on this third aspect: temperature. Screened within the ice-cold basement of the Palais (which Peacock is adamant that the team have in no way “artificially cooled”) is *Marilyn*, a film that impersonates the deceased Marilyn Monroe, as she materialises during a seance in a suite at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. The camera takes on the position of her eyes, a computer reconstructs her voice and a robot recreates her handwriting as she anxiously tries to communicate her frantic gaze darting across the room. It is a tragic portrayal of a troubled

spirit’s desperation whose climax is a result of its chilling setting: as the film comes to an end, lights direct the audience’s gaze to an enormous snowdrift sitting solidly behind the projection screen. The experience is astoundingly upsetting, the cold leaves viewers even more at the mercy of their emotions.

Anywhere, Anywhere is riddled with mysterious happenings such as this – many of which will be noticed by some and overlooked by others, increasing the opportunity for an entirely subjective experience. Elements will also change during the show’s duration, for example: a secret room lying behind a bookcase from Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster houses artworks by John Cage and Merce Cunningham; however, the two will gradually substitute one another throughout the next two months, or *Fade to Black* (2013), a series of posters depicting previously abandoned works, printed in phosphorescent ink will slowly darken so that by March, they will illustrate nothing at all.

For Parreno, an artwork only exists for as long as it is exhibited and experienced, it is impermanent and fluid – an ephemeral being in itself. *Anywhere, Anywhere* is rife with ghostly presences that reiterate this transience: the phantasmagoric presence of *Marilyn*, the 18th century machine-marionette of *The Writer* (2007), otherworldly images of a black garden created in Portugal, the motions of deep-sea creatures, and the humanistic CGI character of Annlee.

Parreno and Pierre Huyghe bought the rights to this 11-year-old Manga character in 1999, having found her image in the Japanese Kworks catalogue. Never intended as a heroine, without a name, personality or voice, her digital file was cheap. However, after having been introduced in Parreno’s 2000 film (also titled *Anywhere Out of the World*) she spent the next two years featuring in the artwork of several of his contemporaries – a sort of revival of the Surrealist “exquisite corpse” who quickly gained celebrity status. Parreno and Huyghe prohibited any further use of Annlee’s image in 2002. However, she reappears at the Palais in both digital and human form: a film of the character is followed by the apparition of a performance artist imitating her: a work from Tino Sehgal first shown at Frieze New York in 2011.

Like the distraught spirit of *Marilyn* and the puppet *Petrushka*, Annlee appears as a melancholy figure in limbo – invested with life but not living. During the video the character says the words “I belong to whoever is able to fill me with any kind of imaginary material. Anywhere out of the world.” This last sentence has appeared throughout Parreno’s career and is taken from the texts of Charles Baudelaire. Parreno’s work often refers to the theories of Baudelaire, who famously examined the fleeting experiences of modern life and whose poem *Anywhere Out of the World* (1867) explores displacement within the universe, imagining that the ideal world can only exist outside of materiality. As with his choice of Mikhail Rudy’s version of *Petrushka*, the artist decided not to settle for the well known and therefore entitled his exhibition at the Palais using the words that Baudelaire actually borrowed from English poet Thomas Hood in 1844: “Anywhere, anywhere Out of the world!”

