

Gold Fingers

A Gold performance by Laura Martin - movie, large digital print
Initiated in nov. 2006, work in continuum



Gold performance with inhabitants of the river's borders, Surya festival, Bodhgaya, Bihar, INDIA.

“Speaking through touch“

Laura Martin's travels in India allowed her to enlarge the field of her work and turned the country into a space where a frontier appears which is at once manifest and problematic. The promise of different life experiences (and what experiences!) appeared with such a powerful “off stage” aspect that during the last trip, her projects multiplied in different registers of potential meetings. In certain African towns we feel that art is possible everywhere. In India it is necessary to add the very imposing presence of religious cultures as much inscribed in daily life is in the long history.

How to structure an artistic gesture in such a field of possibilities? What forms can be attributed to it? How could it be shared in the time of its own elaboration. The questioning that accompanies Laura is part of the trip in the sense that no premeditated strategy can contain her appetite for meeting and sharing these questions themselves. The list could certainly be prolonged. But overflowing this appetite, one hundred questions full of ethics will always be summed up by a single question that is impossible to ask. Strength or weakness, it is the game of art.

During the “Buddha Enlightened” project that brought together thirty artists from different cultures, Laura sought her “motif” as close to local polarities and street people as possible. The project which gradually took form consisted of putting gold dust mixed with oil on the hands, feet and ears of people encountered in the streets of Bodhgaya ... rickshaw men, women recycling cow dung into fuel, lower cast Hindu populations, untouchables, small girls, twins, beggars, riverbank inhabitants, street children, etc. The ritual became progressively defined and accessories were perfected. The challenge was to overcome the contradictions of this symbolically saturated gold.

What is remarkable about Laura Martin's latest Indian experiment and the work that has emerged from it, is her capacity to melt these frontal difficulties related to the context through the force of a “touch” inventing a haptonomy as simple as it is spectacular. To sum up the difficulties related to context, we may evoke the big difficulty of communication (in English), the gratuity of the artistic proposition confronted with poverty and invasive begging and above all the difficulty in transforming the role of

passive actor of the participants in this ritual. Logically, this should have asphyxiated a demand for meaning or an a priori construction of political analysis. On the contrary, this approach of “speaking through touch”, the simple and intuitive communication of this golden haptonomy, has suspended some destinies and some moments. Probably in the Indian context, these suspensions, like crotchet rests in an insistent musical piece, were magical in their way. But they could equally be perceived as natural, just as massage is Indian through the Shantala tradition from mothers to their children.



Laura Martin & Mr. Makku, saddhu-rickshawpullar, “Buddha Enlightened” project, Bodhdaya, INDIA.

Thus appear precious shared moments. Precious and paradoxical, or precious because paradoxical. These shared times were only superficially golden, and could have left the actors sceptical or meditative, as if faced with a disguise or an empty rite. However, between the artist and her patients, this “speaking through touch” seems to have transformed misunderstandings into playful silences, improbable complicity into winks, irreconcilable difference into ephemeral complicity. Through this open-ended work, a lively question is posed concerning the possibility of allying artistic and religious or traditional rituals. Bodhgayâ was the ideal location for this experiment.

Laura Martin has made surprising progress in her work. She who often resorts to the use of shared words or narrative images to link individuals around a situation, crossed Bodhgaya by producing a golden mosaic on dark skins. Coded massages on a thread of the passing of days, massages coded for a valorization of the existences met.

*Jean-François GAVOTY
2007*