

galerie dohyanglee

TEXT //
LAURENT MARESCHAL

GENERAL BIOGRAPHY LAURENT MARESCHAL

Laurent Mareschal was born in Dijon, 1975. He lives and works in Paris. In his videos, installations and performances, Laurent Mareschal uses unexpected ways. During the displacement of symbolic contexts, a simple gesture becomes the support to a political confrontation, a game turns into a desperate fight against time, a friendly meeting around an ephemeral installation gives rise to historical stories. Between engagement and subtlety, his projects draw strength from the experience of those who share them.

Anna Olszewska

Laurent Mareschal exhibits regularly in France and abroad, his work has been showcased at Victoria & Albert Museum (London,UK), Van Abbe Museum (Eindhoven, The Netherlands), CAPC Museum (Bordeaux, France), Grand Palais (Paris), New Manege (Moscow), Le Fresnoy (Tourcoing, France), in Printemps de Septembre (Toulouse, France), au Ashdod Art Museum (Israël), at Stadtmuseum (Karlsruhe, Germany). In 2011, the Ashdod Art Museum published his first monographic catalogue.

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LA FORÊT PENSANTE

A solo exhibition of the works of **Laurent Mareschal**
October 12th - November 16th 2024

With the support for the galleries / exhibition of  Centre national des arts plastiques
(National Centre for Visual Arts).

Porte de Vincennes
23rd September 2024

La Forêt Pensante (The Thinking Forest) was the nickname given to the University of Vincennes, located in the heart of the wood of the same name in eastern Paris, from 1968 to 1980. In the aftermath of May 68, in order to keep the revolutionaries away from the historic centre of Paris and the Sorbonne, the De Gaulle government decided to build a new university that was both experimental and revolutionary in its operation, but also in its aims.

A popular university open to non-graduates, workers and foreigners, with no age limit. A university where lectures are replaced by debate, criticism, exchange and conversation, and which includes a crèche (nursery) so that parents can continue to attend classes.

This university, new in its experimentation, was characterized by the freedom given to students and to the left-wing political movements of the post-May 1968 period, as well as a great deal of political effervescence.

In 1980, President Giscard d'Estaing ordered that the university centre be demolished. Muzzled and then destroyed by public opinion, the revolutionary left-wing university created by a run-down right-wing government was closed by order of the Ministry against the wishes of those working there and the students. Not a trace of the site remains today. The revolutionary symbol inherited from May 68 has disappeared. It is still known today as the lost university.

This political, historical reminder is important, and it's not for nothing that Laurent Mareschal has chosen the nickname given to the University of Vincennes as the title for his new exhibition. What we need to remember above all is the speed with which the political power in place acted to displace and/or silence the revolutionary voices that rose up, too many and too loud, against it.

At the entrance to the gallery, behind a window, like an acronym announcing what is to come, hangs an eponymous work made of green neon letters : **Bureau d'Échange**. We are invited to share our ideas and understand what's going on within these walls.

Not far away, on the floor behind the illuminated lettering at the back of the gallery, a charcoal-coloured cloth is spread out with wooden pegs on top. This is not a game board, but a message in Braille. Arranged like the raised signs of writing for the blind, their composition translates Fénelon's famous letter to King Louis XIV in 1694, urging him to listen to his people and hear their troubles, or risk succumbing to a 'revolution' himself.

If the message of this **Letter to the Blind** is deaf to those who look at the work without understanding Braille, as deaf as Louis XIV in his time, it was no less a harbinger at the time of the upheavals to come in 1789. And while Fénelon's words may have been prophetic for France, the work is at least as much a harbinger of the rest of the exhibition.

Just before descending the stairs to the rest of the exhibition, a black-and-white photographic montage appears. A large, walled university building, with a sheet hanging from one of the windows, tagged 'No to closure.' While this is of course a view of the University of Vincennes, we see it here as if it had survived and we were observing it through the prism of our times, when France is led, as it was then, by a particularly right-wing and conservative, not to say refractory, government.

It is hard not to draw a parallel between monarchical France, overthrown by revolution, and an authoritarian government that has no regard for the results of the ballot box, as if, like Fénelon's letter to the king, popular demands that go unheeded by the government can only end up in revolution. All the more so when the video piece in the same room, **United AI**, mounted as a communication object, urges the publishers of artificial intelligence to take responsibility for and stop systematically exploiting the sentimental misery of their customers.

