

Interview with Simon Lamunière – Curator of Art Unlimited.

One of the things that ensure Art Basel its outstanding position is the Art Unlimited section. The 68 pieces on show all have characteristics that make them impossible to show in a normal fair booth. Many of the works are made especially for this particular and huge exhibition place, but also older works are included. The show really is an impressive tour de force in the more spectacular form of art. Kopenhagen met the curator Simon Lamunière to ask him about his way of organizing an exhibition this scale.

Can you tell us about the procedures behind 'Art Unlimited'?

SL: It's a long process: first of all we receive the projects in January, where they are studied by me, then I present them to the committee, who then vote. As for everything that comes in to the art fair, they decide if it is to be included, on a waiting list or out. Then I start to work on the floor plans, and see how many works I can put in, how the things match together, and think about the general concept of the show.

How did the 'Art Unlimited' start?

SL: The 'Art Unlimited' began in 2000. Before there were two sections, sculpture and videoforum, and I was asked to take care of the video section, because I have worked a lot with all kinds of new media, while Martin Schwander stood for the sculpture section. But I immediately said, that we had to stop with these two sections. Art is art, and it's more interesting to go from a video installation, to a painting, to a sculpture in stead of dividing the medias in different sections – it's simply too obsolete. It was Samuel Keller that came up with the name. The goal of 'Art Unlimited' was very clear, as a new challenge to the art fair, to be able to present works of big sizes that could not be presented at the normal art fair booths. You know, artists actually do these works, then we should also be able to show them!

Do you see any special trends this year?

SL: I'm the nasty guy in this case, because I don't want to do trends, but I'm more in to activate the works together – by doing the selection and the floor plan, and decide how the works are activated. This year I call it an 'Alphaville situation', because there are many black and white works and a lot of works dealing with modernity, science fiction and anticipation movies. This artist generation of course has been watching these anticipation movies (2001 Space Odyssee, Brazil, etc.), and reading these books, but I think it's something that is also happening almost by chance this year, and I'm just pushing it a bit forward. Last year it was much more about making the viewers a bit disoriented, with 10 projects more, and with a lot of works turning and spinning, rooms that felt or tilted, mirrors reflecting, mobiles turning above your head etc. It was a question of creating a disorientation with these elements. Not doing it at all 'Disneyland', because it is art, but just to turn our perception 90 degrees, and to activate thoughts about how we look at things and perceive them.

How have you worked with the placing of the pieces?

SL: For me the idea was to get the feeling of arriving in this big big hall, which has its own dimensions in comparison to the more fair-situation that you will find in the Statements-section. So when I set this installation by **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** here, with the rotating lights, it's ment to signal a kind of "airport entrance" to the exhibition, that brings us towards the strings between architecture and science fiction. And in this next piece by **Tatiana Trouvé** the objects are kind of

perverted, you don't know if it's a suitcase, a car or a saddle, if the stone is a sculpture or coming from outer space. For me it's interesting, because in this passage you have an Alphaville and it's exterior lands, from Jean Luc Goddard, and you go into Alphaville, but you never see the exterior lands... this modernity is just black and white, and I try in a way to play a bit with art, or at least bring art also to be something as strange as a special city. That's why the black and white and modernity helps me, because it's also what the works are a lot about. So just for the general concept, we go through this passage of black and white, and of course to reveal more obviously this black and white part, there's color at the end. And in that section things link to production, to painting, and get more physical again.

So this is the basic planning of the exhibition?

SL: Yes, it's kind of the stupid story I'm telling myself! But of course, the works are the works. The story I'm telling is my own to help to organize all the works, so they can speak for themselves.

Architecturally I try all of a sudden to create a surprise, like the one where you come from the black and white to the color section. Here we arrive in another section and it has totally changed character, these projects are more concerned with a production idea. Like with **Superflex's** Jacobsen chairs, which are actually not Jacobsen chairs, but supermarket chairs. Superflex has then tried to paint them back to the original colors and cut the wood out to get the right sizes. When you get close to it you will notice, that it is really roughly made, and not at all well made, although from a distance you almost have the feeling of going into a shop.

So this exhibition exists beyond the fair?

SL: Yes, my function is to make this an exhibition in its own right. You have to have someone in charge, who is involved in making a good exhibition. I'm not involved in selling and I've no other interest in the works exhibited, than to make them work together in one big exhibition.

Does it necessarily have to be new works?

SL: No, but 80% of the works are from 2006 or 2007. But it's not an obligation to be new, we also exhibit works from dead artists. What we want above all is good pieces.

Have you had any thoughts about how this fits in with the other major curated art events that is going on this summer – The Venice Biennale, Skulpturprojekte Münster and the Documenta 12 in Kassel?

SL: Well, we have been doing this since 2000, and each year we are improving. I would say that the general feedback we have is very comparable to the biennales, and other major exhibitions, because of this place's size, and also because of the quality of the walls. When the artists arrive and see the quality of the walls, and the spaces we're doing, they are extremely happy, because that's exactly the standard of the Biennale. And that have always been the challenge of Basel to have these things. And the quality of the works are also totally comparable. To my own, strictly personal, view I think that the Biennale should shake up a bit, because now they have the tendency to actually look a bit like this. It is almost now as if *we* have become a reference. First of all, I want to try to escape this idea of being a reference, but I think that most of all *they* should, because I couldn't accept small projects, that should rather be in a booth. So that way I think that the Biennale should go in a more irrational direction.

Don't you think that this strong artistic will you have behind this exhibition also does a lot for the credibility of the fair itself?

SL: Probably, and I know that the artists are very happy to have that, because then they also get the attention you want, when you work. But sometimes they get angry, but this year I haven't had one single conflict with them – last year I had three minor problems That's why I'm very concerned about being very clear, when we work out the floor plan.

How much do you think the curated 'Art Unlimited' is helping to ensure the Art Basel's unique position – you know, with this section its no longer a regular art fair, its more like a biennale?

SL: I know that for some artists it's annoying that you need a gallery to be in – but in Venice you also need a gallery. For us in the team we always thought, that this is a really good opportunity. And here's so much understanding of what art is about, so we just want to continue and go ahead! And it's true, my feeling really is that we're improving each year – with better works, that are being better adapted. Basel is a very special city in that way, with such a history of comprehension with art and what should be done about it. In Basel there is this attention and a care about making things as they should.