

South likes: Benjamin Valenza at Komplot, Brussels: *Circa Circa Fabrica Vehicula*

The show by Benjamin Valenza on view at Komplot constitutes the prosecution of an ongoing research on which the practice of the artist is based. With a multifarious approach, Valenza embraces diverse procedures, including sculpture, music poetry and performance. The exhibition addresses complex themes related to the culture of the Mediterranean, to the issues in defining the vernacular, and to the way we envision the representations of certain cultures. A series of sculptures created and showcased in the exhibition venue highlight a particularly important point of Valenza's vision. Maintaining that culture appears when it is shared or so to speak when it is exchanged, the objects and the experiences created by Valenza bypass any exotic take on the purity of regional cultures. In order to favour the portability of his discourse, the artist chose a material that is both easy to find and cheap to produce, regardless of geographies and local economies. For this reason he decided to employ a traditional recipe to cast soap sculptures with the help of a group of young artists. The collective work included the actual realisation of the objects as well as the production of a musical score to accompany the work of the group. The portability of this "vehicular factory", as it is defined by the artist, is in fact central to the show. Halfway between a workshop and an installation, the show is composed by different elements, each one bearing a specific semantic tension. The head of a swordfish, an impossible wooden boat, a piece of rope recreate cultural landscapes that are common to many different regions of the Mediterranean, as seen in Vittorio De Seta's documentaries or during Valenza's travel to Palermo in Southern Italy — whereas travelling is indeed a healthy habit rather than an entertainment for tourist. A poem, vacuum sealed in a plastic bag, reaffirms the research for a common character that unifies distinct cultural scenarios: the whole page is the seamless repetition of the words "lingua franca". For eventually, as Fernand Braudel wrote, "the life and history of the Mediterranean do not stop — as the geographer, the botanist or even the historian might have imagined — at the point where the last olive tree has been left behind".

Michelangelo Corsaro

Benjamin Valenza in conversation with Hugo Canoilas

HC

Recalling my visit to Benjamin Valenza in Brussels to get a thread of what might happen in this show: We walk around the Quartier and stop in a bar. We got two beers and smoke. We talk first about Jimmy Durham, the absence of his work

in this show, the qualities I could see in your works in Milan that are also present in some of his works: the text placed over an object, the time it requires, the passivity or indifference

or capacity to disrespect the object that holds the text (as full respect).

Then you mention the fact that everyone in the bar was drinking the same beer. That in fact there was something libidinal about it and that you wanted to make this bar at the opening serving schnapps that comes in ceramic bottles (both made by you and both using the fish as form and material).

The will is more or less to produce a sort cabaret, or a feast-preparing everyone to a certain state of mind and then introduce poetry (your poetry or others or both?)

I want to ask you also if you find a relation or a possible thread in all these assumptions I'm making here... For me there is something going on with the fish.

In Hungary for example one cannot eat fish on New Years Eve because fish runs away and money will run away from you. I understand it that fish as this quality, in Portugal we call eel to those people who are slimy. Away from these silly considerations the fish seems in motion (like bridges in paintings bring the will for motion). And in relation with this I see poetry as permanent movement (the poet aims to disappear). This I have already seen in your paintings where you place acid over them. Is poetry this path, this running away from us as if it would be possible to do so?

BV

Maybe for me there is something libidinal in this relation of language on top of an object, and sometimes even through an object... "La lingua" as an object, with its physicality like a giant tongue monster sliming on every works of arts in every exhibition. A massive 160 pounds of pink gelly flesh in motion. They are millions of monster tongues, and I'm like those lonesome characters in the twilight zone: I'm the only one that can see them, they are covering and mashing all artworks. I'm just trying to do that

before them without the mash, to cover the objects in order that this monstrosity will be scared and stay away from the objects. It is a very high form of respect for me. So “la taverna” metaphor is a soft version of this gore context, much more civilized and human. The idea can be even sexy for the most perverse of us.

