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MAY 2018



**WILL
RYMAN**
MAKING THE
WORLD HIS
STAGE

**SUBODH
GUPTA**
INDIA'S MOST
FAMOUS
CONTEMPORARY
ARTIST NOW
A GLOBAL
PHENOMENON

A NEW HOME
FOR GIACOMETTI'S
STUDIO

+ THE MAKING OF 'GUERNICA'
AT THE MUSÉE PICASSO PARIS



CONTENTS



36

Will Ryman
at Parc Villette
in Paris

16 **Conversation With
Alma Luxembourg,
Luxembourg &
Dayan Gallery**
On René Magritte's surreal
works and more
by Franca Toscano

22 **A Conversation
With Loring
Randolph, Frieze
New York**
The artistic director discusses
the upcoming fair with the
co-organizer of the Frieze Talks
by Amy Zion

28 **"We've a Problem on
Our Spaceship"**
Honored as the 'Master of
Photography', Edward Burtynsky
shares how it all began with
shooting local landscapes
by Franca Toscano

36 **Will Ryman: Making
the World His Stage**
Ryman's first major European
project is a three-part installation
at Paris's Parc de La Villette,
encompassed within the city's
multidisciplinary Festival 100%.
by Sarah Moroz

44 **A Man of Steel**
An exhaustive exhibition of
the works of Subodh Gupta
at the Monnaie De Paris is an
excellent opportunity to get
a glimpse of the growth of
Contemporary Indian art
by Archana Khare-Ghose

50 **Eric Mack: A
Painter With No
Boundaries**
The artist's works are all set
to transform the notion of
paintings
by Franca Toscano



Rene Magritte (Or: The Rule of Metaphor), Paintings from the years 1927-30, "Lovers," 1928, Oil on canvas, 211/4 x 283/4 in. (54 x 73 cm.)

Will Ryman:
La Villette Heads





WILL RYMAN: MAKING THE WORLD HIS STAGE

RYMAN'S FIRST MAJOR
EUROPEAN PROJECT,
ON VIEW THROUGH
SEPTEMBER 16, IS A THREE-
PART INSTALLATION AT
PARIS'S PARC DE LA
VILLETTE, ENCOMPASSED
WITHIN THE CITY'S
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
FESTIVAL 100%.

BY SARAH MOROZ



Will Ryman:
"Lo Villelles
Heads"

Creatively speaking, Will Ryman started out as a playwright. "I used to invent my own words to give the characters their dialogue," the New York-born artist explained. "The dialogue was nothing but a string of syllables and sounds that were lyrical." Inspired by the Dada movement and Surrealism, the plays were about the unconscious; they weren't about meaning. His characters struggled to articulate themselves, and that struggle led to absurd situations. "They weren't action stories. So... nobody ever wanted to perform in them," Ryman laughed, "or produce or direct them. Because no one understood them."

Since his attempt to convey the limitations of language wasn't resonating, he took a new tack: "I decided to sculpt my characters. I was more interested in their thought process, their emotional life — their emotional intelligence.

I'm interested in the process of what happens in your mind before an idea is formed. There's a lot going on."

"He's trying to make theater sets that don't need actors," Alanna Heiss, former director of P.S.1, expounded in a *New York Times* article. She continued: "We can be art shrinks and say, well with Ryman as a father" — that would be the artist Robert Ryman — "and a minimalist conceptual painter mother" — that would be Merrill Wagner — "maybe he has a reason to move toward images that carry a narrative."

Ryman hasn't written a play in the last 14 years, although he has just started up again. He admits he's not much of a theater-goer himself, although he states that he was recently floored by a production of Ibsen's "A Doll's House."

In lieu of relinquishing linguistic meaning, he has started relinquishing formal control. Ryman's first major European project (on view



PHOTO BY ANDRONE AN CONGUGIETY IMAGES FOR WILL BYMAN

Will Ryman



Will Ryman:
La Vilette
Pac-Lab

through September 16) is a three-part installation at Paris's Parc de La Villette, encompassed within the city's multidisciplinary Festival 100%. The artist is no stranger to making public work on a grand scale — in 2011, his piece "The Roses" stood on Park Avenue in New York City, and two years later his large-scale "Bird," made from more than five thousand metal nails, was positioned on the Flatiron Plaza.

