

GALERIE
EVA MEYER

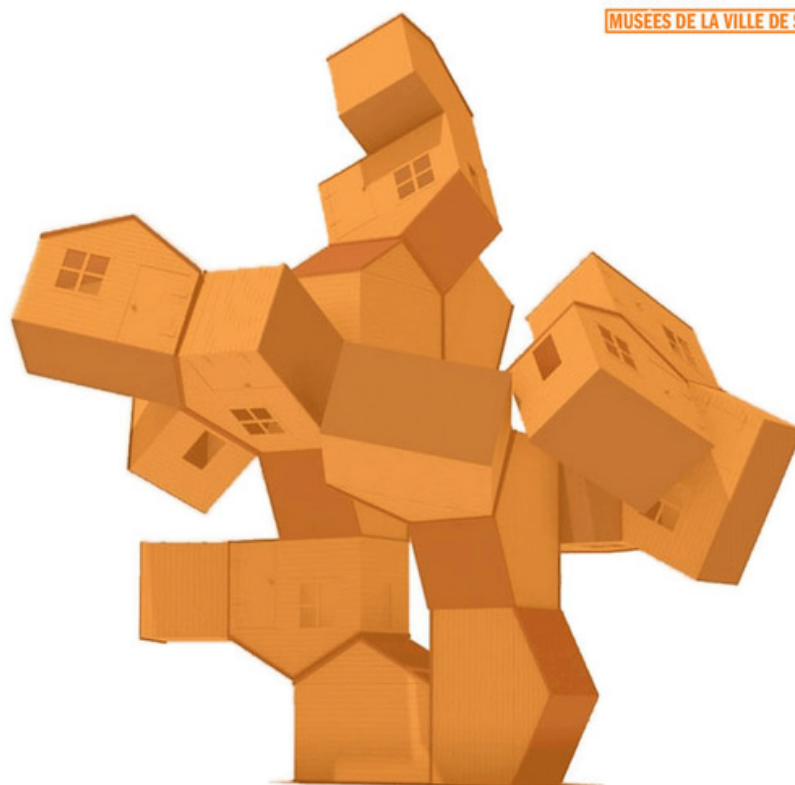
Interview realized by H  lo  se Conesa, curator of our Museum of modern and contemporary Art - Strasbourg.

SEVERINE
HUBARD

Village

MUSEUM OF MODERN AND
CONTEMPORARY ART
1, PLACE HANS JEAN ARP
STRASBOURG

MUSEES DE LA VILLE DE STRASBOURG



THE PROJECT

More "builder" than sculptor, over the last ten years S  verine Hubbard (born in Lille in 1977) has found a place for her approach in the heart of the urban setting. Falling within the province of photography, video and performance, her work mainly provokes a reflection on volume and space, at the crossroads between sculpture and architecture. This Fall, S  verine Hubbard is presenting a series of work in three of Strasbourg's museums including the monumental *Village*, presented at MAMCS beginning October 31st when she will welcome the public for a full day of performances, films and other diverse "Discours sur les passions de l'amour" (Discourse on the passions of love).

S  verine Hubbard's creations have something purposefully makeshift about them, while in fact they are skillfully worked pieces. Scraps of plywood from a hardware store (*Donc et or mais ni ou*, at the Lieu Unique in Nantes, 2002), broken windows (*Paysage d  fenestr  *, a composition of 90 broken windows created for Plate Forme in Dunkerque, 2003) or again the doors of an abandoned building pending destruction (*Vue du Ciel*, Le Quartier, Quimper, 2008), the material she chooses is not random: it refers back to the city and the materiality of its buildings, the preferred stomping ground of this "artist without a workshop".

S  verine Hubbard's work, however, never limits itself to one single concrete approach since she is able to give the most banal elements new dimension: above and beyond their sometimes brute aspect, her pieces, a combination of poetry and humor, also subtly touch upon the notion of memory (of a place, a building, its inhabitants). Some of her projects incorporate public participation into their dynamic and creation.

The artist will be showing three pieces in Strasbourg's museums; a video called *R  volution* at the Zoological Museum, *Le Cr  ne de Pierre* at the Archeological Museum... and the grandiose *Village* at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. A work specially created for MAMCS, *Village* is a monumental assemblage of 18 "sheds" stacked together and measuring over ten meters in height.

Installed in the space behind the museum's nave, the work can be seen from both inside and outside the museum.

Opening: Friday, October 30th from 6:30 pm

An event organized in partnership with les Journ  es de l'Architecture

CAREER PATH

Could you tell us something about your training, your development as an artist?

