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## LE GESTE SUSPENDU, FRANCE 2009 REPORT

The art of writing by hand, which we call calligraphy, is here the suspended gesture that opens a new dialogue between cultures. Nine artists from China, Iraq, Morocco, France, Switzerland and Italy met at Château de Vogüé, in the south of France.

Christine Macé, the exhibition curator, is an art historian who has founded and directed Terres d'Écritures, an art gallery in Grignan, south of France, dedicated to calligraphy and literature. The gallery has been working for ten years and so this exhibition at Vogüé represents the fruit of her decennial research and search for artists in the field of calligraphy. The artists, although coming from many parts of the world, are almost all living in France, with the exception of Denise Lach who comes from Switzerland and myself coming from Italy. This means that many of the artists have lived in more than one culture, and in the group I add myself, having lived for ten years in San Francisco, California. This wide range of cultural experiences was palpable, energizing. The migrant embodies, more than anyone else, the multicultural experience which the world needs so much nowadays.

Christine's love for literature has played an important role in her artist's choice and her research on the cohesion between calligraphy and literature. An author, calligrapher and poet whose books always accompany her, is François Cheng.

Walking through the spacious and luminous castle's rooms, I felt immersed in a conversation of marks coming from East, Middle East, West, North and South. Artists who have searched into the precise territory of artistic handwriting, whose history varies greatly in each culture.

Western artists rediscover art within an action that has not been considered such for thousands of years, freeing writing from its servitude to text and total devotion to legibility, opening up curiously towards the pure communication of gesture, so familiar to other cultures. The Latin alphabet, incapsulated into type, has had an outstanding graphic development, that has no counterbalance in the development of writing by hand. I think it could be really interesting to do an in depth study of the Western journey towards contemporary calligraphy. I think of Dotremont, Alekinsky, Gastone Novelli, the Abstract Expressionism of Mark Tobey, Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, Joan Mitchell, the few significant calligraphic artworks of Roland Barthes, the Chinese, Japanese and Middle Eastern historical calligraphy exhibitions in the major Western art museums, the work of Shirin Neshat, the Archivio di Nuova Scrittura of Paolo Della Grazia at the MART in Rovereto, Italy or the Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry. All are fundamental steps towards the development of a contemporary Western calligraphic movement, and there are many others. Today the access to Internet opens new worlds: many unknown artists who have remained at the artistic scene's margins, now thanks to the web are offering us extremely interesting new journeys. This exhibition is one, a new journey.

The work of Kitty Sabatier seems a quest towards absolute essence. Marks in the infinite space and I get lost, hypnotized into them. Denise Lach, who says "text is a pretext" incorporates calligraphy into graphics and researches the links between marks and nature, as if nature itself was a written texture. Laurent Rébéna's works are a 360 degree research into the communicative potential of marks. Christine Dabadie-Fabreguettes is a woman that seems without territory, her artworks are a powerful message, the calligraphy of a nomad encompassing all cultures.

Hassan Massoudy and Abdallah Akar are the Middle East at the exhibition. They represent the calligraphic cultures that have had the most significant cursive evolutions. The first works with strong colors, yet maintaining a transparency of movements, honestly and fully present on the surface; the second, uses layers and stratified gestures which unveil in time, creating a mystic atmosphere that reminds me of dance and music. I believe both artists have legible text, but I don't know the meaning.

In China, calligraphy is a major art whose abstract and erudite character has had special appeal for intellectuals and scholars throughout the centuries, but is also one of the most popular. Ye Xin's writing textures have a physical sensuous presence, perfectly in harmony with the drawings being born of the same brush. I'm fascinated by his writing, so abstractly attractive, yet legible, perhaps even more after he tells us the meaning of the text, but I had already fallen in love with his works.

Finally Anne Gros-Balthazard, young promising calligrapher.

Two windows offer to visitors some examples of old Ethiopian books: a rock book and small booklets in leather. There are also nibs, ink holders and other writing instruments. All are part of Dany Jung collection of book arts objects.

This exhibition has also given me the opportunity to discuss my work with the other artists. I have exhibited some originals and also the photographic book BAB, Book as Body. BAB caught the attention of many. It shows writing on the body which becomes the body itself. A bold action which calls, to the mind of the viewers, the works of other artists: many people thought of Shirin Neshat, in whose work though, Persian calligraphy is identity and at the same time very sensual texture and legible text. In the West, on the other hand, the feeling given by a body filled with calligraphy might be that of an empty body, like the word "calligraphic" until recently was synonymous of a work in which form appears excessive, crossing over the content. Yet handwriting and its artistic expression, calligraphy, are always essential gesture of self expression.

I want to thank Christine Macé, the Association Vivante Ardèche and all the artists who made possible this unique exhibition. I return home with many questions, new ideas and mostly with the desire of being again, in the future, together with this group of artists.

## "Le Geste Suspendu"

with: Monica Dengo, Abdallah Akar, Christine Dabadie-Fabreguettes, Anne Gros-Balthazard, Denise Lach, Hassan Massoudy, Laurent Rebenà, Kitty Sabatier, Ye Xin.

Contemporary Calligraphers exhibition June 28, November 1, 2009



"Coming from France, Italy, Suisse, Maroc, Irak and China, the nine artists calligraphers exhibiting this summer at the Château Vogüé, have a passion for the mark, the light and shadow, the rhythm, the breath generated by writing, essential source of thought and inspiration incessantly renewed."

Christine Macé  
Exhibition curator

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