In the frame of the gallery I thought it was more interesting to have this brewage coming from one jar or bottle, I’ve made two big ceramics that are inspired by the ancient amphorae, but very simple, actually they look more like big bollocks...

As old amphorae they are made and design for transport use, they’re vehicular objects. Their shapes always remind me something very organic like a fish or a dick. Oil or vine... Fat and alcohol.... Mine will be filled with a schnapps made out of fish, and they will be covered of course with poems and drawings of fish.

Pessoa once wrote that “the poet is a faker” so, yes I’m trying to escape from myself but at the end I m just hiding myself behind the bush or under the mask.

Of course the fish is a symbol of this vehicular way of life and thinking the objects.

Always in motion, always focus on what is appearing in between, during the translation, the transit.

You refer to a very old work of mine, those acid paintings made on hard panels where initially thought as background for installation I wanted them really in motion by the effect produce by the acid on the painting, a kind of slow motion or a very slow apparition of an abstract image (cf photography) at the back of a sculpture... It never worked out, I always thought nobody understood that, except you apparently, always had the feeling that people where reading them as paintings/objects, I m not a painter and it’s not a sculpture... I haven’t seen those things since I left Switzerland.

But recently I’ve seen Jimmy Durham, and you know what we had the same food!

HC

At the same time this movement is not really hiding and not really a mask... there’s a feeling that you are more and more with yourself (like a

good friend of mine said once to be with the weapons or the bombs next to your body). This has to do with the fact that you are more and more self sufficient, making yourself everything, driving your car to this or that place and install the show... it's not so much hippie or punk - do it yourself but more of an awareness of the time we are living that of course plays a change in the work you are doing. Maybe the movement is there in the sense that you try to approach your center of production and your work will always keep up a distance since it comes object. It happens and it is now in front of you... the work is than a mask you have to place in front of your face, it protects you but it also creates a new distance to yourself... if this is true one might say that the work will drive you in to an abyss, to fight with the demon (Like Stephan Zweig shows in his book the Struggle with the demon - the relation between life and work in Höderlin, Kleist and Nietzsche put it).

Yes I have more autonomy now, I'm more experienced as well... But I don't think I'm self sufficient, I need the others so much that I will never be able to stay alone. On the other hand I'm afraid of community... I have developed a kind of economy and a way to do things in a very brief delay, also easy to move from one place to an other. I like to work on any kind of material like if it was a text. Sometimes I envolved people on the way, I like to translate ideas, and see how words changed when you exchange them. It's more like a Troop. Regarding the mask, I always remember that word from Pessoa: "A poet is a faker". I may add, the performer and the visual artist is too. They double, and even multiply. And sometimes, in extreme synthesis, they overlap and are the same person. Maybe I'm looking for all these three roles in one, like a "fixed center that moves around, if it can be considered a real center, remaining the same and becoming more central, more uncertain and domineering"

Passe Passe

Jennifer Teets in conversation with Benjamin Valenza

About four exhibitions: The Ephemeral Cosmogony I & II, Working class hero, & Double song, the game space.

Jennifer Teets: Where did you wake up today?

Benjamin Valenza: I woke up after a dream... I was headed down a big river, going back to the sea, on a small homemade raft, the journey had stops, like chapters, on small islands, each stop was related to a short and simple action I had to do, like digging a hole, or smoking a cigarette. At the end there is just the river and the sea, then I woke up in my bed.

Jennifer Teets: What is your day like today or an everyday like to you?

Benjamin Valenza: It's not very organized. Today I will think about that dream. Maybe I'll use it as narrative system in a future project for example. I will probably work on some key moments, like a mental storyboard in a way. But usually my days consists in reading of any and every kind. I don't do anything as a ceremony or follow a program or schedule. I think I hate that. In general, I'm not an organized person.

Jennifer Teets: You were born in Marseille though principally trained in Lausanne. What were the conditions of your move and how did Lausanne affect your mode of production versus any other place?