I studied at the school of Fine arts in Dunkerque, and then in Nantes. When I finished school, I quickly realized that the system of "residencies" corresponded to the way I work, on site in a given context. For example, during my first four month residency at the National Sculpture Factory of Cork I wanted to **transfer the historical monument Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge** in Northern Ireland from its location between two cliffs and show it between two buildings in Cork, Ireland for the winter. This was a first contact with the world of engineering and while the project never saw completion, the experience was quite enlightening.

Then in 2004 I went to Kaus Australis, in Rotterdam which is right next to a waste collection center where I helped myself to a dumpster of wood to create a new sculpture from a wood pallet daily for two months. It was an intense period of work and research which was like **a continual performance**. Since then I participate in nearly one residency every year, either in France or abroad. I am currently involved in an exchange between Shanghai-Besançon organized by the Le Pave dans la mare Art Center. **On n'a jamais été si proche** (We've never been so close), evolved from a visit to Shanghai, it is a wooden sculpture I created by myself this summer at the Hangar aux manoeuvres de la citadelle in Besançon for the **Traffic art highway** exhibit. This piece will be created in metal at a factory enviroining Shanghai in 2010.

CONCEPT AND DESIGN

How did you come up with your monumental project at MAMC Strasbourg?

After I had been invited to MAMCS by Joelle Pijaudier-Cabot and Estelle Pietrzyk I suggested occupying the courtyard of the Sculpture Garden by architect Adrien Fainsilber. This space has been empty and unoccupied for as long as I can remember. So I came up with an idea called **Village** which takes the form of a monumental sculpture using both the length and the width of the courtyard.

The first model was in balsa, part of a piece created in 2006, in fact. The idea of a layout of houses spreading in all directions was already in its embryonic form in **Entre-deux** exhibited in Frankfurt during my first show **Ohne Brücke keine Perspektive** where I wanted to rethink the city and specific areas in it (the town center, the stadium, monuments and religion, the harbor...) The model in question was part of a concept treating in-between spaces, or transition spaces, whose elements are visible from the highway (electricity pylon, forest, bedroom suburbs...).

Then I commissioned a 3D project allowing me to get a grasp on the difficulties I would be up against and provide **visuals showing projected results** (I'm quite surprised how close 3D image actually is to the final product).

That was the first time I had ever used 3D: in general I'm wary of 3D software, I don't want to learn to use it because I don't want it to influence my work too much.

So I showed up at the museum with convincing images and a model.

Once the project was accepted, I had to give it shape. Working alongside Daniel Del Degan head of technical services and the staff at the Museums of Strasbourg, as well as the OTE (research department) was a really great experience.

CHAOS

And can you tell us more about how this construction entitled Village is assembled? Its layout seems disorganized but in the same time there is a feeling of order in its anarchy, its arborescence... it resembles fractal art when mathematical calculations govern the study of chaotic systems.

In fact for me it's really an experimental construction: leaving off from one or two houses and building a construction that unfolds like a tree or a crystal.

I recently saw Daniel Libeskind's **Michael Lee Chin Crystal** at the Royal Museum of Ontario. It seems that the idea behind this ensemble is randomness, but in fact, nothing is more ordered and complex than a crystal. It's the same thing with the tree construction in **Village**. The order/chaos dialectic is a part of nature's laws and I wanted to apply this to urban space.

There is a simple layout at work here: the floor is never connected to the roof, and nothing's connected to the façade. Leaving off from that principle, several complementarities are possible: roof-roof/roof-side/floor-side...

Finally from an urbanistic point of view, I wanted to undermine the dictate of horizontality in **Village's** construction and put forward a construction that borrows from the vertical and the oblique. I want people to ask themselves: why we should continue horizontally aligning houses when we can invent more imaginary buildings?

AVANT-GARDE

This verticality and schematization of forms is in echo with De Stijl's theories. Even if Mondrian shuns the oblique, we know that the diagonal plays a role in Van Doesburg's work, especially concerning the Aubette. In other respects, you define yourself as a "Constructor" a term Lissitzky and the Russian constructivists used before you. How is your work based on the avant-garde's influence?

You are right, my work is influenced by the constructivists: three quarters of my layouts are very constructed, orthogonal. But in my work I resist any notion of functionality: I don't do design. In that sense, I don't share all of the same priorities as the avant-garde.

Another thing I'm interested in is the idea of profusion. Therefore a work like *Donc et or car mais ni ou* is influenced by constructivism but in the same time it is proliferating and without geometrical layout. There is a board at a 45 degree angle in the installation, but this is an exception to the rule I have laid down for myself. Because even if Van Doesburg chose the diagonal, it is still obvious that the oblique is a constructive principle for him, something that structures. Whereas I am more and more interested in deconstruction.

