Hubert Duprat

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/68051>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.68051

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

This article is a translation of:

Hubert Duprat - URL : <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/68046> [fr]

Publisher

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

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 November 2020

Number of pages: 77-79

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Jean-Marc Huitorel, "Hubert Duprat", *Critique d'art* [Online], 55 | Automne/hiver, Online since 30 November 2021, connection on 15 September 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/68051> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiquedart.68051>

This text was automatically generated on 15 September 2022.

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Hubert Duprat, 2020 © Frédéric Delpech, courtesy of the artist

- 1 The works titled *Caddis Fly Aquatic Larvae with their Cases* (1980-1998) have both helped and hindered our consideration of Hubert Duprat's œuvre. They have helped inasmuch as they have made his name known, to such a degree did their paradoxically spectacular dimension (they were never more than two centimetres long) impress those who discovered those poor and insignificant creatures producing, thanks to the artist's intervention, objects—sheaths or cases—of remarkable beauty. They have hindered it because they created a screen in the way of any overall vision of pieces which, without contradicting those works we have just mentioned, have broadened the artist's ideas and intentions and the nature of his exhibitions.

- 2 The oeuvre of this unusual artist, whose first known shows date back to the early 1980s, was interpreted somewhat swiftly as a metaphor of the studio, sometimes in the form of photographs (*L'Atelier* and *La Montée des images*, 1983-1985), at others by the inclusion of a synecdochic drawing, using incrustations, in plywood, or lines and layouts in impressive concrete constructions, representing a plinth, the articulation of a floor and a partition pierced by a door (*Marqueterie*, 1986-1994). Strictly speaking, Duprat has never had a studio. On the other hand, what lends form to the energy of origins and emergences, and to the marvel of the first time, fascinates him and involves him in studies. This explains his liking for mineral constructions, which are less precious than dazzling, for the making of which he brings in amber and limestone, coral and pyrite, sandstone and magnetite, all pieces which owe the strength of their appearance to a consummate knowledge about joining and attachment. Another quality of Duprat's works resides in their monumentality, from the tiny cases of caddis flies to the sweeping forms of the Vassivière lighthouse (*Sans titre*, 2008) and the *Figures de Lyon* (1991), whatever their dimensions. Herein lies a sculptor's virtue, and in Duprat's case it comes from the amazing density with which he endows each one of his works (it matters little here if they are the fruit of his own hands or of various kinds of delegation and collaboration). We find this quality in the invasive and saturating works, whether they have to do with surface (*La Montagne*, 1993-1994); *Sans titre* (2008) —the mica ceiling of the small theatre at Vassivière) or volume (*Coupé-cloué*, 1991-1994; *A la fois, la racine et le fruit*, 1997-1998).
- 3 The stubborn quest for a first time, not in the historical sense but in that of a novel invention, where the immediate power of the object is only equalled by the scope and length of the research preceding it, also explains the genealogy of a work which probably refers more to the dawn of time than to the history of art in the modern period. As such, it just so happens, Hubert Duprat's oeuvre is indeed of its time, a present stretched as never before between the symmetrical abysses of origins and future.