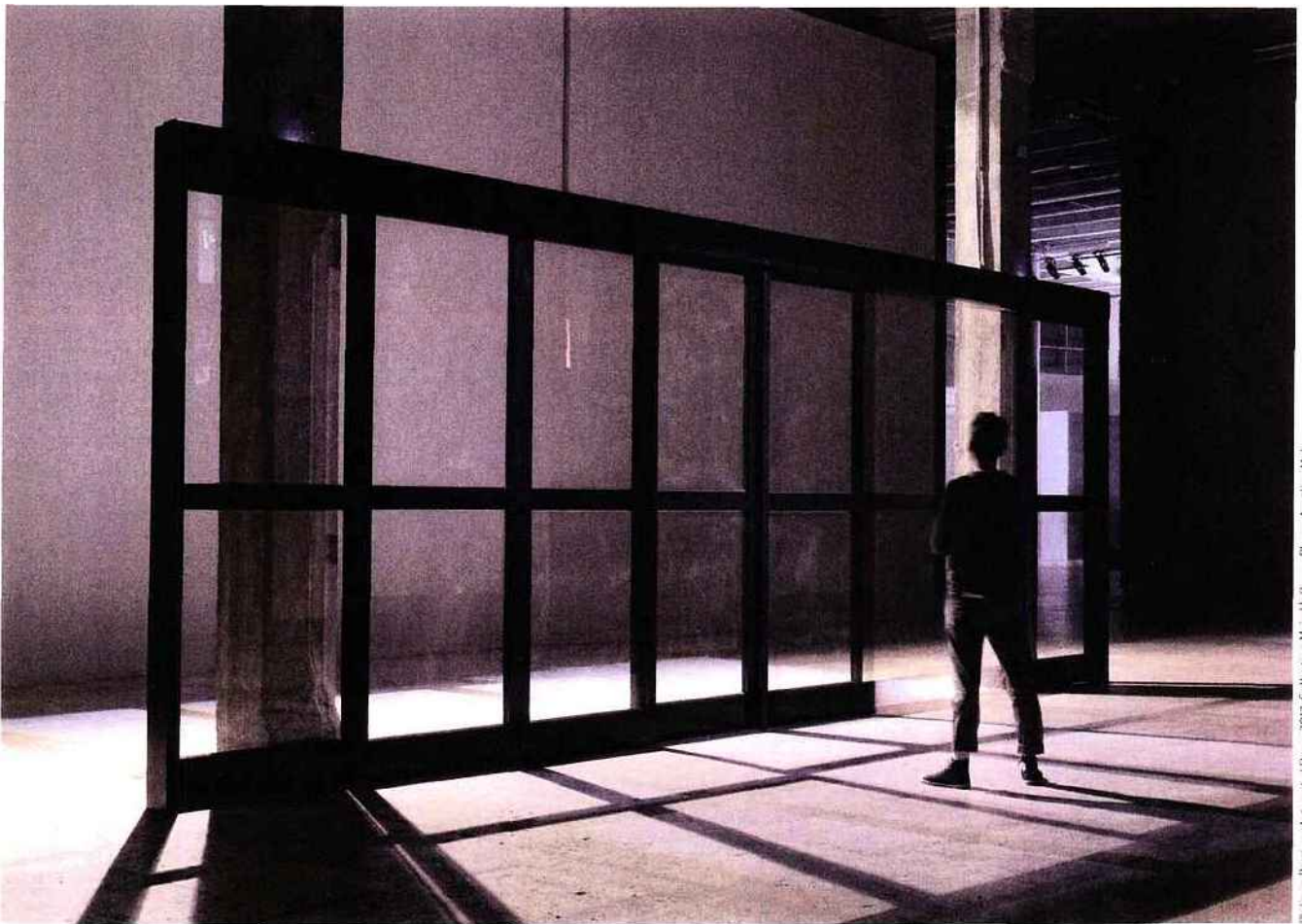
Parreno is a complex individual, combining “high” art theory with “low” art: Manga figures, and nodding towards popular culture with pieces like *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait*. Displayed across 17 screens, the film employed 17 cameras (including two from the US army, with the strongest zoom available) to track Zinedine Zidane’s ever-quivering breath and muscle movement. It is far more than just a film of a sportsman; vitally it combats what Peacock suggests is one of conceptual art’s downfalls: “It is often exclusive.” Something Parreno is not. “Working with Philippe is a remarkable experience in that he allows people to employ their strengths and to produce something that is greater than the sum of its parts – to make something bigger than the art.”

Anywhere, Anywhere has evolved as a collaboration between artists

musicians, architects, and lighting, sound and set designers. Emerging as the largest survey of Parreno's work to date, this show layers multiple narratives within a building steeped in history, choreographed to a soundtrack that has a rich story of its own: an unbelievably complex and yet entirely accessible creation. It is undoubtedly one of the most significant exhibitions in 2013.

Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World by Philippe Parreno continues at Palais de Tokyo, Paris, until 12 January. www.palaisdetokyo.com.

Chloe Hodge



Philippe Parreno, *Autonomous Doors*, 2013. Collection Raja Hoffman. Photo: Aurelien Mole.

“Museum signage often tells us where to look, and why artworks are important; but by avoiding the use of this kind of instructive and didactic text, people are more entitled to create the artwork for themselves.”

