

# Lionel Estève

## So Much

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Press release



Lionel Estève, *So Much To Give*  
#2, 2022, play dough,  
54 x 44 cm

Xippas Geneva

Rue des Sablons 6  
Rue du Vieux-Billard 7  
1205 Geneva, Switzerland

Tuesday to Friday:  
10am to 1pm and 2pm to 6.30pm  
Saturday: 12pm to 5pm

geneva@xippas.com  
xippas.com  
+41 (0)22 321 94 14

📍 @xippasgalleries  
📘 @xippasgalleriespage  
📺 @xippas

Openings November 5-6 on the occasion of the open house weekend Geneve.Art

Xippas Gallery in Geneva is pleased to present “So Much”, a solo exhibition by Lionel Estève. The playful interaction of the artist’s work with space, colour and sensory perception is the result of meticulous research using a wide range of materials. His creations are situated between randomness, repetition and precision.

Here, through images made of modelling clay, the artist investigates the relationship between the work and its title, finally making the latter the work itself. If the phrase “So much to give”, inscribed in the mass and repeated nineteen times, can evoke romanticism, love and the condition of the artist, the meaning of these words and those to whom they are addressed is voluntarily left to free interpretation.

In addition to these paintings, there is a series of sculptures representing hands made of pebbles. Gleaned by Lionel Estève from the banks of rivers and shores, they testify to the influence of the environment on his artistic practice. By assembling these pebbles like a jigsaw puzzle and choosing them by pareidolia, the artist not only questions the mystery of the nature that surrounds us, but also wonders, even more deeply, about the application of this psychological process to better apprehend the complexity of the world we inhabit.

"I would like to retrace in these few lines the path that led me to present an exhibition composed of the same phrase repeated nineteen times.

There is a strange relationship between a title and a work. At first glance, one might think that the title defines the work. This relationship is called into question by the works that have no title. Are they less intelligible than the others? Is there a lack? While a work can be without title, can a title be without work? Would it be like a name that would not designate anyone? It is by going through all these questionings that, as if by a slip, the title, little by little, became the work, that it was sufficient to itself. Thus appeared to me the pleasure of writing words, of tracing letters, and like an alibi, this pleasure became a pretext to invent forms. This experience had nothing to do with those pages of writing that one had to do as a child. On the contrary, it was a pleasure to draw letters and to freely discover the joys of calligraphy.

But I did not want to produce an image. I wanted these writings to be inscribed in a mass, in the mass, as in a block or a stele, as if to mark something immutable to reinforce the definitive character of the meaning of what is written. It is by working with modeling clay, a material known to all that comes from childhood, poor, accessible and poetic at the same time, it is by diverting this material, that it was allowed to me to escape the production of image in the sense that my practice, my gestures, remained those of a sculptor and that I was able to produce images with my hands.

In doing so, I was looking for sentences that were worth writing down, a sentence to mark. I was collecting statements of a total character. It was not really a search for meaning, but rather for something that seemed to me to be worth underlining and repeating, like a slogan.

Among all the words and phrases invented or gleaned, one caught my attention: "So much to give" from the American romantic-soul music repertoire of the 70/80s. I perceived this phrase as remarkable because it remained open to multiple interpretations. It was like a crossroads where different meanings crossed. Of course, one can only be amused by its sexual undertone sung by Barry White, Marvin Gay and a few others. We can also enjoy its kitsch or ironic side, but the meaning of these few words seems to me more ambiguous. Of course it is about love. But it could also be about the definition of the artist's condition, or maybe just a commentary on a kind of artistic practice that is not afraid to be generous, as a response to the "Less is more" that has become so academic. Its evasive aspect questions us: so much what? What is this sentence about?

One could also wonder to whom these words are addressed, is it a confidence? An observation? Why wouldn't it be an injunction? Its meaning would then be more prosaic, it would be about exchanges. There would have been a shift in meaning and we would then be talking about sharing, transactions and economy. For my part, I prefer that these questions remain open and that the meaning of this sentence remains intact as it was when I first encountered it."

Lionel Estève

Born in 1967 in Lyon, France, Lionel Estève lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

Since 1997, the artist has participated in numerous exhibitions such as « Laboratorium » at Antwerpen Open, Antwerp, Belgium (1999); “Generation Z” at the Museum of Contemporary Art PS1 (MoMA PS1), New York, United States (1999); “Amicalement vôtre” at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Tourcoing (MUba), France (2004); “Involution” at the CAC de Brétigny, France (2005); “An Eye on Europe” at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, United States (2006); “Boys Craft” at the Museum of Modern Art, Haifa, Israel (2007); “Heavy Lines” at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art (MOMus), Thessaloniki, Greece (2013); “Jardins” (curated by Laurent Le Bon) at the Grand Palais, Paris, France (2017) and “Points de Rencontres” at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2019-2020).

Solo exhibitions have included “Migrateurs” (curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist) at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM), Paris, France (2003); “Fleurs de Rocailles” at the Herzliya Museum of Art, Herzliya, Israel (2006); “Petite vitesse” at La BF15, Lyon, France (2007); “I can talk to my cat / Thinking what others are thinking” at the Palais des Beaux Arts (Bozar), Brussels, Belgium (2008); “There are no circles” at La Verrière / Hermès, Brussels, Belgium (2011); “Vivre en pensée” at Les Eglises, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Chelles, France (2014); “Un nuage sur mes épaules” at the BlueProject Foundation, Barcelona, Spain (2015); “Poussières urbaines et sculptures plates” at La Comète/Espace 251 Nord, Liège, Belgium (2016) as well as at the Manufacture de Sèvres, Sèvres, France (2017).

The artist’s work is part of public collections among them: Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France; CNAP, Paris, France ; FRAC Bretagne, Rennes, France; Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Namur, Belgium; Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece; Thalielab, La Fondation Thalie, Brussels, Belgium.

Lionel Estève has been collaborating for over twenty years with Galerie Baronian (Brussels) and since 2004 with Galerie Perrotin (Paris, Hong Kong, New York, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, Dubai) and his work is also represented by Gana Art Gallery in Seoul and Galerie Xippas in Geneva and Punta del Este.