

Philippe Ramette: Galerie Xippas - Parris - Brief Article

ArtForum, Jan, 2002 by Jean-Max Colard

The world upside down: The artist is standing in a suit and tie; he has climbed onto a pulpit, and his hands grip a wooden balcony that is floating on the water. Behind him the Bay of Hong Kong extends as far as the eye can see, but is turned at a ninety-degree angle, its skyscrapers strangely reclining, horizontal. With this unsettling image--Balcon II (Hong-Kong), 2001--Philippe Ramette superbly demonstrates the use that can be made of the strange furniture he has been constructing for more than ten years. Here, a Canon a paroles (Word cannon), 2001; there, a Fauteuil a coup de foudre (Lovestruck lightning chair), 2001, or a Starting block a chute (Starting block for a fall), 2001.

With the fifteen objects he showed here--and almost as many drawings, which were akin to those of Glen Baxter--Ramette presented a mad universe in which absurd logic surges forth in the domestic banality of everyday life and human beings oscillate between moral baseness and spiritual grandeur, between the desire for damage and the desire for freedom. Some of Ramette's objects are obviously cynical traps, such as the Plongeur n[degrees] 6 (Diving board no. 6), 1997, on the roof of the SMAK in Ghent, which in some ways recalls the traps of Carsten Hooler or Andreas Slominski. Other pieces, by contrast, seem to propose more contemplative postures to the viewer, ones that are serene and soothing, like the helium balloon we can wear on our head for a feeling of uplift, shown here in a photograph. This prosthesis, not constricting but liberating, that bears a title--Sans titre (Aloge de la paresse n[degrees] 1) (Untitled [In praise of laziness no. 1]), 2000--makes us daydream, being the workers that we are. With a casual air, Ramette points to the true taboo of capitalist society. Dreamers of this sort are often excellent observers of their contemporaries. The proof again, with a more brutal piece: In a corner of the gallery a chair hangs from a cord, a miserable spectacle of the market economy (Le Suicide des objets, 2001).

Falling somewhere between design, sculpture, and pure reverie, Ramette's objects are most often made of wood, as if they were prototypes. They are meant to assay the world and possible human behaviors, for better (Objet d'amour [Love object], 2001--not very ergonomic perhaps but with an adjustable handle) or worse (Karaoke pour dictateurs potentiels [Karaoke for potential dictators], 2001, originally intended for SMAK and shown here as a drawing). With these strange pieces of furniture, Ramette touches, prods, and often turns against themselves the strange ideologies of the century, from capitalism to ecology, present in a rather mocking way in the form of Drapeaux mondialistes d'interieur (Globalist flags for interiors), 2001, blazoned with a kind of Gaia logo and meant to be placed in the living room

between the television set and the window, in case of the sudden appearance of extraterrestrials. It is no accident that Ramette, in the eyes of Christian Bernard, director of MAMCO in Geneva, seems to be "a sort of UFO in the contrasting landscape of contemporary art"--a lovely homage to an unusual artist, one who conjures the inventor surrounded by his strange machines, the wide-ranging creator of an absolutely extraordinary universe.

Translated from French by Jeanine Herman.

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