



Xavier MICHEL

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Xavier Michel, engineer in error of situation

Before I met him, I knew that Xavier Michel made performances and sounds with cobbled-together objects resembling things they weren't : he may put on his painter's jacket made of scotch tape, but he still looks naked; however realistic his wooden pallets may be, they would barely hold a chocolate bar.

Since meeting him, I've learned that he himself makes systems as well as objects, whose function he activates in the course of performed actions. Let's take it one step at a time: he makes himself because, he says, «doing it yourself opens doors, both narrative and plastic, including to things you're missing» – note, to return to this point, the final flip-flop that confuses the initial, apparently unambiguous statement: it's simple, but not exactly.

He makes systems, i.e. «devices made up of various elements and performing a specific function»¹ : the coffee pot, for example, pours the hot liquid into the scotch mugs, which are loosened on the table by an oscillating and then tilting foot, while the soft, painted sneaker with the paper-towel sole gently absorbs the coffee on the floor, until, one thing leading to another, filling a cup with coffee triggers an avalanche. It has to be said that Xavier studied engineering in Rouen, before going on to study Fine Arts at the Villa Arson, and it's possible that he has retained a taste for mechanics.

I don't know whether this attention to the articulation of bodies and machines – whether instruments, tools or mechanical devices – in Xavier Michel's work is a reminiscence of his engineering studies. We may recall that Henry Ford called on choreographers, proto-ergonomists, to design his car production lines: machines are articulated to bodies that are all the more efficient because the former fit well with the latter. I was thinking about this again recently, watching *Modern Times*, admiring the slides, pirouettes and grimaces of the madcap Tramp after he had been tested on the eating-at-the-same-time-when-it's-bolted machine, which in the end wasn't quite perfected.

Perhaps even more than Charlot, Xavier Michel's actions evoke Buster Keaton, in their absurd prowess, their almost clownishness or their ideal idiocy: a controlled abandonment to the precisely organized chaos of things. The systems he invents «dissipate», he explains: they serve no purpose. They're poor, gratuitous and perfectly oiled, like *Le Cours des choses*² or *La Maison démontable*³.

Unlike these brilliant little films, however, the images generated by the artist's interaction with his «objects» sometimes verge on the grotesque: like this sculpture clad in marble-effect synthetic fleece, which begins to dance on plaster feet perched on a concrete-iron heel. The figure is incongruous, extraordinary, graceful and monstrous all at once.

« Doing it yourself opens doors, both narratively and plastically, including to things you're missing out on ». And in fact, opening doors doesn't necessarily mean borrowing them; you can also walk right past them, if you like.

Julie Faitot, april 2023

¹ <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/systeme/76262> consulté le 17/04/2023 16:13.

² Peter Fischli et David Weiss, *Der Lauf der Dinge*, 1988, film 16 mm, 30 minutes.

³ Buster Keaton, Edward F. Cline, *One Week*, 1920, 22 minutes 30.

Inviting Xavier Michel for a residency represents a certain risk. He's one of those do-it-yourself artists who can't go anywhere without their arsenal of objects, tools, crates and trunks of stuff¹. To put it crudely, Xavier Michel transforms the spaces he inhabits with his work into a sweet, messy capharnaüm – something between workshop and laboratory, in which he acts as a mad inventor, or as a lover of serendipity who experiments and tests, fails, tries again, fails better². Driven by an irresistible need to understand how things work, he dismantles and reassembles them, reproduces or makes them himself, modifies them, arranges them, makes them resonate in concert. Everything holds together in a precarious, fragile balance, maintained and activated by the artist's hands and body, string games and juggling tricks. He creates ingenious systems in which everything is linked by a joyful interdependence, and in which he too seems to be seeking his place also. His gestures and sensibility borrow from the burlesque spectacle, in which he plays the role of a romantic Buster Keaton, eternally confronted with the risk of catastrophe. Like a prestidigitator in training, he creates magical illusions in which he always ends up irretrievably naked³, a melancholy portrait of the artist as saltimbanco⁴.

Isabelle Henrion, 2024

1 See the concept of bricolage developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The savage mind*, 1962.

2 based on Samuel Beckett, in *Worstward Ho*, 1983.

3 Xavier Michel, *Rap à poil*, 2023.

4 Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l'artiste en saltimbanque*, 1970.

Pointes

Rap à poil

Flaques

Faccia a faccia

Je me cherche, tu me trouves

Rêves de bambou

Avocats vinaigrette

Sculptures à la petite cuillère

Pleurer à l'horizontal

En dormance







Pointes, 2023, installation et performance.
Le Shed - centre d'art contemporain de Normandie,
Maromme.

