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sculpture

Complex Forms of Intelligence: A Conversation with Tatiana Trouvé



The Shaman, 2018. Patinated bronze, marble, onyx, concrete, steel, sand, and water, dimensions variable. Photo: Mark Blower, Artwork © Tatiana Trouvé, Courtesy Gagosian

Born in Italy in 1968, the artist Tatiana Trouvé lives in Paris. Her new show, “On the Eve of Never Leaving,” opens at Gagosian Beverly Hills on November 1 and runs through January 11, 2020. The title is a translation of “Na Véspera de Não Partir Nunca,” the title of a poem by Álvaro de Campos, one of the many pseudonyms of the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa. The exhibition includes new drawings from two related series—“Les Dessouvenus” and “The Great Atlas of Disorientation”—installed in a metal armature that itself functions as a linear drawing through space, as well as *The Shaman* (2018), a life-size bronze cast of an oak, partially submerged in a pool of water beneath a ruptured concrete floor. Here Trouvé discusses the work in the show.



The Shaman (detail), 2018. Patinated bronze, marble, onyx, concrete, steel, sand, and water, dimensions variable. Photo: Mark Blower, Artwork © Tatiana Trouvé, Courtesy Gagosian

***Sculpture* magazine: Can you describe the making of *The Shaman*? How did the idea for it originate?**

Tatiana Trouvé: It's always difficult to say how an idea takes shape, because later it can be a crystallization of several things, experiences, readings, or events, like the immediate expression of an intuition. However, it is true that the interest I've taken for many years in plants, animals, and minerals, in all such living things and their ways of being, in their relationships to time, to their co-evolutions, is playing an increasingly important role in my work. Bridges and connections are, for example, emerging between the scent-marking used by wolves on the ground to demarcate their territory, which can be mapped, and the "Dream Charts" of Aboriginal people, whose phrase "dogs have turned us into men" has made a deep impression on me; I admire those kinds of huts that are sumptuously decorated by Vogelkop bowerbirds to seduce females, with their extremely delicate architecture, in which form and color border on abstraction. I'm interested in the ways plants orient themselves and fight; in the magnetic sensitivity and the geo-localization of great migrators; in a dog's sense of smell, which configures its volatile world as it moves, but also its memory and self-awareness. All these complex forms of intelligence fascinate me and rouse my curiosity and interest. This veritable revolution in the biological sciences, which is accompanying the ecological disaster that we are experiencing today, contains something that is particularly troubling. *The Shaman* fits into these interests.

More factually speaking, I've been working for some time on making fountains and I'm also interested—increasingly—in incorporating water and its circulation into my sculptures. *The Shaman* is part of that research, which is opening new horizons, because it involves an entire aquatic setting; it is surrounded by water and intersected by water, but it also integrates other elements, in concrete and stone. In that sense, it's no longer a fountain but rather an environment.

***Sculpture*: Why the title, *The Shaman*?**

TT: I've always considered my sculptures to be travelers crossing space and time. *The Shaman* is one such being who can pass through the boundaries of life and death, spirit and matter, connecting the animal and plant realms, and who navigates between different spatial and

temporal dimensions. Trees, too, maintain a singular relationship with space and time, with their very slow mobility, and their long lifespan, which can sometimes reach thousands of years. They are fascinating beings, which are connected to both the sky and the earth; they help produce water, from which they draw their nourishment, and they keep root systems alive for a long time after the trunks and branches of fellow trees are felled or fallen. These different elements play a part in the choice of this title, *The Shaman*, who is a transmitter.



*Untitled, 2019, from the series “Les dessouvenus,” 2013–. Pencil on paper mounted on canvas, and bleach, 125 x 200 x 3.5 cm.
Photo: Florian Kleinfenn, © Tatiana Trouvé, Courtesy Gagosian*

***Sculpture:* What is the relationship between your drawing practice and your sculptural practice?**

TT: Everything I make is connected to one another, and I don’t make a distinction between my drawings and my sculptures, both because I’ve always made sure that they can mutually exchange their qualities—in other words, that the sculptures can draw the space in which they are situated and that the drawings can sculpt the space in which they take place—and because elements can circulate from one to another, materials, forms, etc. Together they constitute a kind of ecosystem.

***Sculpture:* How did the idea to install the drawings on a metal armature come about?**

TT: It’s part of the movement I’ve just described: that structure is but the pursuit of the drawings themselves, extending their manner of integrating into the space and of reconfiguring it, which assures their passage between two dimensions.



Tatiana Trouvé. Photo: Claire Dorn

***Sculpture:* When creating a sculpture or installation, do you tend to begin with a concept or an image?**

TT: I don't really know the difference between an image and a concept or rather, to say it another way, we can easily recognize that an image is a concept or that a concept can be an image. I don't apply a method or a system. Instead I think that dynamics fill my work such that the starting points for my drawings, sculptures, and/or my installations never come from nowhere, but are always like echoes of other points situated elsewhere.

***Sculpture:* What is your day like? Do you work every day?**

TT: Artists are lucky that they can invent how they work, but the particularity of their work is such that there isn't really a time or a schedule. Sometimes I'm not sure if I'm working more effectively when I'm dreaming than when I'm going around in circles in my studio trying to solve a problem I'm facing.

***Sculpture:* Where do you find your inspiration? Books? Other art? People?**

TT: Curiosity is my guide.