

Not Just Another Day at the Office

by Alliance Française on Apr 10, 2012

Lise Duclaux tells the Alliance why she decided to use stamps as a form of art to express the poetry in the day-to-day dolldrums of administrative office work.

AF: How did you come up with this performance?

I start to make stamps for my plant certificates [another installation/performance] (Les plantes de Bruxelles), and discover that the act of stamp could be a performance itself.

AF: What is your inspiration?

Life, all form of living beings, non-permanent thing (like life, which is non-permanent), motion and time, permanent creation, fluxus movement; like Robert Filliou said: "l'art est ce qui rend la vie plus intéressante que l'art." Art is what make life more interesting than art.

AF: Is there a message you wish to convey with your performance? If so what?

Every stamp is a "watchword," a slogan or a rallying cry. It speaks about our human condition. For me living is more important than possessing, than buying... Art is a point of view, a view of the world, a transformation, what you live shown in another way. It's a kind of "act of trespassing." Everything – object, paper etc. – can become a piece of art if is stamped, and registered in the register of stamped persons.

AF: How would you describe the Belgian theatre scene today?

Very diverse and humble.

AF: What is one thing you love about the U.S.?

American art, nature and landscape, Indian culture.

AF: What is one thing you don't really like about the U.S.?

You can buy a gun at sixteen but you have to wait [to be] 21 years old to buy a can of beer. What is the most dangerous?

AF: What do you think of Washington DC?

I never went to Washington DC, [so] I don't know. It will be a surprise

AF: What gave you the idea to use stamping as an artistic method?

I start to make stamps for my plant certificates [another installation/performance] (Les plantes de Bruxelles), and discover that the act of stamp could be a performance itself.

Administration, bureaucracy, the capacity of human beings to categorize, classify and control. Stamps are still used (less, but still) in official documents. When you cross the border your passport is stamped, and children use stamps for playing. It's also a simple way of printing, a simple way to reproduce words, sentences, images, to multiply them, and you can put these sentences on many kind of objects.

In human life, humans need stamps for a living; stamps are important and necessary sometimes for doing things, for paper for example. It's why my performance is a game and has the form of an administrative procedure. It transforms an administrative procedure into a piece of art.

The title of the performance and the name of the register is a pun. In French "s'en tamponner" means "I don't care," and "le registre des tamponnés" means the register of stamped persons or of people who are a little bit crazy.

AF: How do you feel about the ephemeral versus the permanent; that is to say, what is the difference between when someone asks you to stamp their body and you know it will not last versus when someone asks you to stamp an item where it will?

There is a register of stamped persons, every person who asks for stamps has to write his name and sign the register. On this register I write which stamps the person received, the number of examples and on which material it was stamped. This person keeps a receipt of what's happened; it's a memory of the performance and a memory of a moment. And if the stamp is ephemeral, the paper will be memory of what's happened. It's not completely ephemeral.

This performance has an end. There are 500 numbers in the register, there are 500 people who can be registered and who can receive a stamp. The same person can't have two different numbers. When you register and you need/want more stamps, you have to come back with your receipt or your number. When all the register is filled (the 500th person), the suitcase will close. I can make another suitcase with some other stamps – or something else. (Some of the stamps – 2 or 3 – were used in another performance "Plantes de Bruxelles" and I think they [will be] still....)

I like the idea that the stamps would have an independent life that I can't control...it can be ephemeral or permanent, but something can happen.

I like when people think of the object to stamp (ephemeral or permanent), and when there is a meaning for them. Last time I stamped a computer, a poster, credit cards, a diary: specific stamp on specific date etc ...and I like that because you can imagine when the computer is broken that the person will keep it because of the stamp....it changes the value in a way of the object...a memory of something.

AF: What is the link between poetry and office administration?

None at first, but human beings categorize, classify... And the way it is done, the form that is taken, it's sometimes a kind of poetry. Everything, every act has to be named, has to be classified, put in order, stored in a closet, numbered. This is scary and fascinating at the same time, and the form it takes is often poetry, because it's never-ending, never finished, because it's never perfect.

The design of administrative paper (often old administrative paper) can be very beautiful.

And I had often problems with administration, with paper (bad luck I think), so to do this performance is deconsecrating in a way.