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Published on *BLOUIN ARTINFO* (<http://www.blouinartinfo.com>)

## A Q&A with Marcel Duchamp Prize Finalist Camille Henrot



### Language

Undefined

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Published: August 25, 2010

The **Marcel Duchamp Prize** was established by the **Association pour la Diffusion Internationale de l'Art Français** (ADIAF), whose mission is to promote French art on the world stage in partnership with the **Pompidou Center** and **FIAC**, the annual contemporary art fair that will take place in the **Louvre Cour Carrée** from October 21 to 24 this year. Intended to encourage new creative expressions in contemporary art, it comes with both money and prestige: a prize of €35,000 (\$45,000) and a solo show at the Pompidou next summer. **ARTINFO France** is interviewing the four artists nominated for the prize this year: **Céleste Boursier-Mougenot**, **Cyprien Gaillard**, **Camille Henrot**, and [Anne-Marie Schneider](#).

Born in 1978, Henrot was first interested in experimenting with film, with the unusual idea of using film itself as a physical object and artistic material. Branching out into sculpture, she began to deal with interrelationships between different world cultures. ARTINFO France recently stopped by her Paris studio to talk about her interest in anthropology and her recent and upcoming projects.

**Your studies at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris were very much based on applied skills and techniques. How does this inform your work today?**

I find the technical side very exciting. For me, there should be a connection between the project itself and the way it's made. In my work, I'm especially interested in craftsmanship, the way in which craft can constitute a global economic solution.

### **What are you going to show at FIAC this fall?**

Artworks that are in line with my ongoing project inspired by "The Island at Noon," a short story by [Julio] Cortázar, part of which you may have seen at the "Perspectives" show at Louis Vuitton. It's about treating forms of cultural hybridization, desire, and collapse, archetypes and their transformations. The idea of culture as a "relationship of translation" was the starting point. We could describe art history as a history of misunderstandings. This history is developed in the same pattern as a love story, including desire, taking possession, lack of understanding, and finally ending with the phenomenon of translation.

### **What media are represented in the show?**

There will be a sculpture and a film. The film lets me express more complex thinking, something that is not simply given but revealed over time. In school, I studied animation, and I started making films in the tradition of experimental cinema. For me, film and sculpture are acts of resisting time, because film plays back a present that continues, without having any material existence, while sculpture, as protective fetish, expresses a desire for timelessness. The project will explore the status of film and ethnological objects. It will show a rite from Pentecost Island [part of the South Pacific nation of Vanuatu] which inspired the sport of bungee jumping. I found this reversal of influence interesting. Bougainville discovered the island on the holiday of Pentecost, and that's why it has this name today. But chance can also have meaning, when you consider that Vanuatu is the country with the largest number of languages spoken in the world. And in the book of Acts, the tongues of fire of the Pentecost give the power to speak all languages. It's the beginning of globalization.

### **You are part of the "Dynasty" show at the Palais de Tokyo and the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, which features 40 young artists. Which pieces in the show do you find close to your own work?**

I like Benoît Maire's work. I found connections between our approaches, the way of going about a sort of exhaustive exploration in order to develop a personal theory. I also liked the way in which Laurent Le Deunff is interested in artistic forms inspired by Art Brut or archaeology, and Rebecca Dignes' film was really great. I was unusually moved by Raphaëlle Ricol's painting. Overall, I found the artists to be quite sincere, and they expressed themselves outside a certain conformism in contemporary art, distancing themselves from the established dogma of Western art history. You can feel the determination to avoid trying their utmost to define the art of the period.

### **I'd like to talk about your "Objets Augmentés" ("Enhanced Objects"), ordinary items covered with tar. Do they function as archaeological traces of the present?**

It's a nice turn of phrase, but it seems limited to me. In my project, there is the idea that modernity and archaism are no longer opposed. It's more related to anthropology, which establishes theories and then deconstructs them. In our relation to the object, I don't think we're any different from cultures that are assumed to be "without history." In the Louis Vuitton show, most of the pieces referenced anthropological concepts, making fun of them a bit, and showing that these patterns can be combined with other epistemological categories. Hybrids put into question the integrity of identities and their oppositions, as well as hierarchies that are no longer functioning. The future is not situated in time anymore but in space. That is why current anthropological research, which has announced the end of fixed identities, both cultural and economic, especially interests me.

**You start off with very structured ideas. To what extent do the forms change during your work in the studio?**

It's the network of connections from my readings and ideas that's structured — like an investigation. The forms must not be over-determined, so that the exciting feeling of seeing things exist will remain. For example, for a film, I proceed according to what **Arnold** calls "imaginative reason," which is a vision relying on both emotion and knowledge. Many fragments come into play and I try to connect them — the inability to conserve things over time, looting in Egypt, an article on the economy of scarcity, then some music by **Biosphere**. Sometimes, the starting point can also be frustration relating to items found in an auction catalog or on eBay. The first sketches are close to being desired objects, and then I distance myself from them. For "Objets Augmentés," I had bought several items at the Belleville flea market, which I like to call the public treasure-house. When I spread them out on the floor of my studio, I noticed that they were all tools that distance the hand from the object. I wanted to make something new out of these tools, to make enhanced objects, surrounded by a meaning that they carry, but which goes beyond them, and which can't be expressed by language. I was also thinking about the plastered skulls at the **Musée de l'Homme**.

**What are you working on now?**

The wooden cages that you see here are part of a piece purchased by the Pompidou Center for the show "Elles," which will go up in September. It is a group of shapes made up of left-hand planes. In architecture, left-hand planes produce pliable surfaces. "The Cages" — these forms that are both organic and geometrical — are a material expression of people's urge to circumscribe everything. Aerial and suspended, they let air pass through and they have no door, you can't close anything inside. The desire to circumscribe has been made impossible.