

Integration of Art in Public Space (Wallonia, Belgium)

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Source O Rama is an educational museum on the theme of water built around the thermal springs at Chaudfontaine. To draw the public into the place, the architects have given it a double façade made of glass. The artist Lucile Bertrand was invited to create a work for the glazed window.

“The fact of working with an artist was not an obligation in this case”, explains the architect Brigitte D’heft (A 2R C). “We submitted this request to the client and he accepted it. If there is no way of benefiting from grants towards the realisation of a work of art, our clients are rarely aware of its interest. Then it is up to us to persuade them. To us, the realisation of a work of art is fundamental, and contributes closely to the success of a project. The artist brings in a lyrical dimension that the architect alone cannot achieve. At the Museum of Water, the contrast conveyed by the diaphanous nature of the “feather sculptures” set against the architectural construction enriches the whole with a poetic dimension.

“Right from the time of drawing up the project, we wanted to match the symbolism of the earth and the water with the help of certain architectural elements. It still remained to give material form to the air. Then we thought of Lucile Bertrand’s work. It rather evokes clouds and thus the concretion of the air in clusters of water vapour held in suspension in the atmosphere. The pre-existing glass structure seemed the obvious location for her installation, as the material also corresponds to the translucence and fluidity of air”.

“Until this point, I had created ephemeral works in the space” explains Lucile Bertrand. “The process is different when the work has to endure. I think that to integrate with an architecture in a lasting way, one has to give greater consideration to the function of the place, to its history, and also to the people who will move about in this space..

“While remaining faithful to my approach of representing the limit between the palpable and the imperceptible, I had to slip a poetic shock into the heart of this architecture. This ambiguity between visible and invisible is exactly what the architects were looking for to give material form to the air. I wanted to provoke a progression in people’s gaze.

“The feather sculptures that I have realised at the Museum of Water differ from my previous works in terms of volume. These are no longer a picture in two dimensions, but rather a work seen from both sides of the glass façade.

“The structure of the installation has been replaced by brushed stainless steel in reference to the construction of the façade and transparency now sits at the heart of the architecture”.

Adele Santocono, art historian