

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Living It
"Art is Waste, Definitely"
Christopher Beanland
April 2019



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Flamme Éternelle by Thomas Hirschhorn, Palais de Tokyo Exhibition (23/04/2014 to 22/06/2014). Source: Palais de Tokyo.

Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn makes sculptures which engage with the way in which we use and reuse materials in the world. The environment, cities, ruins and morals are some of his themes. He is currently working on a new sculpture dedicated to writer Swiss Robert Walser, to open in Biel in June. He lives in Paris now and speaks to us about why he makes art and what it means for the world.

Tell us about the theory behind your art and what it means to you.

"There is no theory 'behind' my work of art. But there is passion for art, love for art, the will to work, to do a work of art, the desire to establish a 'critical corpus', and the determination to fight for my work, for my position, for my vision of art. Therefore, nothing is 'behind', instead something is 'in the

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‘foreground’. To do art is a mission, and in trying to accomplish this mission, I believe art is universal.”

Is art universal?

“I think that each human being can get in touch with art, each human being can be transformed by the power of art. I believe that art is the way to reinvent the world. Art is autonomous. Autonomy is what gives an artwork its beauty and its absoluteness. Art - because it's art - can create the conditions of an implication, beyond anything. Art is resistance. Art resists facts. Art resists political, aesthetic, cultural habits. Art is positivity, and intensity. Art, because it's art, calls for equality. There is no other fundament, there is no other mission. The absolute affirmation of equality is the link, the hidden and invisible connection holding a work together. Pure equality needs to be fought for at every moment, precisely because it's not a fact. I believe in art and have faith in art. I think that art is an inclusive movement, art should include the ‘Non-exclusive audience’, the Other, the uninterested in art. Art can never act in resentment or negativity, art is always and in all circumstances against discrimination, racism, and exclusion; there is no place for anti-semitism or Islamophobia in art. Art affirms truth; truth created by every form, every assertion and every conviction. Truth is not the verifiable fact or ‘true information’. Belief in truth is something essential. I place truth on the same level as universality, equality and justice. Truth is pure energy, Truth has nothing to do with ‘quality’.”

Tell us a bit about Gramsci and other Marxist theories and your art.

“Again, there is no theory but love to make me work. The love for philosophers, as Deleuze, Spinoza, Bataille and Gramsci. I decided to make monuments in public space for those four philosophers. Therefore, I made - as last of the series - the “Gramsci Monument” in 2013, at Forest Houses in the Bronx, New York. The “Gramsci-Monument” was produced by Dia Art-Foundation. For me the challenge was: How can I give form to the love for him, to my love for him? Antonio Gramsci counts for me and I am a fan. I am a Gramsci fan because he was a hero, because he was a revolutionary, because he was ready to pay the price for his commitment, because he was a strategist, because of his passion for the political, because of his proposition to self-define one's own position, because of his hate of indifference.

How do you re-use materials in your art?

“I don't ‘re-use’ materials, I use materials. I use common materials, that everyone knows and uses, such as tape, cardboard, wire, coins. These materials are non-permanent. My love of ‘Non-Permanency’ comes from the

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strength and courage which is necessary to create something, despite its precarity, despite the precarity of all things and despite the precarity of life. The logic of ‘Non-Permanency’ - and the conditions of its persistence - is an absolute necessity and complete emergency.”



Thomas Hirschhorn, Spinoza Car, "French Window: Looking at Contemporary Art through the Marcel Duchamp Prize", installation view: Mori Art Museum (2011/3/26-2011/8/28) [Watanabe Osamu](#)

Do you see your art as 'recycling'?

“No. As an artist I refuse to adopt the term ‘recycling’ for my work. I don’t believe that art can be processed within a recycling frame, because art means inventing one’s own guidelines or appropriating them. My guidelines are: acting in headlessness; ‘Energy = Yes! Quality = No!’; being weak – but wanting to make a strong work; not economizing oneself; self-expenditure; ‘Panic is the solution!’; being both precise and exaggerating; undermining oneself; being cruel vis-à-vis one’s own work, being tenacious. ‘Less is less! More is more!’; ‘Never won, but never completely lost!’; assuming responsibility for everything concerning my work; being ready – because the first – to pay the price for one’s work.”

Does the environment matter to you?

“Yes, as a human being.”

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Thomas Hirschhorn, "TOO TOO - MUCH MUCH", Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, DeurleRomain Lopez, 2010

What do you think about art and waste?

"Art is waste! Art is a waste of love, waste of energy, waste of attention, waste of sensitivity, waste of critical spirit, waste of truth, waste of belief, waste of fight for justice, waste of desire, waste of desire for freedom, waste of will for equality, waste of conflicts, waste of reality, waste of questions, waste of world-questions, waste of hope, waste of hope as the principle of action. Art is a waste of utopias, waste of generosity, waste of ideas, waste of the ideas to change the world, waste of movements, waste of dialogue, waste of dialogue to know the other, to reach the other, one to one. Art is a waste of transformation, waste of the transformation of each human being, waste of resistance, waste of seeing differently, waste of looking, thinking, hearing, feeling differently, waste of the belief in the power of art. Art is a waste of emancipation, the emancipation of every moment, waste of acceleration, of precipitation, of headlessness, and art is waste of time and money. Art is waste, definitely. Everything which touches and is touched by art must be waste."