

Sometimes public commission projects in France are abandoned for various political, economic, artistic reasons, disagreement or misunderstanding. These projects are considered as "dead projects" by the artists, as Elisabeth Ballet would say, and they put them in the back of the drawer or they abandon them. They do not appear on CVs, unlike architects who show even unrealized projects. That's why we came up with the idea of an exhibition project entitled "Not done = public art projects stopped". We asked some artists if they had any public art projects that had been stopped, sometimes censored, if they could give us archives that could feed our exhibition project.

Théo : This exhibition is a way to give a little visibility to projects that have not yet taken place?

Marie-Laure : Yes, these are projects that are not known, so there is not necessarily an art critic, very often none at the level of public art projects, a little better today but for a very long time this was not the case. However, projects that have not gone all the way and that are also painful for artists are unknown projects. And often they are beautiful projects where in the end there has not yet been any discussion sometimes with the sponsor, with the inhabitants, nothing is opposed, they are projects where everything is possible. So we wanted to make an exhibition and put in visibility and indeed to make these experiences a little positive for each other thanks to the documentation around these projects.

T : You organized this exhibition with your association "Entre-Deux" ?

M-L : Yes, it was one of the first exhibitions we did at La Base d'Appuis, which for me is a place where we can also show documents. We wondered how to show it, how to expose it in this place. This was only the second project after Toolbox.

T : What was the starting point of this exhibition?

M-L : It must be said, however, that this idea is part of a project that has not been completed for us. I forgot about that. Then when I looked at the names of the artists, it came back to me, that's what started it all. It was a project with Claude Rutault in Nantes in the Malakoff district. It was a somewhat isolated district, but at the same time the inhabitants appreciated that it was separate. They were buildings in front of the Loire, they had a beautiful light, so they were attached to it and so the city wanted to open up this district and to do so they made a hole in the bars, it means that hundreds of homes were destroyed, while it was in a decent state, and the inhabitants had to be housed, and it was extremely painful. They fought, people were rented but some had installed equipped kitchens that cost them dearly because they saw themselves ending their days here. Many artists were also settled there because they had the Loire in front of them, facing south... And so that was very painful.

T : How Claude Rutault took over the project?

M-L : Claude Rutault asked how the building, the portion of the building to pass the road, was going to be destroyed, and it was a destruction by nibbling, that is, machines were going to nibble on the apartments as they went along, which were going to be revealed like that as they went along. He proposed to each inhabitant to paint the entire wall with one colour and that each inhabitant hang an image that is important to him and that at the time of nibbling all these images, all these parts of colours and all these images appear...

T : Why it didn't happened?

M-L : The city was frightened to death. They thought that the inhabitants already did not want to leave so adding a project that plays on emotion would have compromised their whole project. They never told us why. They have done everything to ensure that this cannot be done in terms of time and destruction planning. It is a great frustration and misunderstanding. The exhibition project therefore started from a project failure.

T : What were the reasons of the others projects' failure?

M-L : There were different reasons for these failures. Elisabeth Ballet had trusted an exhibition curator who was well known at the time. He gathered a number of artists to make works on Boulevard Magenta in Paris which was under construction except that there had been no soil analysis; he had not prepared the context well. We do not make an intervention in the public space like we do an exhibition in a museum. Elisabeth Ballet worked a lot on this project made of lights that she put in the ground and it created constellations on a large scale, only to be told that nothing could simply be buried because there were a whole bunch of electricity networks. Then there were more political projects. Jean-Pierre Raynaud, if I remember correctly, it was a project of a tower that was to be destroyed, "La Tour Blanche". Rather than destroying it, he wanted to make it a monument, cover it with white tiles, it was not accepted and it lasted for years and it was highly publicized. Jean-Pierre Raynaud, when we contacted him at first he didn't really want to talk about it because he said it had kept him busy for years, that he had fought for years and that now he was 75 years old and he wanted to devote his time only to projects that he could do but he still sent us the press review.

T : How did you contact the artists you showed in the exhibition?

M-L : It was done a little by word of mouth, then we thought we could have made several editions, really continue and inventory because there are many of them so in fact we relayed projects from artists with whom we had worked and whose work we knew. We also relayed some mythical projects we knew had not taken place, including one by Jean-Pierre Raynaud for example. We knew a young artist who had a project that had been censored by Estuaire, Le Voyage à Nantes, quite simply because this project was not aesthetic enough in the eyes of the Voyage à Nantes, so he was very upset so we showed it too. We also relayed a work by Anne Frémy and it was a public art project in Marseille called "La Piste", a playground.

T : How artists reacted to your invitation?

M-L : They were pretty motivated because once you get interested, they're happy. We went to see Elisabeth Ballet at her house, her studio, and we start talking like that and suddenly she gets up and we go to the workshop part and she opens her drawers and she searches and searches, it was really at the bottom of a drawer so she pulled out her project, she entrusted it to us, she trusted us, and she finally wanted to talk about it.

T : How did you manage to show these unrealized projects ?

M-L : These are projects that are very well documented. And we had then used models one meter 50 long. It was very moving to see the reactions of the artists. There were 8 projects and then there was a text by Christian Ruby, philosopher, where he talked about political fear. Sometimes we have a lot of things, and then sometimes it can be reduced to a letter, after that we also bought all the artists' books to get the context a little bit of the work, and the books were not apart, we put the similar schools in big black drawing boards that were open and as they were similar schools it was not at all under glass, people could manipulate them, and we put their books aside. So there were 8 large drawing boards and there were books next to them.

T : And after the exhibition?

M-L : Artists sent us their dead project after the exhibition. When they learned about this, they thought it would be nice if it was archived that it existed somewhere in a documentation. We didn't have the opportunity to rework from all this rich material. We initiated projects that we could have continued but then we did something else, we got caught up in something else and we didn't go back on it. What we saw after this exhibition was that artists started putting their projects into practice when they were winners but were not finalists, for example. They were starting to put it on resumes, and on sites, a little like architects do.

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