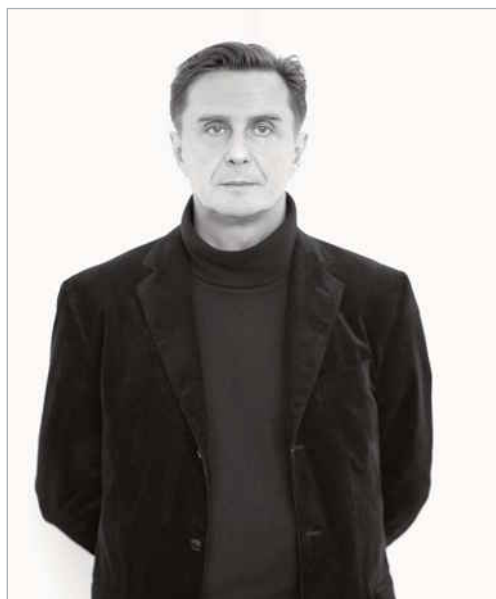


MEETING

Philippe Ramette poet on a razor edge

So what exactly was Philippe Ramette dreaming about when he was sleeping peacefully on his sofa and forgot our appointment? His next project? Embarrassed but ever-courteous, this dreamy, eternally meditative artist born in 1961, whose works are found in the top collections within and outside France, welcomed us to his Paris studio after his exhibition at the Galerie Xippas* - without his suit! Ramette attended the Ecole des Beaux-arts in Mâcon in 1985, then the one in Nice (Villa Arson), the following year. "I

drew a lot, but was a terrible student, and could never believe I could possibly get into the Beaux-Arts: a world I knew nothing about." He stopped painting once he became aware "that there were other things besides brushes". "I then realised intuitively that my work was more to do with sculpture and volume." None of his paintings have survived, apart from a few ashes which he incorporated into his evocative work "Les Cendres de Dieu" (*the ashes of God*) (1988). "This period of crisis lasted a year, during which Christian Bernard the director of the Villa Arson, and my teacher Noël Dolla accepted my drawing work alone," he says. Since then, his artistic process has evinced (almost) unchanging recurrences. The artist starts off with an idea: a mental project he outlines in a very precise, analytical drawing, rather like a strip cartoon. His many studies often consist of human silhouettes staged in particular situations, generally accompanied by comments and suggestive titles like "Canon à paroles" (*word cannon*) (2001), "Crise de désinvolture" (*crisis of nonchalance*) (2003) or "Les Limites de la modernité" (*the limits of modernity*) (2012). Then he makes "pseudo-scientific, Neo-Romantic" objects, according to Christian Bernard, "which you could have imagined in a private collection". His wood, metal and fabric objects indeed seem worthy of a showcase in the Musée de l'Homme during the 19th century. "I wanted their materials to distance them from the idea of modernity. They are timeless. And the physical qualities of wood enable me to go back over my mistakes," he says, revealingly. Thirdly, Ramette tests their viability himself. To do this, he uses the photographic process to immortalise them in situ at a precise instant, though the use of this technique came later in his career. The photo prints provide



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Philippe Ramette (b. 1961), "Portrait".

HD

Philippe Ramette, "Crise de désinvolture", 2003,
colour photo, 150 x 120 cm.



© Philippe Ramette. Courtesy of Galerie Xippas Adagp Paris 2012 © Marc Domage



Philippe Ramette, "L'Ombre (de moi-même)", 2007, light installation, mixed media, variable dimensions, work produced with support from the Domaine Départemental de Chamarande.

resounding proof and "reports" as to the practicability of his objects. The common denominator in all his work is the almost constant presence of his body as a territory of action. "I really enjoy staging myself, because this contributes to my own enrichment." Whether photographed with objects, hovering in "L'Ombre de moi-même" (*the shadow of myself*) (2007), where he uses an aesthetic, enigmatic staging to show the shadow of his invisible body standing in a circle of light emanating from his clothes lying on the ground, or suggested through "Espaces à manipulation" (*manipulation spaces*) (1996), or "Harnais" (*harness*) (1994), which defines its form, his figure appears everywhere.