Trailer : <https://vimeo.com/942306787>
Complete video : <https://vimeo.com/879583287>

In this space two systems coexist :
the first one is a special pair of stilts. They are the result of
molding my feet in plantar flexion. Once on, they stand only
on the tips of the big toes.
The second one is a technical theater grill made of curtain
rods. The curtains mounted on them are very short, and can
only obstruct the space for half their height.

Initially borrowing body positions from sculpture and yoga
practice, the body rises to balance on its large dummy toes.
In this vaporous environment, the body fades behind layers
of fleece and muslin. Two pairs of feet and so little balance.

Page 4 : performance

Page 6 : work in the studio





Rap à poil, 2023, installation and performance.
Le Shed - centre d'art contemporain de Normandie,
Maromme.

Trailer : <https://vimeo.com/942305575>
Complete video : <https://vimeo.com/939951253>

Dancing a slow song with an absent body, setting up mini-grand-pianos equipped with peanut-dispensing, trying to disappear behind and in front of a transparent screen and installing soft, supple neon lights. Melancholy and absurdity are tightly bound together by clumsy gestures and sound compositions, right up to the last three minutes of naked rap : rap in a transparent tape suit.









Flaques, 2021, installation and performance.
Collectif d'en face, Rouen

Trailer : <https://vimeo.com/915927455>
complete video : <https://vimeo.com/882134884>

A strange space is invoked here : somewhere between a café-concert (tables and coffee cups, stage curtain and guitars) and a storage warehouse (objects and sculptures on mini-pallets). These objects await future displacement, or unexpected activation.

During this residency at Collectif d'en face (Rouen), the manipulation of sculptures made beforehand in the studio gave rise to comic and poetic theatrical forms. The result of this research was an installation-performance entitled «Flaques», bringing together different fields of work: sculptural, musical and performative.

Inoperative coffee cups are served on unstable tables. The inevitable fall leads to an in-between time, when cleaning transforms the installation space into a potential concert stage. Standing on a keyboard, a plaster hand is crushed under a shoe. The key triggers sound that accompanies a spoken song-poem. « Pastiche, potache, pistache, fastoche, pastisse, potasse, panache, médiocre » [...] An extended list of paronyms that underscore the absurdity of gestures and weave links between phonetic wanderings and functional shifts.

Pages 11.12.13 : installation
Pages 14.15 : performance











Faccia a faccia, 2022, installation.
Push manifesto, Aubervilliers
Collaboration with **Konstantinos Kyriakopoulos**

Konstantinos makes collaboration a cornerstone of his work: he makes beds with other artists he likes or simply wishes to work with.

For the exhibition of congratulate graduating students from the Paris Fine Arts School, he invited me to conceal my work in a drawer cimaise. A folding bed crosses the wall and objects related to my plastic research inhabit the interior space of the wall.

A sort of minimal showroom apartment.

Konstantinos is pleased by this gesture of gentle piracy, as I'm neither a graduate of the Paris Fine Arts School nor a « congratulate »..







Je me cherche, tu me trouves, 2020, installation and performance.
La Station, Nice, production La Station.
<https://vimeo.com/439679532>

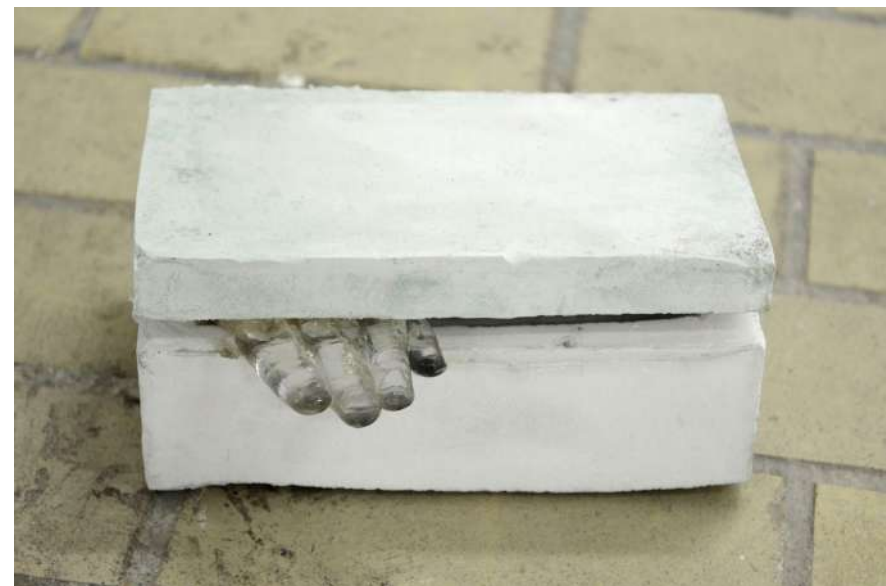
Three figures are summoned here: the flute player (storyteller/pipe player), the visual artist wandering around his studio and the clown. In a series of acts at the antipodes of the extraordinary, objects are manipulated in fragile experiments. This character enchants and disenchants with what he has produced.

next page : installation-performance.