Even more than with Braille, the following works use coded languages. And while these signs are silent until we play them, they carry messages that are much stronger than they appear to be.

Alabama, based on John Coltrane's piece of the same name, composed in 1963 after a racist attack by the Ku Klux Klan on a church for African-Americans in Alabama, which killed four girls, as a work made of hair. This piece uses the score of the song that served the cause and the conquest of African-American civil rights in the United States. White nails act as notes on the score, and the braided strands of hair link them together as if the piece were being played by an instrument of silent memory, in which the melancholy and the pent-up anger that preside over it are particularly moving.

At the back of the room, a long bar code made up of the lead of pencils, entitled **Mine de rien**, is another graphic code, this time referring to a phrase by the author Henry David Thoreau and his seminal book *Civil Disobedience*. Next to it sits a large, colourful, abstract calendar for the year 2023, entirely handmade in felt-tip pen, tracing the timetable of a mid-career visual artist. The lack of free time is glaringly obvious. It's a real-life experience... Further on, three music boxes entitled **You'd Better Start Early** play jingles from Windows, McDonalds and Apple. Irony is never far off.

From the next room comes the sound of the video work **Des Nouilles Encore** (More Noodles). A unionist operetta for two female opera singers and a harpist, set to Offenbach's *Barcarole*. The lyrics openly criticize the pension reform that was recently rammed through the National Assembly by using the 49.3 Article. However, the least ambiguous piece of work in this entire Thinking Forest will surely remain the megaphone turned against the wall. A vehicle for inaudible and incomprehensible demands, it lives up to its name: **Parler aux murs** (Talking to Walls).

Everything could be summed up here. No matter how hard the voices of the people try to be heard, no one listens. Worse still, these voices are silenced by radical political action, sometimes more than authoritarian. The demand then becomes a fight. The struggle of an artist who, in graphic codes normally reserved for sales and efficiency, transmits voices of defiance and ideas of civil disobedience.

Léo Marin
Translated in English by Emmelene Landon

THE TASTE OF OTHERS, A TEMPORARY EXHIBITION
OF LAURENT MARESCHAL, TEXT BY NATACHA NATAF

for the exhibition *The Taste of Others*, Galerie Fernand Léger, Ivry sur Seine, France,
September 22nd - December 17 2022

As guest in residence at the Fernand Léger Gallery in Ivry-sur-Seine, Laurent Mareschal has chosen to make the city the beating heart of his exhibition: a sensory, if not synesthetic, journey, composed of fourteen new works in situ. The largest of these is a sound installation, a polyphony in which twenty or so Ivry residents of all generations recount their most vivid olfactory or gustatory memories. Mixed into a flow of concrete sounds recorded in the café, the day-care center or in the subway, their voices and their laughter, sometimes their silences too, take us to the distant and mysterious isle of childhood. From the incomparable smell of jasmine in the Mediterranean to that of a guava tree in grandparents' garden, these lands that we thought were fossilized, buried under a thousand sediments of memory, become marvelously fertile again at the simple evocation of a perfume. Plunged into darkness, standing or in a deckchair, the audience drifts through this invisible archipelago, their way lit only by modest lampshades found at Emmaüs. The bulbs twitch and flicker, beating the measure of whatever is being played. Their luminous circuit runs above our heads to the rhythm of the sound loop of the confidences, an endless ritornello of emotions. As in the second part of the exhibition — a prestidigitation of cocoa powder, candies and spices more focused on the illusion of the senses — the impalpability of memories is revealed through the very fabric of the past. Tired leatherette and faded velvet unwanted furniture and locks without keys... In each installation, waste and rejection illuminate each other, the occasion of a more or less magical reunion. More than a temporary exhibition, *Le Goût des Autres* is an exhibition of time itself. The theatre of other lives, and the highlighting of a second life that has not lost sight of the first. Even in the middle of the night or under a "lichen of time" that has become too invasive.

Le temps d'un parfum (The Life of a Perfume).