For this commission, curator Jérôme Neutres came to Ryman's studio in downtown Manhattan in October 2016, and asked Ryman to make a proposal for the Parc de la Villette.

the specific sites that were speaking to me."

"Heads," surrounding the Fontaine aux Lions, are seven sulfuric sculptures — the urban yellow of traffic lights, of painted lines on the streets. "Heads" look abstract in form, but Ryman clarified emphatically: "they're figurative." Sculpted in clay, cast in resin, and then painted, each is christened with lines or fragments of lines from Samuel Beckett's 1948 oeuvre "Waiting for Godot." The play's philosophical themes are ageless, if a bit portentous: "The Essential Doesn't Change." "Nothing to be done." "Some remain so" — completing the line "All men are born mad..."

"THERE'S NO RHYME OR REASON WHATSOEVER! BUT WHEN YOU GET INTIMATE WITH A MATERIAL, YOU KNOW WHEN IT'S DONE"

"I didn't know what that was," Ryman admitted — so he made several pilgrimages to the site the following month. In the 19th arrondissement, far from Paris's art epicenter, Parc de la Villette is a flat green space bisected by the Canal de l'Ourcq; within its parameters, it houses a science museum and several concert venues, including the Philharmonie de Paris. Architect Bernard Tschumi's "follies" dot the landscape with red enamel steel structures. Although Ryman absorbed the history and architecture, "I didn't want to react to that," he said, but rather engage "with

Each "Head" was created using the same method — a new one, for Ryman. He celebrates "having an intimate relationship with the clay, in terms of allowing it to do what it can do, and the material giving back by allowing my hands to do what they do." Taking large blocks of clay, he closed his eyes and set a timer for two-and-half or three minutes, pushing and sculpting until the time expired. The negative space in his sculptures is caused by trying to stretch out the clay too enthusiastically: when it would break, he would stick it back on, not knowing where, with his closed eyes. "I stop



Willy Ryman: La Vierge
Sisyphus

the timer before I would start thinking of images," he said. "Our brains are always trying to solve the problem, and always will solve it, but that's not what I wanna do." As he described it: "these are thought processes in the form of a sculpture." He would take breaks, sometimes for days, and start again with the material, until it felt complete. "There's no rhyme or reason whatsoever! But when you get intimate with a material, you know when it's done."

Further afield, at Prairie du Cercle Nord, is "Pac Lab": a maze of oversized resin slabs in primary colors, named after the video arcade game. While visually playful, its intent is to

movements reflected in the mirror finish of the giant globe that crowns the park's science museum, "La Géode." Ryman reminisced fondly: "When I was a little kid, I used to run around on Carl Andre sculptures in sculpture parks. I wanted to make this able to do that." Ryman noted that seen from above, "Pac Lab" evokes Piet Mondrian-style lines; but at ground level, he said simply: "I want kids to jump around on it."

Also situated at Prairie du Cercle Nord is the more discrete bronze sculpture "Sisyphus" — so-named for the mythological figure condemned to pushing a boulder up a hill only

“ART OPENS UP PLACES IN YOUR MIND THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW WERE THERE. YOU HAVE TO PUSH THAT ALONG A LITTLE BIT, BUT IT'S THERE”

skewer the voraciousness of contemporary consumer culture, like the endless appetite of the iconic Pac-Man.

Made with same approach as the sinuous "Heads," the blocks were primitively fashioned while Ryman's eyes were closed. "It's almost like my unconscious interpreting what a straight line is, which is impossible," he reasoned, "but which was the point!" He didn't seal the clay, letting it shrink, crack and warp. "That's what clay wants to do," Ryman said with a shrug. He likes that individuals can encounter the work ad hoc and engage with it. Indeed, as he surveyed "Pac Lab" from across the canal on an elevated walkway, young explorers were wending through and ducking down behind its outlines, their darting

to have it roll back down, in an infinite cycle. For Ryman, it's a "contemporary bust of the consciousness of a man today."

When asked whether he thinks art can provide hope — after all, what's more defeatist than Sisyphus? More gluttonous than Pac-Man? — he said that, bleak references aside, he believes art has a humanizing effect. "When you go to the Met or the Louvre — which bring together different cultures, different systems — they're trying to sort out the same things, and they're speaking to us. The art today will speak to someone else. That's what makes everything OK." He added: "art opens up places in your mind that you didn't know were there. You have to push that along a little bit, but it's there." MP