Details :

page 19 : latex hand mold, latex and PU foam clamping assistant, resin hand emerging from a ciporex box coated with mint syrup glue.

page 21 : inflatable latex double hand.









Rêves de bambou, 2019, installation.

FRAC Nouvelle-Aquitaine Méca, production Le Pavillon et EBABX.

Latex, clay, rammed earth, earthenware, stoneware, siporex, polyurethane foam, avocado, tomato, pumpkin and false bean plants, wood, steel, rebar, silicone, wheels.

When I first arrived at the Pavillon residence (an international creative residency run by Ange Leccia), I found it difficult, as an artist, to take on the role of pizzaiolo-sculptor (cf. pizza sculpture project). Living with more established artists, I decided to measure my artistic potential. Based on the simple observation that a good artist grows beautiful avocado trees (Michel BLAZY, Nicolas MILHÉ, Baptiste AUDOUSSET).

I laid out a battery of pits on damp absorbent cotton. These stones traveled to Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil, and to Spain, where we visited prehistoric sites as part of our residency. Weeks went by and none of the seeds germinated.

In the middle of August, after 5 months of waiting, the first shoots appeared. At last, I could get down to work.

previous page : installation

Details :

page 22 : stoneware thorn-square held in place by the torn latex bamboo mold.

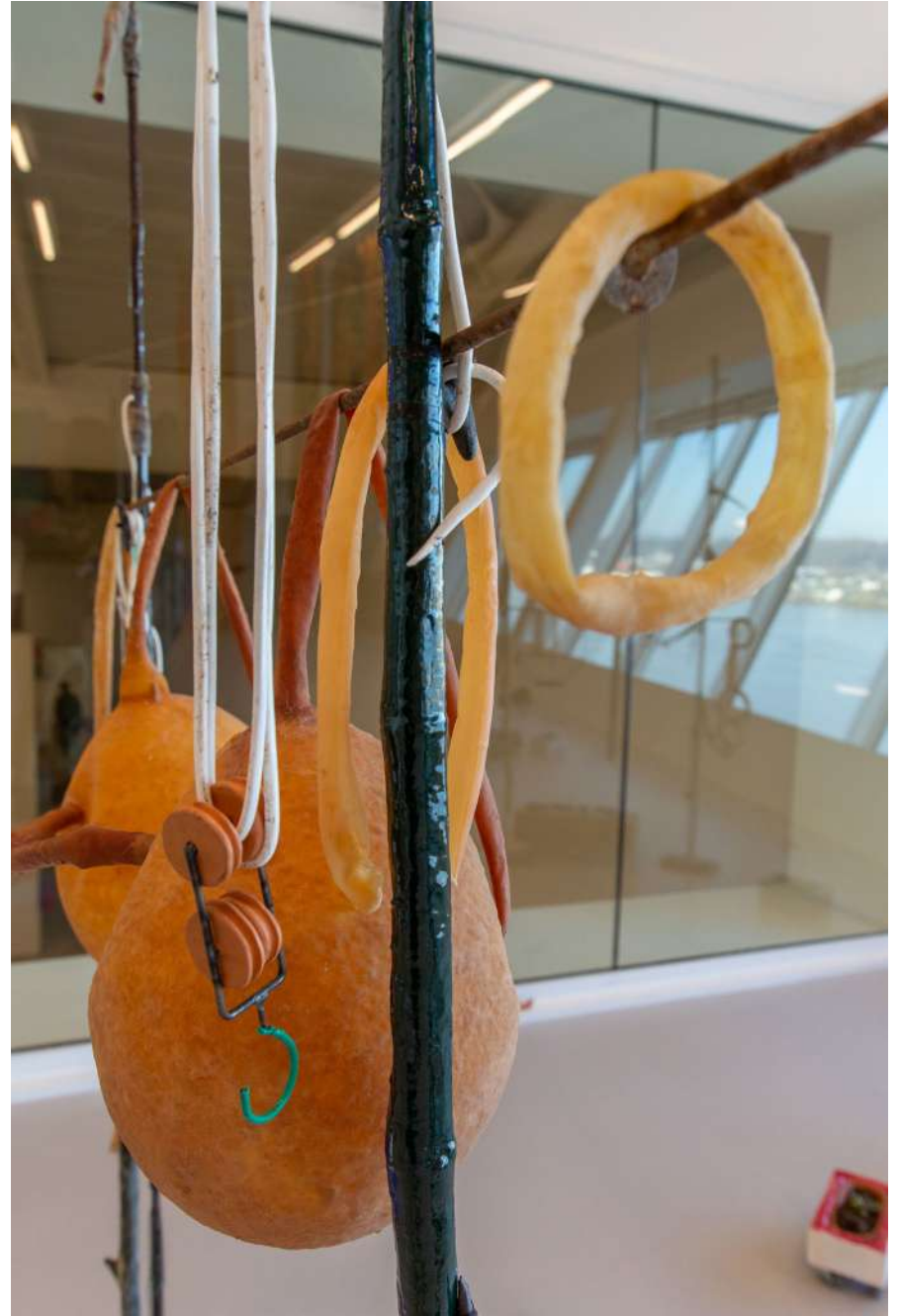
next pages : Inflatable latex costume, terracotta pulley, PU foam and resin bamboo, silicone cables.