They haven't seen anything yet but already, they are more than simple spectators. Their eyes close, their tongues untie; an invisible thread unites them. The voluptuous air, loaded with spices, transports them between the stalls of an oriental market and even further than that: in time. Like Hansel and Gretel lost in the haunted forest, they all go into the darkness towards *Beiti* — a work that signifies "my home" in Arabic and Hebrew. But too late, alas: the gingerbread walls have already been devoured. Only the ghost of their ruin remains, which always takes a fabulous turn with Laurent Mareschal: 40 square meters of cement tiles beautifully drawn on the floor... from spices. Between the loops and scrolls, a scented geometry, an abstract garden composed only of zaatar, sumac, white pepper, ginger and turmeric. But, unlike the kolams that flourish on the doorstep of houses in India, the *Beiti* spice carpet is only dark melancholy. A world has been laid flat, here, and is holding its breath. In Hebrew, spice is called tavlin. The etymology is not clear, but tavlin would be the plural of tevel ("the world," "the universe"). A plurality of worlds, therefore, contained in a single seed. And from this seed an infinity of ground grains whose illusion (cosmic? political?) threatens to fly away at the merest breath. Minimalist yet very embodied, Laurent Mareschal's site-specific work bears witness to his years spent in Israel, the homeland of his wife, the photographer Tami Notsani. Promised land - of his promise, but also land of shadow, dust of peace. The theatre of a disillusionment that the artist has expressed forthrightly during a performance entitled *White Line*. In the Palestinian village of Al Walaja, near Bethlehem, he reproduced on the ground the line of the wall that would soon separate the inhabitants from their cemetery and their water source. The arbitrariness of the political decision was embodied in the obstinate figure of the artist who drew with lime (a material with which the Palestinians also cover their tombs) this border intended, with the greatest absurdity, to designate parcels of land as well as paths: Hansel lined up his white pebbles, as if there were still time to hope to find the path of reason.

Cypress trees, palm leaves and oriental stars.

In the "land of Uzi and falafel", says Laurent Mareschal with irony, other wars are brewing, such as the less deadly but very real war over hummus. Claimed as their own by eight Middle Eastern countries, the chickpea puree was at the center of another geopoetic performance by the artist. As big as a large carpet adorned with beautiful Palestinian embroidery in zaatar, sumac and cumin, the dish, served on the floor, served as a lure to explain to the audience what these patterns of cypress, palm leaves and stars of Bethlehem said about the Bedouin women who made and

wore them. “ I was trying to share what I had gleaned in Palestine through this ephemeral appropriation,” says Laurent Mareschal. This nearly-lost craft of cross-stitch embroideries, now classified by UNESCO, now has its museum far from the West Bank, in the United States. Not surprisingly, the public knows little of this stylized landscape studded with exile and tragedy.

Abysses of spice.

Ici, ailleurs (Here, elsewhere) : an immense ellipse strewn on the ground. At its center, a black hole. And intoxicating notes, to the point of vertigo. Paprika, coffee, sumac, curry, turmeric, ginger form a soft gradation up to the vortex of burnt vine shoots. More than an ellipse, it is a hole in time that winds towards nothingness. *Vertigo*. Chris Marker - who saw Hitchcock's film “19 times,” recalls Laurent Mareschal — took up the hypnotic motif of the spiral in *La Jetée*. His hero, “chosen from a thousand for his fixation on an image from the past” is haunted by the face of a woman who returns in a loop in scenes already experienced. Is there a face lurking beneath *Ici, ailleurs*? We follow the spiral to the heart of the vineyards, in the artist's birthplace, which after a silence evokes this memory: the garden impregnated with the “extraordinary perfume of the flowers” that his mother planted there. “Fabulous flowerbeds” that he levels, like a secret map of the world, and fertilizes by transmuting ash into gold. Here lie his rings of Saturn, and his deepest burns.

Like a sweet and wild vanity.

