

“A certain vision of the immaterial”

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The artist’s job is to make the invisible seen. Lucile Bertrand, through her creations, likes to suggest immaterial elements such as breath, air, light, the wind, clouds, the sky, the fragility of life, absence, through the use of particularly delicate and evanescent materials such as feathers, particles of dust or flour, hair. By their extreme flimsiness and fragility they underline the elusiveness of the invisible.

Outside the windows of the large exhibition hall at ISELP, Joseph Kosuth has realised a work entitled ‘A Map with 13 points’ composed of quotes from well-known figures relating to art. Lucile Bertrand wished to signal the presence of these quotes inside the space. As her research progressed, she realised that she would not be satisfied with a simple reproduction, and she made Joseph Kosuth’s work her own¹.

From this moment, Lucile Bertrand detached herself from the text, took it apart, broke it down. It was not a question of giving meaning to the words, but simply of extracting them to underline their intrinsic poetry: art, gap, memory, oblivion... They too have their own material, just like hair or feathers. The contour of the letters remains blurred. These frames enclose evanescent bodies that give the work a depth, a density. As a result the light becomes material, it lends substance. It is an integral part of the work. The thing that gives material form to the air is those little particles that one can see in a beam of sunlight.

Grains of dust are glued into the case to give material form to the density of the light. Here one observes a continual exchange: the light reveals the matter and the matter reveals the light.

The work, traversed from the inside by people’s gaze and from the outside by the light, has a space of its own, an intermediate space between outside and in, between the viewer and the light. The idea of place, border, in fact occupies a central position in the artist’s work (the theme of refugees, genocide, displaced populations, memory and disappearance, places where roads and existences cross), but also absence or disappearance – which are the negation of place – or sometimes the place to be crossed, the closed or inaccessible place. An enclosed object, untouchable, thus inevitably evokes secrecy and consequently silence. This is the theme of the second work, a mural entitled “Without a word”. Silence taken as being a synonym for serenity: the white feathers evoke quietness, gentleness, and have that very tactile aspect of bodies that one cannot help touching. Or silence perceived in a dramatic form: the silent labels speak of a void which could not be filled with words and which leaves regrets.

Lucile Bertrand’s work shows a real aesthetic paring down, a restraint in her way of conveying a sometimes grave message. The evanescent elements that she confines inside a geometric structure catch us up in the form of a mystery. A mystery which, by its essence, must not be revealed.....

Frédérique Margraff, art historian

¹ ‘A Map with 13 points’ describes and builds a kind of theoretical object: the situation of an artistic practice. Whether this is on the surface casual, or a product of conversation, the thing that creates itself through others’ comments is this attitude that describes art at this end of century. My work is situated in the spaces that separate these quotes: what I make of these intervals here is different from that which was said by each of the persons quoted (...) By reducing every ingredient with an anterior cultural meaning to a smaller constructional element (a ‘word’ element) I have been able to create other meanings on another level, it has been possible for me to produce ‘my own paragraph’ and still to remain sufficiently within the context of the art to be able to alter it. This has been an essential aspect of my practice for over thirty years and has required a certain form of appropriation’. Text by Joseph Kosuth, comment on his 1998 work at ISELP in the context of the decree concerning the integration of works of art into public buildings (‘1%’ decree).