Stoneware spines and multiple-choice glass service.



Le Grand Verre

Au dernier étage, le Grand Verre est un espace spacieux et lumineux. Il communique, grâce à ses larges baies vitrées, avec l'extérieur et l'intérieur. D'un côté, une vue plongeante sur l'exposition et de l'autre, un panorama sur la Garonne et les cotons d'Alsace. Ces qualités lui valent le nom de Grand Verre, en écho à l'œuvre de Marcel Duchamp intitulée Le Grand Verre ou Les Femmes d'Alger (Ouvrage en cours) même (1915-1923), qui joue sur un double registre pour produire un échange d'intensité.















Xavier MICHEL

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Education

- 2017 DNSEP (Master II) Villa Arson, School of Fine Arts, Nice.
- 2015 DNAP (Bachelor) Pavillon Bosio, School of Fine Arts, Monaco..
- 2013 Engineering degree (Master II) ESIGELEC : speciality embedded systems.

Residency

- 2024 Résidence Croisée, HomeSession et Artistes en résidence, Barcelone.
- 2023 L'académie, Le SHED, Maromme.
Somme Toute, Clermont-Ferrand.
- 2022 La maison des arts, sur invitation du SHED et du CNEAI, Grand Quevilly.
- 2021 Collectif d'en face, Rouen.
- 2020 La station, Nice.
Les Charpentiers de la Corse.
- 2019 LE PAVILLON dirigé par Ange Leccia.
Résidence de l'Art en Dordogne, Les Eyzies-de-Tayac-Sireuil.
Accueil studio au CCN (Centre Chorégraphique National) Ballet du Nord , Roubaix.

Grants

- 2023 Aide individuelle à la création DRAC Normandie
- 2022 Bourse arts visuels de la ville de Rouen.
Bourse arts visuels du département de Seine-Maritime.
Aide à la création de la région Normandie.

Workshop

- 2023 DeVisu : Dispositif d'interventions artistiques en collèges et lycées de la région Normandie.
"Chamboule tout" interventions en école élémentaire coordination Frac Normandie
- 2021 "Outils mous", Lycée Chérioux, terminale section horticole et métiers du paysage. coordination MacVal.

Solo show

- 2023 "Performance en permanence", le Shed - site de l'académie, Maromme.
- 2022 "En Dormance", Medium Argent, Rouen.
- 2021 "Flaques", Collectif d'en face, Rouen.

Group show / Performances

- 2024 "Cabaret Internet", El Pumarejo, Barcelone
- 2023 Performances, invitation des Ateliers pour Documents d'artistes Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes avec le soutien d'Artistes en residence, Clermont-Ferrand.
- 2022 "Histoire d'un ciel en creux", Brasserie Atlas, Bruxelles.
"Felicità Milieu des choses", Poush Manifesto, Aubervilliers.
- 2021 "La grande diagonale", Le quartier/EESAB Quimper.
"La grande diagonale", Bellevue, Douarnenez.
- 2020 "Voilà l'été", La Station, Nice.
"Pœurnf", Arcade Majeur et Sissiclub à Montévidéo, Marseille.
- 2019 "Dévier la trajectoire", FRAC (MECA) Aquitaine, Bordeaux.
"Chercher l'oubli", Galerie des Tables, Bordeaux.
"In (En)Acting Roles (performance festival)", SB34, Bruxelles.