Recently, the artist- alchemist found himself in a castle in Monbazillac. The memory he retained was of neither the grandiloquence nor the glorious past of this place rich in history. As always, his gaze was focused on the ground, on simple cracked flagstones, whose fissures he highlighted with dried marigold petals — a rustic flower renowned for its — soothing and healing properties. A modest presence that was nonetheless enough to embalm the space with light pollen scent. A vanity bloomed on the floor, soft and wild, like a buttercup *kintsugi*. Further on, in another room, faded squares and rectangles forming a strange score appeared on the walls. Ghosts of paintings that Laurent Mareschal replicated on the floor in monochromes of turmeric that gave them back all their brightness. *Avec le temps* (“With time”) is the title of this silent sonata. A wonderful ricochet to an as-yet unpublished project by the artist, entitled *A la Recherche des Temps Perdus*. A copy similar in every way to the volume published by Gallimard, but amputated from the paragraphs in which the word “time” does not appear. Their absence inhabits the pages, and almost obsesses them, like phantom limbs. To all these games of revelation and disappearance, Proust's monument, entirely contained in a madeleine, has of course served as a matrix: “When from an ancient past nothing remains,” he writes in *Swann's Way*, “after the death of beings, after the destruction of things, only, more frail but more vivacious, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and the flavor still remain for a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, on the, ruin of all the rest carrying without bending, on their almost impalpable droplet, the immense edifice of memory.”

Under the lichen of time.

The double helix staircase that opens Laurent Mareschal's exhibition at the Fernand Leger Gallery is immense. As at Chambord, our regard is carried away by its hypnotic presence ; a round of words swirls on its infinite rotation. It is a generative video of a poem by the artist, as much as an invitation to fall endlessly into the well of wonders. The words *bonbec*, *jasmine*, *exquisite* stand out and the mechanical ballet of memories begins. Already, at the foot of the (real) ramp of the art center, a first piece of furniture appears, curiously coveted with beeswax, As fascinating as it is disturbing, the honeycomb panels seem to be able to absorb everything and to trap the least sound in their contact. Is the object (a writing desk), silent, closed on itself stamped with the seal of secrecy? Since silence is golden, Laurent Mareschal pays homage to his grand-father, a beekeeper, whose darker side invades the whole space of this “very” personal exhibition. We are back in the house of childhood and the ogress of the Grimm brothers. The tale can resume. Here, someone has covered a table with a red gingham tablecloth, made of powdered sugar and strips of sour candy. But there is no chair to sit on. There, on the floor, lies a lace curtain of which only the livid, floured spectre remains. Further on, the drawers of a ramshackle chest of drawers are overflowing with washing powder, whose perfume evokes nothing of orange blossom but everything of a synthetic perfume. Another chest of drawers, more bourgeois, in marble and mahogany, contains small piles of ash that would collapse at the slightest touch. Molded from cups, glasses, “the little we have left,” they embody these “family memories that we would like to set in stone” but which, regrets Laurent Mareschal, are devoured “by the lichen of time.”

Emotional Fossils.

In this "stunted house," where nothing seems functional anymore, even the floor is out of kilter. More than a reconstitution, it is an unedited echo chamber, which nevertheless allows some familiar motifs to resonate. These spicy stars of Bethlehem, for instance, covering the cushion of an armchair behind a coffee table sprinkled with cocoa. On the down of brown flatness, the imprint of disappeared objects : plates, a bowl, perhaps a straw. "Emotional fossils," stresses Laurent Mareschal. If these new trompe-l'œil get off the ground for the first time, a carpet partially covered with turmeric is still there to trap our gaze at child height. Further on, it reaches its eye and the mind in 2 bursts of rapeseed field. The bedside table, a little too high as well as too far away, is cluttered with soaps arranged in mosaic. They form a calepinage, specifies the artist, the sketch of a motive to come or perhaps of a dream, tone before its flight in the limbo of the unconscious. Some distance away stands a playpen, strangely wedged against a wall. Inside, lumps of brown sugar form an almost regular paving. The courtyard of the Hôtel de Guermantes? No. *Sous les pavés, la plage* (Under the cobbles- tones, the beach), indicates the title : as if pulverized by a subterranean wave, the work rises and falls on the wall in a dune of useless brown sugar. "Who will my child be? The one who lays the paving stones, or the one who throws them?" asks the artist. Behind its bars, the baby-free park invites us with a play of shadows to leave the house and sink into the darkness.

A madeleine with the scent of 4L, mackerel or cigarillo.

