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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/558>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.558

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 April 2009

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Véronique Goudinoux, « Jean Dupuy », *Critique d'art* [Online], 33 | Printemps 2009, Online since 26 January 2012, connection on 21 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/558> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.558

This text was automatically generated on 21 April 2019.

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REFERENCES

Jean Dupuy : à la bonne heure !, Paris : Semiose ; La Seyne-sur-mer : Villa Tamaris ; Nice : Villa Arson, 2008

Jean Dupuy : en 4^{ème} vitesse, Paris : Semiose ; La Seyne-sur-mer : Villa Tamaris ; Nice : Villa Arson, 2008

Jean Dupuy : rouge et blanc, Paris : Semiose, 2008

- 1 Jean Dupuy did not want any monograph written about him. He had (he still has) other projects, and he had worked out that the cost of the monograph proposed in his regard was probably more or less the equivalent of the cost of the four 75-pages books he was keen to publish. We must thank Eric Mangion, Alexandre Gérard and Benoît Porcher for having managed to persuade him to the contrary. The three recently published and carefully documented books (including one monograph) help us to discover the artist's entire work in a way that nobody ever experiences it. This said, Dupuy's hesitation is not altogether trifling: it suggests something about his particular conception about art and creation, which features not a lot in summaries at times prompted by monographic exercises, and is situated, as we shall see, on quite different turf.
- 2 Dupuy, who was born in 1925, is perhaps better known, nowadays, for the group performances and actions which he organized in New York between 1973 and 1979, than for the works he produced before and after that period¹. Herein lies all the interest of these recent publications, and of Eric Mangion's monograph in particular: the fact that they restore to this body of work the density which is its hallmark. Seen in its continuity, his work is actually especially interesting for the fact that it beggars any pigeonholing of his praxis within a particular time, place, movement, medium or activity. Dupuy cannot in fact be summed up in one fell swoop, even if the art form chosen were the complex one of performance. And if one had to chose an artist thwarting the still overly schematic

manner in which the history of the 20th century is often written as a succession of movements whose players are quite different, it would be this one. We might then see that there is an encounter in “his” (hi)story between artists, actors and often disjointed trends, and that the seminal threads leading from one to the other are at times more obvious than one might have suspected.

- 3 In fact, Dupuy shares with Robert Rauschenberg, Daniel Spoerri, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jean Tinguely and many others that capacity which certain artists have to move about between artists, countries, periods and movements. Dupuy was a painter up until 1967. In Paris he espoused a form of body painting that had levity and fluidity, which can be likened to that of his friend Jean Degottex. In 1967, that pictorial praxis gave way in New York to the production of occasionally sophisticated machines whereby the artist explored invisible parts of the body (heart beats, senses of smell and taste, etc.). Because Dupuy then took part in events associating art and technology, it would be easy enough to categorize him as one of the artists representing that trend, whereas a closer look at his works would show him to be, rather, something of an artist-cum-inventor, a tinkering handyman aided and abetted by technology, keen not to demonstrate the triumph of modernity but, more modestly, the viewer’s inner eye or the dust trapped by the silent grooves of a record. In a way, this attitude endured when, in 1973, he once more switched tacks and started to put on group shows and performances, in which he himself took an active part. In this respect, the *A la bonne heure!* catalogue is a valuable one, bringing together as it does both the photographs of those events and the articles published about them². In the catalogue, for example, we can read an essay by Alan Moore, which appeared in *Artforum* in 1974, discussing a comparison between the work of Gordon Matta Clark and that of Dupuy: “[...their pieces]”, wrote Moore, “do not underscore the coherence of the architectural part of the two split parts, but stem rather from a sort of lawless archaeology, which reveals tectonic mysteries in the raw state.” Like Matta Clark at the same show, but using other means, Dupuy thus strove to reveal from his studio unexpected views obtained by things cobbled together using mirrors. One might be forgiven for thinking that, in the absence of any resort to technology, like the ensuing performances, this work on space might represent a break with the previously produced works. But a thread does link the former with the latter. With Dupuy we find a never contradicted soft spot both for *surprises*, and for what *chance* might haphazardly produce, and we can gain a possibly better understanding of his involvement during the 1970s in the group performances that he organized, which, based on simple and precise constraints (*a capella* singing, carrying out a very brief action on a small, round, revolving stage, etc.), summoned responses best described as unpredictable.
- 4 In the early 1980s, there was a new turning-point. Jean Dupuy left the United States for France. He stopped putting on performances and embarked on a praxis entailing anagrams, including the two below, which it would be a pity not to quote, in the interests of our thesis: *Il a l’air amateur de surprises — Amateur de plaisir, il rassure / Ah, c’est drôle mais — le hasard, c’est moi!* At the same time he created objects which, like his *Table à saluer*, also play on the surprise effect. For example, would you imagine discovering on this Table a view of your own skull? It is hard, in just a few lines, to show the glowing gaiety of these colourful anagrams, with their tireless word play; it is not easy, either, to bring out the wit, invariably effective and spiced with levity, of the incongruous object which he has now been producing for almost 30 years. Let us just put forward the idea that his œuvre is permeated by a certain conception of art, one which gives pride of place to chance and

plays on the surprise effect; and that this anything but static conception has been transformed and enriched over the years, from one encounter to the next. For this artist who shifts effortlessly from one praxis to another, from one time to another, and from one country to another, the acceptance of chance and the hope of creating a surprise are perhaps what help the different facets of his work to encompass the experiences of such figures as Lautréamont and Raymond Roussel, Degottex's gestural art, the poems of his friend Bernard Heidsieck, the amusing physique of Marcel Duchamp, Rauschenberg's collages, Tinguely's machines, George Maciunas's gags, Robert Filliou's games, the performances of Dick Higgins and Olga Adorno, and Matta Clark's cuts. Dupuy is not a machine artist or a performance artist, nor is he a Lettrist or a post-Duchampian, a Fluxus artist or an artist involved in body painting. Rather, he is probably one of those in whom some of the most unusual conceptions of 20th century art were embodied, in many different forms.

NOTES

1. Let us point out that, in 1975, he was probably better known for the technological machines described below.
2. Just as *En 4^{ème} vitesse* presents the articles written in the 1960s about Dupuy's body painting. Let us give this practice its due, a practice which was still relatively unknown in France and which, by publishing anthologies of critical writings, helped to gauge the terms whereby a work was received, and thus envisage the gap with our present-day perception of it.