Lausanne is nowhere. I came only for the University of Art and Design in Lausanne though I met nice people there. Most of the people I cherish today are from that period in my life. Lausanne is a quiet place. I live outside of the city in a forest north of Crissier, while my studio is almost outside of town. I don't go much to Lausanne, but I like the landscape around. I can work and and staty concentrated. It's not a retreat, it is a different relation to time and it's slow. Compared to Marseille, it is an other world. My eyes widen in Marseille, but as soon as I'm there I want to leave. I have that sickness of people who grow up in an harbor city. In fact my relationship is totally distorted, as it is distanced from my memory. It is now a city that probably never existed as such; the concept of being part of a city is something hard for me to understand. Maybe it has something to do with the idea of the building of an unconscious identity. At the moment I don't know exactly if Lausanne really affects my production; maybe it affects more the way I produce things, but for the objects themselves, I can't say yet.

Jennifer Teets: Do you consider yourself a studio artist? Do the ideas initiate in the studio or elsewhere?

Benjamin Valenza: I love watching DVDs of artist portraits. For example, I recently saw Richard Prince's studio on television. I think it's amazing to have so much taste for organizing space. That inspires me a lot. Studios are a great place for inspiration. My mechanic just cleaned his place and that would be a great studio for me. I'm also inspired by garages. But there is also bedrooms for dreams, airports for sounds. I also like bookstores, theaters, movies.... If I'm a studio artist is a difficult question to define. I haven't been in my studio for two months, but on the other hand I have intense periods of work there and also with people in the sense of workshops....

Jennifer Teets: I sometimes imagine the studio as a movie where a whole world of processes occur that grant the work its breadth. Do you ever make work outside of the studio?

Benjamin Valenza: Yes, I know what you mean, but in my case I have the tendency of imagining everything around as elements of a movie... One of my friends just told me that my studio looks like a junk shop. Storage is almost like a presentation – it depends on points of view or contexts. I don't think studios in general are defined typologies or belong to clear functions. Here's a question of

context: recently I produced a large scale installation, so I had to produce it on site. It was different than the usual works, but it also was a great source of energy. Working inside or outside the studio, principally brings forth a dichotomy in the way you produce. It presents a situation of comfort or a situation of danger. I don't want to be trapped in any of these situations, so I'm balancing perpetually in between. I see my studio more as a box filled with various stand-by materials and ideas.

Jennifer Teets: Your recent work has been defined by a group of reoccurring tropes such as stones, megaphones, and postcards. Could you expand on this symbology and the relation to primitive forms? How does the trope configure itself inside of your work?

Benjamin Valenza: I thought I needed to start with fundamental things. Stones are archetypes of sculpture maybe. I'm not interested in their primitiveness, but I do focus on their primacy. I approach materials as words, but I'm not trying to define a discourse. I'm into poetry, as a

formalist approach to writing. The primacy of forms is sometimes a way to explore abstract language close to prosody and tones. The poet as a musician, but without the idea of harmony. I feel I live in a complex and dissonant world. So things need to be distributed in more complex, fragmented, conceptual systems, like dreams for example. That's when, as Fernando Pessoa says, the poet became a faker...

I use these prepared megaphones for readings, they are like extensions or prostheses. The sculpture "DON QUIXOTE HIP" (2009) was the first of these. In this case, I assembled a megaphone and a walking-stick. I wanted to create an unknown typology of an object. I quite like this double contradiction of function and symbols: the megaphone is used to vocalize an authoritarian speech. On the other hand, I use it to recite poetry. Using a stick can be a sign of a weakness or a handicap, yet it marks a position of authority. I like this duality – it is symbolic due to the social position of the artist.

Regarding the postcards, it's again a question of duality. I dialogue with Josef Hannibal, my partner. It's a playful way of turning my notes into a poetic exchange.

Jennifer Teets: Who is Josef Hannibal?