TO SEE

Museum of Modern Art of Buenos Aires (MAMBA), Argentina,
18 October to 9 December. www.museodeartemoderno.buenosaires.gob.ar

An ingenious inventor and inveterate thinker, Ramette always goes one step further. With "Crise de désinvolution" (2000), "Promenades irrationnelles" (*irrational strolls*), "Inversions de pesanteur" (*inversions of gravity*) (2003), and "Explorations rationnelles des fonds sous-marins" (*rational explorations of the ocean depths*) (2006), he experiments with permutated points of view and physical states that are definitively shifted: he climbs up and fixes himself on a sitting room wall, lies down on the ocean floor as though in the sun, or reads a newspaper there... nothing could be more logical, in short! Through "Balcon II" (*Balcony 2*), carried out in Hong Kong Bay in 2001, the author, equipped with prostheses concealed beneath his clothing, achieves a staggering performance of displaced perspective with no digital trickery. "It was hard," he admits, "because the balcony sank the first time, but we were helped by some lucky chances: the wave wasn't expected, and for a brief instant there was a light from the sky." His crea-

TO READ

"Philippe Ramette. Inventaire irrationnel", Galerie Xippas Paris, Editions Courtes et Longues, Paris, 2010.

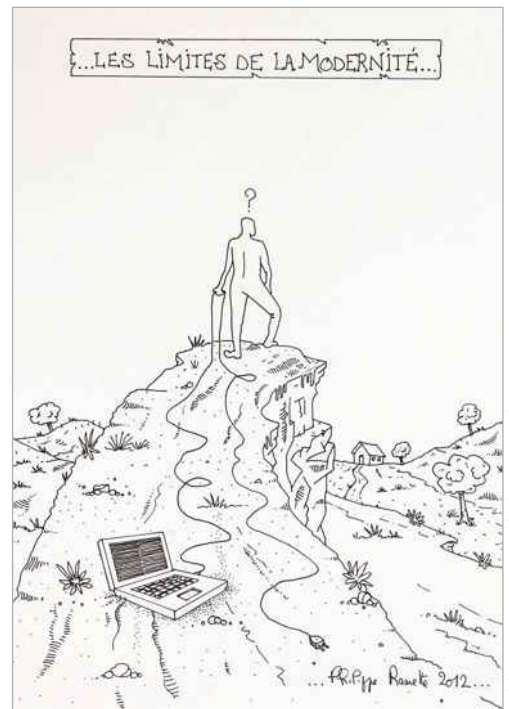
tions feature derision and humour, sometimes with gentle naivety and a genuine sense of the absurd or fantastical, but they also deal with more serious subjects. In "Modules à structurer les foules" (*modules for organising crowds*) (1995), "Karaoké pour dictateur potentiel" (*karaoké for a potential dictator*) (2002) and many other works, Ramette proposes more committed visions about the individual's relationship with the group, or points the finger at the fragility of life, personal freedom in "Prison portable" (1994), and the fundamental values of humanity. This artist in his impeccable suit-and-tie is certainly anxious, but remains optimistic by nature. He keeps his word and holds us to ours, puts his finger subtly on the inconsistencies in our society, and breathes poetry into a world sometimes cruelly lacking in it. When you ask which is the most iconic piece in his work, he immediately says "Objet à voir le monde en détail" (*object for seeing the world in detail*) (1990), a rectangular device you hold up to the eyes, with a central hole that enables you to pinpoint a detail in the landscape. "It's a Zen contemplation project," he smiles. If this seems trivial "in principle", it is still laden with meaning: do we know how to see? What do we really see? Taking inspiration from discussions between friends, rumours overheard in the street, exhibitions, literature and films, this dandy with his Buster Keaton look, living constantly on a razor edge, has already had three major, revelatory exhibitions in his life: one entitled "Gardons nos illusions", at the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO) in Geneva in 2008; another echoing the first in the Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain (CRAC) in Sète in 2011, and one in the Galerie Xippas in March this year. The latter marked a telling development in his career, with a display of ghost-like sculptures of himself, sometimes merging into the surrounding space and making play with one of his leitmotifs: the pedestal. In 2011, he collaborated with choreographer Fanny de Chaillé

on a show-performance "Passage à l'acte", where the dancers "played" his works. Though also admitting his fondness for his "Éloge de la paresse" (*in praise of sloth*) (2000), Ramette is anything but a dilettante. With a pronounced taste for physical effort, stagings that involve performance and sometimes elaborate preparations, and a sense of distance, anticipation and great delicacy, he likes to make us see that our imagination can adapt to the real world, and even serve it. In the end, his powerful narrative work urges us to know ourselves better – through him, and it suffices to believe in this fiction deeply, as he does.

Virginie Chuimer

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www.xippas.com

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Philippe Ramette, "Les Limites de la modernité", 2012, ink on paper, 42 x 29.7 cm.

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