As a matter of fact I am interested in Frank Gehry's architectural constructions, Zaha Hadid or Claude Parent, and I like Virilio's theories on the spatial dynamics of the city. In *Village*, I think that I deconstruct more than I construct starting from a formal motif of the roof's slope.

INFLUENCES

Would you say that your influences are more on the side of architecture or sculpture?

Well, I am influenced by numerous mediums: video and cinema and also drawing, but it's true that I am more attracted to three-dimensional works.

In the sphere of contemporary sculpture I really like the work of a sculptor like Deacon for example, the way he plays with full and empty in materials, especially wood. As an anecdote, when I finished the school of Fine Arts, I applied as a boat builder I was intrigued by its technical side and I wanted to decode the internal and structural mechanisms governing forms.

In general, I really like the ins and outs of what was called the new English sculpture in the 1980's : Deacon but also Tony Cragg.

I'm also interested in work by sculptors like Manfred Pernice, Thomas Schütte, Pedro Cabrita Reis, Karsten Höller, Romain Pellas, Vincent Lamouroux. And there are also artist-architects like Luc Deleu.

UTOPIA

The idea of undermining the diktat of horizontality in favor of more original constructions gives your work a utopian dimension and also opens up a rethinking of alternative architecture. Do you follow the lines of members of Archigram, for example who, in the 60's wanted to develop a poetic and ironic vision of the urban, marked by science-fiction but in which the city remains oriented towards people and their interrelationship?

Yes, it's true that in my utopian impulses I'm exploring a new vision of the city. I'm trying to find a new make-up for the city. Nonetheless, I observe very intense architectural and urbanistic reflections from afar.

But I can certainly relate to certain projects, in Shanghai, for example, there's a project to build a sort of vertical city: a sky-scraper capable of housing 100,00 people that I find rather fascinating. (image 11 and hypertext link Bionic Tower). In Rotterdam too, though more modestly, there are cubed houses floating above ground on their edges. While *Village* has a utopian dimension, I nonetheless leave off from reality. In fact, in my work, I don't want to destroy the existing, on the contrary: these mundane houses exist, what can we do with them? How do you use the real and make it more poetic? Finally, I'm looking to develop "heterotopias", or counter-spaces as Foucault called them¹.

¹ In his 1967 conference at the Circle of Architectural Studies entitled "Other Spaces", Foucault recognizes two ideal types of space, "utopias (that) are sites without real place, and heterotopias (that) are real places, true places, places which are an institutional part of society and which serve as a counter-space, a type of true utopia".

QUESTIONING

Village features a type of living space similar to suburban housing's mundane architecture, housing that was already a central element in your video *Un jour (One day)*. Is this your way of criticizing ordinary, everyday architecture, typical of a standardization in suburbanite town planning?

In fact, there was no real design to challenge, because I myself lived in this type of housing when I was young and it's a nice place to live: the housing is comfortable, there are fewer cars around, kids can play outside. In this sense the mundane has something reassuring about it. I choose then to spice up this universe by incorporating an element of deviance into town planning which might liven up the way we see daily life. In this direction, I am trying to work out the relationship between people and the housing they are offered.

PUBLIC SPACE

Can we evoke the political or social implications of your work? Does your work's insertion in the public arena contribute to this new approach?

Yes, definitely. I am interested in *polis*, the city and interactions between a city and its population. I like the idea that my work relates to people in public space. For *Vue du ciel*, I was already involved in this problematic. I was surprised by the urban reconstruction that considerably modified Quimper's landscape and especially the priority urban zone Penhars. I also fell in love with the *Maison pour tous*' late seventies architecture, destined to disappear in three years time. I built a giant model of the MPT on the scale of the exhibition gallery from a stock-load of doors from Penhars' buildings under dismantlement. In 2012 the MPT will be destroyed and I let it be known that I was interested in occupying this public space by installing a sculpture with the same form as the building. Inhabitants could use this sculpture as a meeting place. It also represents a token of memory created for public space while not necessarily perennial.

In the same rights, in Strasbourg I want to extend the spiral staircase that stretched to Churchill bridge, today obsolete. It is the confrontation between my works and public space that I'm most interested in, and so my work obviously has social and political implications.

BIRD VIEW

You proposed two versions of the work *Vue du ciel*. Do you want to follow the same course of action in *Village*, with one work occupying museum space and another urban space?

