

Interview | David Douard: Dissemination, Contamination, Flow of the language

Panelist: David Douard, Dongmen Yang, Ruihan Zhu, Siqi Lin, Xiaomu Cheng

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David Douard: I always use the image of whispering as an important metaphor to express the transmission of language. In my works, I used mixed information to spread through different interfaces and materials. I want the viewer to feel that the language is contaminating our space.

In the exhibition, I placed the image of whispering inside several advertising lightboxes. The core of the structure is a poem taken from the Internet and I printed on stickers. I always use objects from street as elements of my work. On the street, I often see people use stickers to make their voices to be heard, just as bacteria constantly spreading and multiplying in the public space. These sounds are like black metal music for me, even though some people don't consider it as music. It is through such noise that people can express themselves. Same, I express myself through such kind of chaos.

I want to express the existence of objects that are constantly in motion. The viewer can see objects that exist in real life in my works. Instead of simply taking them, I want to express the metaphor of movement and the hidden state under the surface. I want my works to be like a static mirror reflecting vivid movement, talking about a kind of contamination of external space, which is an expression of personalization/privatization of public space. Public space is always limited by its own conditions. For example, the iron fences in my works are an effective means for space to be fragmented. I believe that individuals can corrupt and influence those public spaces.

This is the reason why I always use masks: masks are constantly moving and tangible objects in the contemporary society. They come from the online anonymous movement or the recent popular clown movies, through which the younger generation shows their thoughts about politics. Countless faces hidden underneath the masks are a kind of depoliticized political expression of individuals. However, politics is not my central consideration. I do not want to support or oppose those movements in my works. My work is to think about how to make a politicized expression out of materials, forms or techniques—I hope to effectively link the promises made by politics and poetry into a kind of poetic politicization.

Xiaomu Cheng: What criteria do you use to select the poems in your works?

David Douard: Marcel Broodthaers inspired me a lot when I was a student at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts de Paris. His work “Pense-Bête” (Reminder), which sealed several books in plastic foams, made me think about how language can be applied to creation. For me, his work shows that we cannot read all literature and what important is to understand our relationship with language. So does graffiti. I do not concern about the content of graffiti, but the way graffiti expresses themselves. I think it is a sense of confrontation with society. When the Occupy Wall Street (2011) happened, as someone who grew up in the Internet age, I naturally received information about this movement through the Internet. I wondered if I could apply the language of the movement to my sculptures. Therefore, I searched blogs, news, and other platforms where slogans or poetries might appear. For me, language is a universal existence. To be more precise, I think I should call it a flow of language, which melts into my works like water and fountain. I create visual works from these movements, where poetry surrounds them just as language haunts politics.

Dongmen Yang: I found the exhibition is particularly poetic, with each work having a meticulous design that make them seems perfect. But what is the relationship between such poetic nature and your so-called politicization? Does the poetic nature weaken the political one?

David Douard: I agree with you that being poetic and being political are paradoxical. But what I want to express the most is the existential nature of those things in motion. I want to intercept the tangible objects in real life. But we cannot really acquire their power by doing so, which is why they need to be grafted into a poetic context. Also, to some extent, my work is subjective, but isn't that what art is? Art is always paradoxical, and an important function of being poetic is to resist reality.

This is why my work always mixes private space, street (public space) and digital space. For example, in “SOFTPIL 'LOW-rack'2”, I have placed a bed horizontally within the sculpture, suggesting the stillness of human body within the physical world while a television plays a video of exploring a virtual room with subjective perspective. The video is an article from the New York Times that I viewed online, and by clicking on the article I digitally entered an area of conflict. I roamed there and eventually found a bed. I wanted to talk about the relationship between people and technology, about how we use technology to enable our mobility, but also about the difference between physical and the mental movement.

Ruihan Zhu: I feel a kind of fluidity and variation in your exhibition. They are like objects remained after moving continuously in the space. You mentioned earlier that you found a bed during your roaming on the Internet. I would like to hear you talk about the relationship between the bed and this kind of variation. They seem to be contradictory.

David Douard: I often use beds or sofas as materials because I need these concrete objects to visualize my ideas. One can think of a static body based on a bed, but on the contrary, the body on the bed may constantly operate the brain, like our thoughts or dreams, which is an expression of our inner activities.

Ruihan Zhu: When speaking of the convergence of private, public and digital spaces or when you talk about language, you frequently use the word “contamination”, could you talk more about this concept?

