



**an audience with david lynch and  
other lynch-like experiences**

**commentary by francis powell**

**published 15 march 2007**

**paris: vie et art | volume 1 • number 6**

Living in Paris means surprises are something of an inevitability. Imagine, for example, going to an art exhibition and arriving in time for the press viewing...but without any form of news media identification, any proof of credibility. Such was the case when I arrived at La Fondation Cartier, a large futuristic-looking space covered in sheets of glass, flanked by trees and sundry vegetation—an interaction of structure, form, and nature designed by Jean Nouvel. Upon my arrival, I was abruptly accosted by heavy-duty, immaculately dressed security guards and a young man armed with a list. It seemed I'd made a mistake, as well as a wasted journey. There appeared little chance—especially given the officious nature of the French—of me getting into the show. There I was, dressed in my scruffiest clothes (having, earlier, indulged in some painting), while the glamorous filed past to the exhibit. I was about to turn on my heels and head back to the métro, cursing my misfortune, when I meekly told the civil young man with the list that I was a writer for the American Web site, *The Bohemian Aesthetic*. This, apparently, held some credence, unlocked a door, and I was ushered in.

Some days just go right.

I walked down to the basement, as the sound of David Lynch's latest film score menacingly reverberated in the background.

Center stage in the room was the film maestro, himself. Lynch sat on a stage like a monarch on a throne, dressed, as you might presume, in all black, and sporting his trademark quiff of silver hair. I'd inadvertently walked in on an audience with the auteur, whose latest film I'd seen just a few weekends prior. I couldn't, however, focus on the erudite things he was sharing—aided by a translator—about his art and films. Instead, I rushed about the show taking photos, assembling his world, trying to deconstruct the man and his process.

At the Lynch show, there's much to see and evidence of diverse influences, Salvador Dali, unsurprisingly, being part of the fold. There are spread-about sculptures that involve high-heeled shoes—*inexcusably* Daliesque—and there's a drawing that bears a remarkable resemblance to the aforementioned Catalan artist and the symbolism one might associate with him. But Dali isn't the only influence; another is Oskar Kokoschka, the Austrian expressionist painter, of whom Lynch once, during his school days, did a major study. I was also reminded of an exhibition I attended, a long time ago, while an art history student. It was called "The Outsiders" and contained primitive folk art images echoed in some of Lynch's work. There are no constraints, here; Lynch uses an

assortment of materials or incorporates found objects in his pieces, much like Robert Rauschenberg. For instance, one painting features embedded dice.

The exhibition covered a great deal of the director/artist/furniture designer and builder's life, and some works bore the hallmarks of an art school background. In cabinets, there's a collection of what must be Lynch mementos—sketches and doodles, sometimes on scraps of paper, each no doubt having some intrinsic meaning for their creator.

There are installations which may be sauntered through, straight into a Lynchesque, microcosmic world. As evidenced in his most recent big screen project, *Inland Empire*, David Lynch isn't afraid to make use of new technology, and some of his images on display in Paris were generated, I imagine, via Photoshop®. There's no shortage of variety in this heavy mix of dark, disturbing imagery sure to perturb the faint of heart and meet with the approval of those edgier souls.

Countless rumors have circulated about Lynch, over the years—concerning his character, politics, relationships with women; I'm only prepared to speak to his talent as an artist. I left deeply impressed by his work and pleasantly surprised that I was allowed to encounter the man and his art, firsthand.

•••

An unexpected eMail invite from IQONS and I was off to a fashion show in the Arts et Métiers section of the city—the same day as my audience with Lynch. The building housing the event was suitably strange and, it would seem, used for purposes other than fashion. In fact, as we waited to enter, some sort of meeting, generating occasional ripples of applause, was in session. Odd Egyptian artifacts were dotted about. In front of me stood a tall woman with a youthful face who reminded me of the Somalian model Iman.

I'd dragged along a somewhat reluctant friend, who soon spotted somebody she knows, a bumptious looking man wearing an unflappable, cheery smile. When we were finally given the go-ahead to enter "Area Defiles" (interestingly, no catwalk, there), we discovered that champagne was being offered, as well as classy house music with a pounding rhythm that, I'm fairly certain, was by UK group Underworld. A buzz of expectancy hung in the air. Photographers wheeled in equipment and gathered together, at the end of what, ordinarily, would have been a runway, flanked by rows of seats. A copious Japanese contingent was in attendance—not unexpected since the first designer up was Kohshin Satoh, showing his autumn and winter collections. Judging from his press release, Satoh has been a major player for awhile, a leading presence in the Japanese fashion world with more than his fair share of high profile fans—most notably, legendary trumpeter Miles Davis (for whom he designed outfits to be worn at a Grammy awards ceremony and on Davis' 1991 world tour, and art icon Andy Warhol.

His models all sported a worn expression, as though they'd been caught in the full force of a windswept gale; suffering through days of insomnia; or, even, clinically depressed; nonetheless, from the moment the lights lowered and the first model walked down a strip of diffused light, it

was clear that Satoh's clothes are stylish. At the abrupt end of his portion of the show, the designer made a fleeting—albeit shy—appearance.

Next was Megyn Florence. The title of her collection was, simply, "Elementary". Florence's press release informed us that we were about to be "taken back to the classroom". Models, tinged with an air of rebelliousness, strutted up and down, from time to time producing flirty grins. Some held books; some, limp dolls; while still others had their hair styled to make them look like precocious school girls. The colors sometimes vibrated, strong yellow and red hues.