Yes, true. For *Vue du ciel*, there is the museum piece, the one that the Fonds national d'art contemporain acquired and which will be presented at the pole formation of the CCI beginning October 26th. And then there is another version for the public space, of a different material, something that people can use.

The museum's public is not the same: visitors went to the trouble to go see the piece. At MAMCS, the work is outside the museum and inside at the same time since you can see it from the nave. For now, *Village* could be seen as a manifesto. It is a demonstrative image, a model of experimental construction that has its place in the museum. There is a play on perspective with the window, this is part of the exhibition process, a way to show off the work. By simply looking at *Village* I'd like people to get a feeling that they are strolling through different space: the wall becomes the roof, the right wall the façade, etc. A bit like walking on and through the upside down bunkers in Normandy's cliffs. In the near future, *Village* could be set up in a park so the population would be able to, for example, circle it, lean against it to read, appropriate it. In any case, I want the work to have a life after MAMCS. It will probably be necessary to change the wood so that it acquires the patina of its new location, but the piece will remain exactly as it is.

EPHEMERAL

Isn't this notion of perpetuation contrary to some of your previous work when the work was destroyed? Have your ideas about the ephemeral evolved?

Not completely. In reality, even in the public space, I am all for the ephemeral or at least change.

In Pau, I accepted the inter-communal cultural Pole's proposition for one of my works to appropriate public space: this implied a week, a month, three years. I came up with a two-year project. In this sense, I think it's great that once the work is visible it incites questioning, but then when it disappears, it also questions by its absence.

In 2004 in Strasbourg, within the framework of *Interim # 1, Una settimana* I created *Pavillons* in the Esplanade neighborhood. This project consisted of building a type of giant 200m² model over a week's time with help of people from the neighborhood using material that had been salvaged. Each participation was designated by a small wooden flag (pavillon) and at the end of the week, the entire construction was set afire. This was a reflection on memory. I think that fire and the destruction it implied, the loss that it entailed did more to fix the project's memory in people's minds than anything else: they took pictures, they talked about it, there was an idea of ceremony that stood out in their minds more than a permanent sculpture would have. The ephemeral side of things is meaningful for me.

LEGO

Children's playhouses are already caricatures of adult houses. It's true that these houses are a little like elaborated sheds, garden sheds. A house designed to be smooth with pure lines: two windows, a door, a little red sloped roof. The module houses in *Village* remind us of the ones in the fairytale of the three little pigs.

But the playhouses at the garden's edge become a real place of existence for the child, a concrete space housing the imaginary, a multifarious space. *Village's* tree of houses becomes the medium of a dreamy heterotopia such as Foucault's boat¹.

¹In his 1966 conference entitled "Heterotopias", Foucault explains : "Civilizations without boats are like children whose parents are without a big bed to play on; their dreams dry up, spying then replaces adventure, and the hideousness of police the sunny beauty of pirates."

HUMOUR

Humor is yet another tool you use to open up the eyes in relationship to artwork, especially your titles, yet *Village* seems a rather sober title on the lines of the tautological word/image.

Humor in my eyes goes a lot further than militant discourse. A message reaches more people if it is done with humor. Titles definitely are a part of my research. So, I played around and reformulated the mnemonic phrase we teach children to learn conjunctions of coordination: "mais ou et donc or ni car", choosing them randomly to entitle one of my installation *Donc et or car mais ni ou*.

For *Village* the title is a little abrupt. In the beginning, I wanted to choose an Alsatian word as a kind of veiled reference to the villages around Strasbourg or a "flowered Village", bringing to mind a contest for the most beautifully-flowered village, but also the idea of a construction that grows like a tree, a flower. Incidentally, the nickname given to this work is the "tree of houses", but by calling it *Village*, the sculpture has a direct reference to the urban.

While its title is literal, isn't there a humoristic dimension to the work considering the absurd nature of a village that doesn't in fact play the role it's supposed to.

In my opinion what is funny is that this architectural proposition can't be materialized. It is a model and not something doable, and yet the title implies in an almost peremptory way that it's a village. But this village will never be lived in. I like to create images of ideas, images that feed people's urbanistic imagination. *Village* is only a giant model. I think the fact that its construction is practically at scale 1 even when the urban project will never be built, this gap between reality and play, involves a certain amount of humor. It's like a child's dream in which a giant Playmobil comes to life. Here it's a matter of a monumental model and not a mini-village. Therefore there's a certain exaggeration and disproportion provoking humor.

CONSTRUCTION

Some images to understand the construction of *Village* as well as France Alsace's **special program** ICI dated Oct. 10th.