Surface approx. (cm²) : 2317

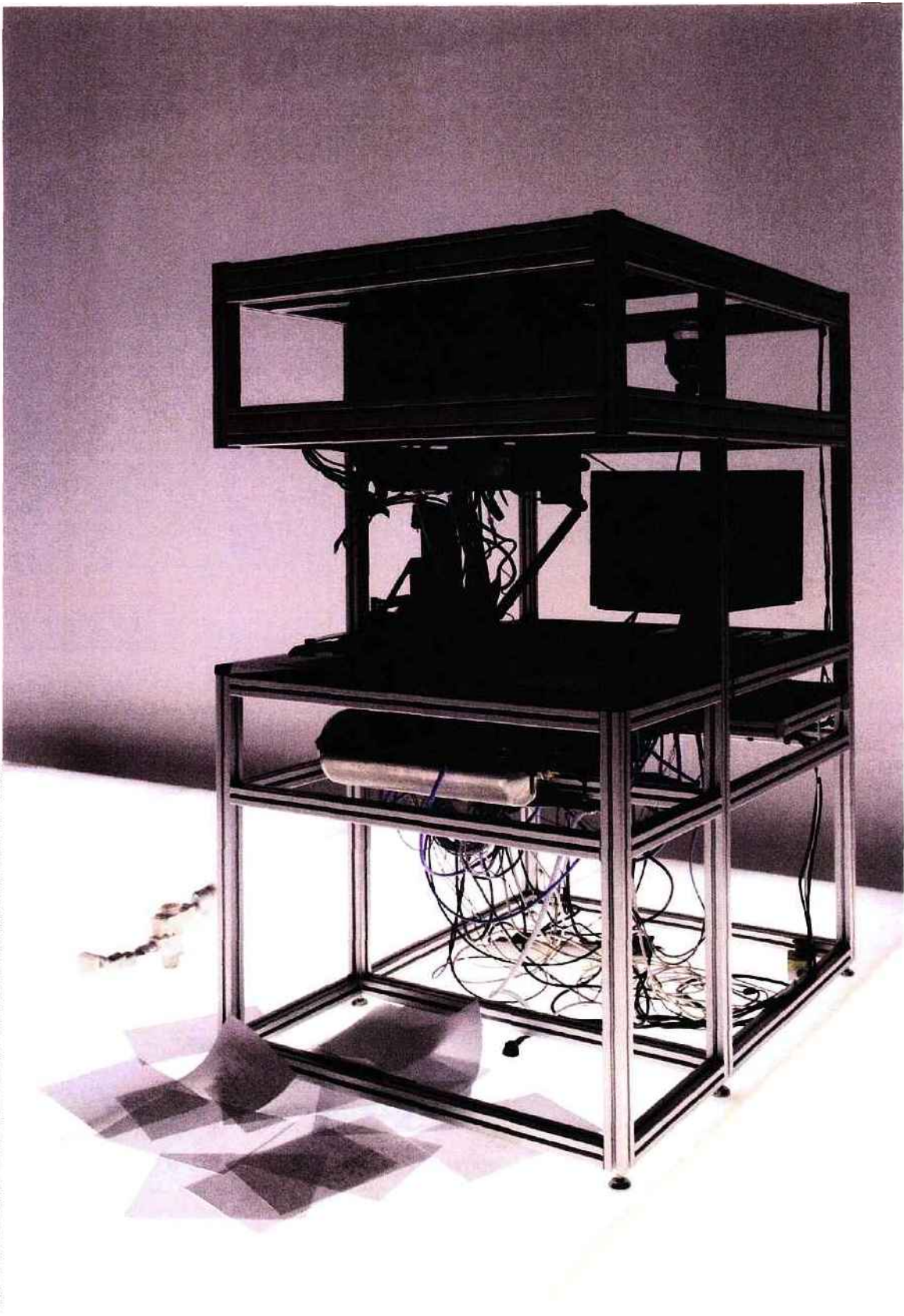
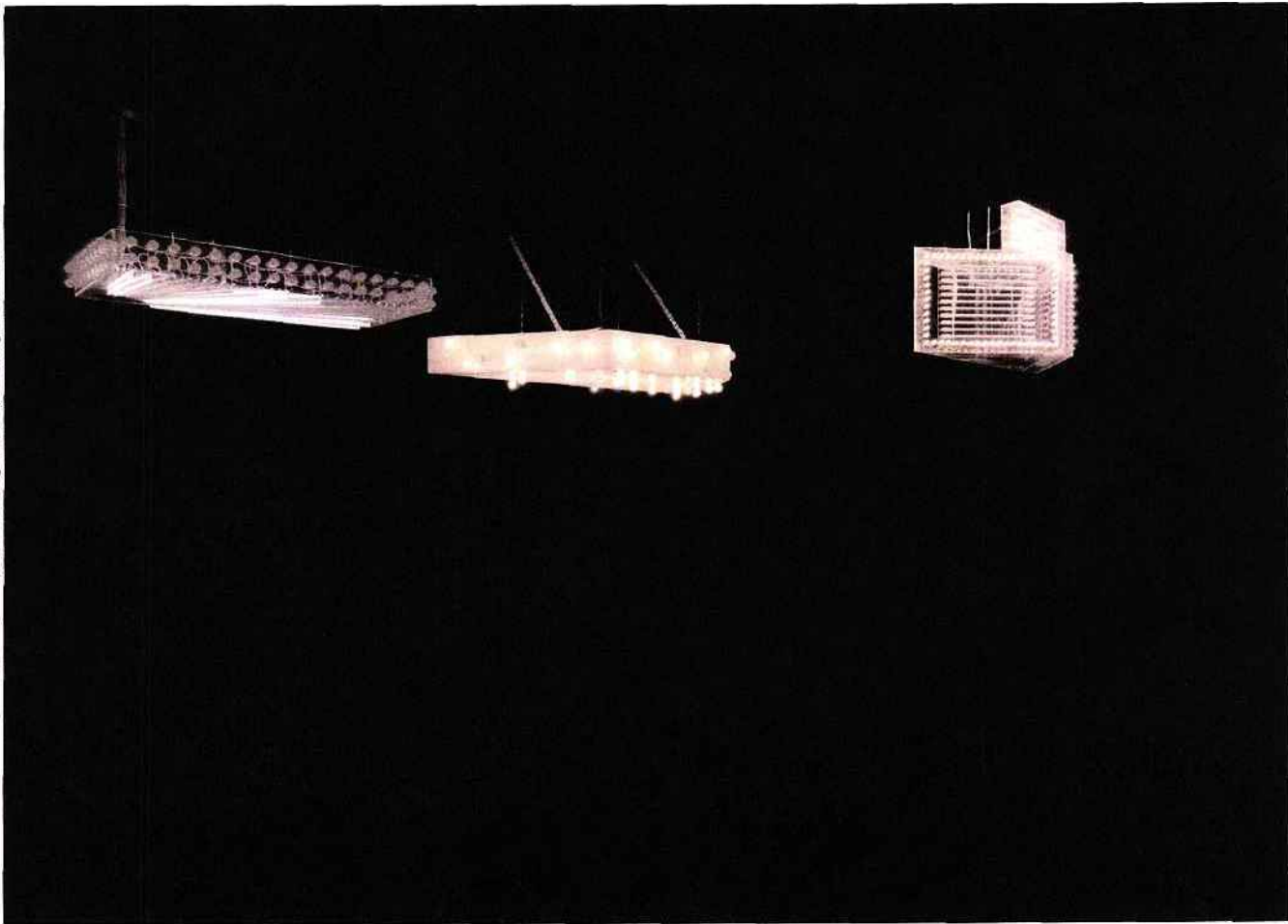