The last featured designer was Geoffrey B Small. (His name has a poetic ring and, perhaps, double meaning.) Small's collection was "Heroes of Another Gender", and its start was marked by medieval music. His press release, while making no mention of his clothes, contained a political message with references to Jeanne d'Arc and an indirect comment on Hillary Clinton's impetus to becoming president. Small hailed woman, stating outright that men have only led the world to the brink of disaster, a statement I believe, in many ways, to be true. He noted that, throughout the world, women are rising or have risen to power (in France, Ségolène Royal; in Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel). The models, following umpteen getup changes from the previous collections, marched into view, draped in a mix of modern and medieval attire, which included some rather outrageous shoes. Some wore chainmail and armor, as in Norman times. As props, some held swords and, others, flags or axes. One model's accessory was a real (and oblivious) baby. There were times when I found the ancient and modern a bit incongruous.

•••

Places have a way of beckoning me back. You'll recall that, only last month, I went to La Générale, a sizable squat that formerly served as some kind of factory. This time, a friend invited me to the same spot. I was unsure of exactly what we were in for, as his details were sketchy. After spending considerable time trying to re-find the location, I made out vague noise and followed it until it led me to an artist by the name of Tomoko Sauvage, who was packing up her material—including bowls of water used to create musical notes. The room, with its reams of red curtains, was eerily smiliar to a David Lynch set.

Another musician hobbled onto the stage, supported by a crutch. He combined very noisy laptop music with a handsome double bass; his act felt endless. At one point, an inquisitive dog wandered in and sniffed about the stage, seemingly unaffected by the incessant pounding of electronic music, the crowd of French and Japanese, or the punks scattered throughout. The performance was challenging.

As it turned out, the evening was dedicated to Japanese musicians and difficult, hard core sounds. I was somewhat relieved when Petits Petons completed his set; While it had had its moments, I couldn't really connect with it. It's a shame there were no visuals to accompany some of what he had to offer. I think it would have made the night more satisfying.

The last act I took in was compliments of a strange, much tattooed Frenchman, with a red,

Mohican hair cut and an Asian female accomplice. The two stood face-to-face and interacted musically. Although they built up some nice textures, we, for all intents and purposes, just watched two people, face each other, stare intently at their computers, and conjure up sounds. Who am I to criticize? I pretty much do the same thing; but, certainly, the dynamics and energy of rock and roll were missing.

•••

Recently, I responded to an advertisement for a Dj required at a private art viewing being held at Art de la Vie, located in a charming square in le Marais district; but it didn't pan out. Maybe it was a question of money, or maybe someone had a whim to find a Dj and then thought better of the idea. (This is a normal occurrence, and Djs and musicians live with the frequent frustration it causes.) I was, however, invited to the exhibition, which took place in a gallery I think might have once been a horse stable. My contact has a beautiful name, Ferama; and, of comparable beauty, is her work.

There's obvious money behind her work; not many, these days, can afford to sculpt in bronze. In Ferama's press packet is the personal declaration

"The inner core of each human is beauty, goodness, bliss, and joy; and only an ever-growing awareness of this fact will lead to liberation."

In these troubled times, that's an inspiring thought.

Alongside the sculptor's work is that by photographer, Jean Merhi, whose background is in video and film. Merhi's photos are dreamlike and well-executed.

•••

One of the greatest pleasures for me so far, this year, was the Carnaval de Paris (a/k/a Saint-Fargeau). In my eight years living here, I'd never heard of the event; but, on February 18th, a friend told me that it was taking place that very afternoon and early evening. According to its official Web site, the Paris carnival has been in existence some 500 years.

What I witnessed was nowhere near the scale of the Notting Hill Carnival that happens every year in London, with up to a million people gathering for the festivities. Then again, I remember some Brazilians I knew scoffing at the *Notting Hill* carnival, which doubtlessly, seemed far inferior to their own.

I must say I really enjoyed the Parisian fest. (There should be a world law dictating that every city have a carnival, every six weeks or so. I'm convinced the planet would be in a far happier and more peaceful state.) There was little chance of getting crushed (not the case at Notting Hill) and

an assemblage of eccentric people, unshackled in their desire to look different and project whatever they fancied—punks, rastas, young, old, oddballs and crazies.

I could hear the drums thumping as I rode the escalator up from the métro; everything had been in swing for an hour already. There were a number of Brazilian drum bands, one of them primarily made up of women who swayed to the rhythms they beat out. How they managed to keep this going for four hours, while climbing hills and carrying their weighty looking instruments, was beyond me. We walked past Père Lachaise and I wondered if the dead were stirred by the the din of the cortège. On our route, we passed a large work of art, by French artist Ben, scaling the side of a building.

There was a clown dressed in an old-fashioned police uniform, who seemed to delight in motioning the posse forward with culinary items. A few people had created elaborate costumes or were pushing along animals. At the head of the trailing crowd was a bulky cow; it rustled my sympathy, clobbering along in that unusual urban environment.

The significance of the cow is to warn people not to eat meat during Lent—an amusing thought in this country of stoic carnivores—because Saint-Fargeau takes place during the pre-Lent period, a custom which originated in Rome, in the middle of the second century, when the Fast of the 40 Days of Lent was preceded by a feast of several days, at which time participants donned masks, dressed as spectres, gave themselves up to Bacchus and Venus, and considered all pleasure permissible. As a matter of fact, the word 'carnival', in Latin, means "to take away eating meat".

Vive l'art! Vive Paris! Vivre le Carnaval!

Copyright © 2007 The Bohemian Aesthetic/Francis Powell. All rights reserved.