



Flore Nové-Josserand interviewed by Paul Luckraft, Curator: Exhibitions, 06 March 2015



Paul Luckraft: The recent photographs you have made for Invites depict 'sets' you have fabricated out on the street near your studio, as well as ones within the studio. Can you talk about your interest in these street spaces?

Flore Nové-Josserand: I've moved recently, to a new neighbourhood. So I've been spending a lot of time looking at what's around me, what's on the way between my house and my studio. What strikes me is the number of boarded up properties that I see and the number of condemned or closed off spaces. That's very much linked to gentrification and the privatisation of space. In Streatham, where my studio is, small shops and large halls are being 'acquired for development', which for the time being creates this decrepit, shut down, non-space. Brockley, where I live now, is a quiet, residential area with rows of semi-detached houses each with their own little front concrete 'garden', fenced off with some kind of decorative trellis or brick wall. 'Keep out stay out! This space is mine.'

I am ambivalent about all these structures I mention, because on one hand, there is a formal beauty in the rough geometry, a decorative beauty. These walls and fences become large, casual, abstract surfaces that suck the whole city into a dance of pattern and rhythm. At the same time, against the background of intense property speculation, a crisis of affordable space and the selling off of public space that exists in London, it's very unsettling.

PL: It sounds like you are investigating possible tensions or overlaps between the social space of functionality, and the aesthetic space of looking and contemplation?

FNJ: I've been thinking about the place of art, the place where art is seen and experienced and what kind of scenario that fits into. Obviously there is a good case

for dedicated spaces for viewing art – galleries and institutions that create conditions for the close examination of artworks, for contemplation and focused appreciation. But I am also interested in the space of daily life, with propositions that are much more hybrid, much more ambiguous. For example, what happens when your shower is also a painting? What happens when washing and actively looking at form and colour occur at the same time? Or what happens when the artwork is the combination of a painting and a t-shirt that you wear, in relationship to one another.

Something becomes an artwork when we both agree that it is one. So there is an interesting dynamic that happens in terms of objects switching from being activated or potential, artworks or not-artworks, content or display, tool or totem. You have to re-evaluate your scale of hierarchies and, by extension, what is an appropriate way to behave, what makes sense. The rules of engagement change, the meaning changes.

PL: Your process seems to currently be quite a circular one, in that you are making a 3D composition into a flat photographic image, but then are looking at expanding this physically out again into the gallery space?

FNJ: This ties in with the way my practice has developed. I started from painting really, focusing on abstraction – expressive mark making, the emotive power of patterning, a constructivist approach to composition. Painting as creating a space for the eye to promenade, and painting as an arrangement of flat colours on a surface. I then began expanding this constructivism out in to installations, as spatial interventions with sculptural elements. This had to do with my wanting to focus on the perceiving body rather than the perceiving eye. Do you know about the idea of proprioception? It's these extra senses that allow you to know

where your limbs are in relation to your body, for instance, just because you feel it somehow. These physical sensations are really interesting for me. It's things that architects deal with all the time. What is the physical sensation of space? In my work I play around with that a little bit. So I'm often moving from things that are represented to things that are physically present.

Recently I've been using photography as a way of capturing a space. The lens of the camera is like the subjective viewpoint *par excellence*, a recording made by the body or eye floating in a fixed point in space. For Invites I want to wrestle photography back into object-hood, by thinking about the immateriality of the image-object and how to give it an incarnation. This perhaps is related to bigger questions about what is real, when we are surrounded by so much advertising imagery selling us things – in magazines, on billboards, online.

PL: Do you think about the question of real objects versus virtual objects? Your work often has a look and feel of flat digital screens, but seems rooted in a handmade materiality. Is there an interest in how we sense 'objectness'?

FNJ: You could say that the virtual versus material object question is an extension of the question of the primacy of ideal over embodied realities. When I was growing up I was more in line with Platonic and Cartesian ideas, that the mind forms reality through concepts and logic. But now I think of reality as being much more embodied. Visually, reality is data perceived through the eyes, and is always operating in a chicken and egg game with expectations of what there is to see. Societally, reality is the individual's interaction with others in a complex chicken and egg game, within the perceived rules of engagement. Hmm. I don't know if that last bit is true but it's a good place to think from!

In terms of 'objectness', I do believe that there are qualities specific to different media that change the message. There is always loss and morphing in the process of translation. This translation could be from painting to spatial installation, or from photography to object/space. Also, I'm bilingual, so perhaps it's about the translation of thought into language. What is lost? What is gained? What is specific? That is what is so interesting with the digital image. It's never completely digital. It's presented on a screen, in a defined size. And yet it carries with it this seemingly infinite potential for materialisation. But it's not just a concept, it's a concept mediated by a particular viewing experience. For example, sitting on a chair, at my desk, on my computer, with a coffee and a cigarette.

PL: The structure of your works seems to be exploring how things sit within other contexts, as frames within frames perhaps?

FNJ: Yes, there is the *mise en abyme* device, which is all to do with staging. You have a focal point, but that is framed within something, and then it's framed again, and framed again. It makes things more and more absurd in a way, like repeating a word many, many times. I like *mise en abyme* in two ways in particular. First, it makes the work expand outwards indefinitely into the world, turning everything into a stage. And second, I'm interested in the movement from two dimensions to three dimensions, and three dimensions to two dimensions. This is a feedback loop I think, and it raises the question of what is changed in this process.

PL: It could be said you are constantly shifting around the central focus point within your work. You seem to avoid having one central metaphor that everything hangs on. Instead it seems more about things in relation to each other. Are you always setting up a constellation of diverse things?

FNJ: One thing is a subject. Two things tell a story.

PL: You mentioned absurdity earlier. Are humour and surprise key traits for you?

FNJ: Everyone loves surprises. As for absurdity ... I'm not a religious person. For me, everything is arbitrary. That is both horrific and very, very, funny, don't you think? I think these most recent works could be seen as awkward or even extremely conceited. They are kind of refusing to be proper photographs, and at the same time they are refusing to be proper interiors, and refusing to be proper painting.

PL: So the images and objects are a bit provocative and unruly?

FNJ: I think they are. I'm not sure if they're meant to be. I made them to be beautifully behaved! But in the making of them I've come up against resistance in processes or techniques. So there has been a lot of amateurish improvisation and serendipitous solutions. For example, in frequenting some 'proper' photographic practices to help answer questions on lighting and framing, I'm finding myself in the situation of getting technical advice on things where there is a really specific ways of doing things, very set methods. There is a functionality to how things work, and I'm coming in and dancing all over it!

Artist's presentation

Sunday 12 April, 3pm:

Join Flore Nové-Josserand to play a collaborative story-telling game.

Flore Nové-Josserand (b.1980, Paris, France)

Recent solo and two person shows include *The Scream of the Commode*, IMT, London (2013), *Warm Breeze Over Rock*, The Royal Standard, Liverpool (2013) and *Flatfile*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham (2012). Group shows include *Head To Head*, Standpoint, London (2014) and *RIFF/T*, Baltic 39, Newcastle (2014). Upcoming solo shows include Eastside Projects, Birmingham in September 2015.

Zabludowicz Collection Invites is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists who do not currently have representation by a UK commercial gallery.

Reverse: Flore Nové-Josserand, *Flatland 1*, 2015

176 Prince of Wales Road
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Opening times
Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm
Other times by appointment
FREE ENTRY

Upcoming Invites

Charles Richardson
1 October–8 November
Milou van der Maaden
12 November–20 December

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