Figure 2: A complex, multi-tiered metal frame structure, possibly a piece of scientific or artistic equipment. The structure is composed of several rectangular frames stacked vertically. The top frame is a simple cube-like structure. Below it, a more complex frame holds various components, including a large, dark, rectangular object (possibly a screen or panel) and a smaller, lighter-colored object. The bottom frame is a large, open rectangular structure with a complex arrangement of wires and cables visible inside. The entire structure is set against a plain, light-colored background. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights, suggesting a studio setting.

Surface approx. (cm²) : 2317

Philippe Parreno, Danyu La Rue, 2013 (detail). (Left) Your Days, My Nights, 2010. La Casa collection; Buca, Middleb Marquee, 2008. Museum Foundation, Bologna; Enna Regi collection. (Right) Marquee, 2013. Courtesy Esther Schipper Gallery, Photo: Aurélien Mole.





Philippe Parreno, *La Banque d'Occident*, 2013. Exhibition view. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Aurelien Mole.

Surface approx. (cm²) : 2317



Philippe Parreno, *Mimlax*, 2012 (detail). Courtesy Pilar Corria Gallery. Photo: Aurelious Malt.

Surface approx. (cm²) : 2317



Deuglas Gordon • Philippe Parreno, *Zénon: a 21st Century Portrait*, 2006. Exhibition view. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Angelen Mole

Surface approx. (cm²) : 2317

Philippe Parreno, *TV Chinois*, 2013 (detail). Courtesy Pilar Corrias Gallery, On Screens, Arles, 1993.
Courtesy Esther Schipper Gallery, Exhibition view. Photo: Aurelien Mole.