David Douard: Language is a visualized existence, which expresses the invisible and continues to spread and grow in shadow. There is a word in French called “bouche à oreille” (word of mouth). I think that language transforms through such method. By contamination, I mean the corruption that environment produced through the transmission of culture. I often think about how to make these intangible, digital presences into something tangible and organic, and sometimes combine them with human body. For example, the viewer can see a tongue in a hand-blown glass ball in “Birdzhands and'US(B)”. The tongue is the only internal organ of all human organs that can be seen from the outside. I often make flowers or other things sprout from the tongue as a suggestion of contamination. On the other hand, I also often use plastic flowers or images of flower in my work because plants can break through public spaces, such as the plants we always find popping up through the gaps of fence. The color rose is also one of the elements I often use, I think in essence the color rose is a presence in nature that protects the roses.

Siqi Lin: Continuing with the topic of contamination, is it possible that the word can be traced back to a barrier as an origin? I find that the barrier is a necessary presence in your works, both on-site and conceptually. What is your understanding of and need for barriers? In addition, I also notice that there are something innocent in your works, such as little girl's stickers and hair clips, which carry a kind of hidden violence. How do you reconcile the relationship between violence and innocence?

David Douard: You will often find paradox in my works, just as graffiti appears in cities, streets and walls, where are restricted spaces. But it is because those restrictions that people want to express themselves in graffiti. The inspiration for my works may start with a very short text, but as the process goes on, I add a lot of objects, such as advertising lightboxes, curtains, iron fences and even sounds. All these objects express themselves and engage with the viewer. I think the hairpin on the tongue does have an element of violence. However, it is when one is compelled by violence that one has the desire to express oneself. What people see in my exhibition is my interpretation and understanding of what exists. I assemble elements from the cultural and natural worlds, regenerating a new form of poetic contamination. At the end of the exhibition, there is a video of a bee shot by high magnification zoom lens. However, you can also imagine it as other animals. What I want to create is a ghostly state haunting the exhibition space. I think the word existence

is a good word to summarize today: for me, what matters is not the expression of concept in language, but the solid existence of concept.

About the panelist

Xiaomu Cheng:

Doctor of Literature, Paris VII University

Researcher at Institute of World Literature, Peking University

Her work includes "Jean Genet, un Baroque modern" and the translation is "L'expérience intérieure" (Georges Bataille), "Le Balcon" (Jean Genet), L'atelier d'Alberto Giacometti.

Dongmen Yang:

Graduated from Paris VII University

Associate Professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts

Co-founder of Dawan Art

His works include "Spices", "The Old Prince", " Three stories of painting " and the translation is "L'Âge d'Homme"

Siqi Lin:

Writer

Graduated from California Institute of the Arts

Former editor of Art-Ba-BA and previously worked in the Exhibition Department of Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum

Ruihan Zhu:

Writer, exhibition executor

Graduated from Central Academy of Fine Arts

Now working at Beijing Jin Shangyi Art Foundation

About the artist

David Douard (1983, Perpignan, France), graduated from the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2011, currently lives and works in Paris.

Language is the very basis of David Douard's work. The texts and poems he collects on the Internet are manipulated, transformed in order to become a vital flow, feeding into his sculptures. Through language as an ingredient, David Douard redefines space as hybrid and collective by injecting anonymous, chaotic, deviant, ill and frustrating poems in it. As he recreates an infected environment where the real world used to be, the fantasy brought by new digital technologies

expands.

In 2017 he received the Fondazione Ettore Fico Prize on the occasion of the Artissima fair in Turin. His work has been shown by international institutions, solo exhibitions including: Magician Space, Beijing, China (2023); Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin, Germany (2023); UCCA Dune Art Museum, Qinhuangdao, China (2023); Serralves Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, Portugal (2022); Rodeo gallery, UK/Greece (2021); Galerie Chantal Crousel (2021, 2019); FRAC Île-de-France, Paris, France (2020); KURA. c/o Fonderia Artistica Battaglia, Milan, Italy (2018); Kunstverein Braunschweig, Germany (2016); Sculpture Center, New York, USA (2014); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2014).

Collective exhibitions including: Frac Grand Large, Dunkerque, France (2023); Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, France (2022); Galerie Christophe Gaillard, Paris, France (2021); Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Irish (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2018); Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, France (2015 and 2017); Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2015); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, Norway (2014); Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris, France (2012).

David Douard participated in numerous biennials: Gwangju Biennale (2018); Taipei Biennial (2014); Biennale de Lyon (2013).

David Douard was a resident fellow at the French Academy in Rome, Villa Medici in 2017-2018. His works have joined the collections of Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, France; Fonds national d'art contemporain, France.