With all our senses alert, we enter a second space devoted to an immense sound collage (memory edits, as Georges Didi-Huberman would say) featuring the voices of Ivry residents of all ages, recounting the memory of a smell or a flavor that has deeply marked them. Under this invisible but densely populated roof each testimony triggers a light bulb on the ceiling, and an ocean of sensations. The lights flicker under vintage lampshades to the rhythm of the emotions diffused in spatialized sound. We listen to these stories that could be our own, and we taste with relish their tender madeleines. The palette of flavors is completely new : the smell of baby's skin, or freshly caught mackerel, a 4-liter engine, a cigarillo, Shalimar, a tire, laundry detergent heritage tomatoes... From one time loop to the next, firefly memories invade the white cube without leaving anything behind. It splashes, it smokes, it bubbles, sometimes it falls into melancholy, but most of all it laughs a lot. Cronos, the twisted god, has not yet devoured all his children!

Natacha Nataf
Translated in English by Roger Surridge

SUPREME ECLIPSE
TEXT BY LAURENT MARESCHAL

for the exhibition *Soleil Noir*, at La Maréchalerie, Versailles, France, January 21st - April 10th 2022

Forms radiate in the utter darkness of the art center. They could have been the phosphorescent work of the **Radium Girls**¹ if those women had not succumbed to the black sun eating away at their bodies from the inside. Although the work may look like it is glimmering with a radioactive glow, we are irresistibly drawn to it like moths, soon to be the victims of our own curiosity. Since the danger from this Black Sun does not emanate from its radiant light alone. Their bodies confined to a narrow trajectory, visitors enter the installation as if it were the belly of a whale beached on **Bikini Atoll**². A succession of structures, made of wood and taut rope, comprise the cetacean's strange skeleton. Composed of towering arches (symbols of power since Greek Antiquity), this phantasmagorical architecture turns out to be less magical when it leads us to the largest of them all— a walled up, mute, black dead-end. The Sun God is dead. Today, the destructive effects of absolutism can still be felt, however, like a radioactive agent impossible to escape.

In the United States, a doctor aware of the health risk had tried in vain to warn the people in charge of the watch factory that the Radium Girls were not headed for a bright future. In Versailles, it was Fenelon who attempted to get the monarch's attention, to convince him of how urgent it was to stop playing with the fire of power, while his advisors fanned the flames to stoke new eruptions of violence in widespread useless wars and lavish expenditures. On their knees, the people would seize other lights to shine on his fate, and overturn it all a century later. In between the two parts of the fluorescent labyrinth, a small room houses an encoded text. On the floor, like so many black suns, dozens of marbles maintain an uneasy balance, echoing Fenelon's disruptive politics, as spelled out in author's critical letter to the sovereign (1694), here translated into braille. Blinded by his own radiance, Louis the Fourteenth, like a fading star, would force into the shadows this man of the Church who had made the mistake of telling him the truth: "*this glory that swells your heart is dearer to you than justice, than your own tranquility, than the preservation of your peoples constantly dying from diseases caused by famine.*"

At the Marechalerie, visitors enter through a small door and right away they experience the black light irradiation, caught in the net of sinuous rope as if courtiers were leading them to their host, embodied by the largest arch. Endgame. Fenelon bids us to open our eyes in this letter addressed to us all, in the end. Whether we are in power or not, we must beware not to abuse it. We might thus be able to avoid the fate of the Radium Girls and no longer have to endure the black light rays that prevent us from seeing clearly. We are citizens of planned obsolescence, ready to be replaced by a new generation, in thrall to the television screens of **1984**³, the ultimate fantasy of the manipulators of souls. Orwell was right: reality surpasses the worst nightmares. We do not challenge overt fascism; we desire the servitude we think is voluntary. Who can believe they are safe from this black sun that lures us only to more readily ensnare us? Before going totally blind, it is about time to reread Fenelon and rebel against the shimmering radiation.

Laurent Mareschal
Translated in English by Susan Power

1. **Radium Girls** was the nickname given to female American workers exposed, from 1917 to 1926, to the radium in the luminescent paint they applied to the faces of watches. The majority of them died from cancer caused by this radioactive substance. Some of them filed a lawsuit against their employer in 1927, which set a precedent for workers rights.

2. **Bikini Atoll** belongs to the Marshall Islands in Oceania. It is well-known for having been the site of nuclear tests conducted by the United States between 1946 and 1958, which left the archipelago uninhabitable.

3. **1984** is cautionary novel by George Orwell, published in 1949.