Benjamin Valenza: I met Josef Hannibal a long time ago in south of Europe. His first appearance into Art history was in 2006 when fellow designer Stéphane Barbier Bouvet and I introduced him to Jeanne Graff and Adrien Missika the, not even named yet, 1M3 crew, the "KUNSTHALLE" of Lausanne. And so 1M3 was initiated with this mysterious Josef Hannibal, curator, critic, sociologist and poet. Hannibal was the inspiration that formed the exhibition program at 1m3 since June 2006. Hannibal is a "metaphor of the public." From what I know he was born in Gori, Georgia, the ex- USSR and grew up in Carthage, Tunisia, close to the Tunis Carthage International Airport. It is by staring each day at the planes in the Tunisian sky that he discovered his taste for Contemporary art and networks of communication. Hannibal's father was a Unionist of the UGTT who died in 1978 at the time of a trade union protest. His mother was a Pacifist and taught French Literature at the Université Populaire de Tunis. In the early 1980's she left Carthage for Paris. In Paris, Hannibal began to work as a Trade Unionist with his cousin, and took part in the French Union syndicate in memory of his

father. At the same time he began studying at L'école du Louvres from afar as well as the Université de Vincennes, where he studied the History of Philosophy until 1987. He quit his studies before the end and speaks English only slightly – unfortunately.

Jennifer Teets: Can you tell us about the exhibition you had at Formcontent in London and how it lead into the exhibition at FORDE in Geneva?

Benjamin Valenza: It was called the Ephemeral Cosmogony and it was an act on the exploration of the sacred. The FormContent version was centered around a performance with readings, video projections, and manipulations of objects. It had something to do with the concept of genesis: the event was proposed in several scenes built around manipulations of props, i.e. tools/sculptures. The space was used as an architectural stage. I used painted plexiglass as a screen for projecting the videos; I read while using and moving the props with the video as a background. It was a live integration into the projection cone that created a shadow play or a “mise en abîme”. In a way it was like a minimal theater and a play on cosmogony, with four scenes in response to the classical narrative of genesis.

At FORDE, it was more of an architectural exercise by creating a large scale installation. This monumental installation evoked a cornucopia through several forms floating in the gallery space. The modules appeared as both architectural units, autonomous forms, and projection surfaces. They operated as phonemes. The Ephemeral Cosmogony is a machine that disperses language.

Jennifer Teets: And how is this a formal analogy for you?

Benjamin Valenza: Well, the Tower of Babel is often represented as a pyramid rising spiral, with multiple degrees or levels. It's sort of the same structure as a large horn. Cornucopia or as we call it in French “corne d'abondance” is a mythological object that has the ability to multiply everything it hugs. It is also represented as a kind of giant horn, who provides a seamless flow of food. Also, the Tower of Babel was intended to be the historical moment for the dispersal of the language and the emergence of different languages. By a mental movement, it was enough to imagine the Tower of Babel as a soft architecture, or a curved tower in

tandem with the formality of the cornucopia. It occurred to me then as a formidable thing that a kind of language gun can exist as a social architecture or monument.

Jennifer Teets: What's the role of text in your work? Could you share some textual references with us?

Benjamin Valenza: Like I said I started to use text as a physical material, but also I had this desire of being as close as I can to my works. I wanted to be honest with myself – as an artist not using any strategies. First, I realized that if I was able to write something good, in the same way I talk everyday with my friends, then I'd be able to embody this with readings or performances and voilà! That's the role of text in my work, it's allow me to express myself in a complete way. I want to talk in the same way at the bar and at the gallery, museum, or whatever. It took sometime to realize this simple function of poetry in my work.

Before I made assemblage sculptures with the appearance of words on the sculpture, carved or written letters, fragmented sentences or titles used directly on the object, cut-ups etc... But as I mentioned, the world is fragmented, and so my poetry has to be fragmented. Expressing myself in a complete way means, that I want to explore with text everything I'm looking at. The form is simple, sometimes even vulgar, but at the end I can really explore things that seem totally foreign to me, but ultimately prove to be the most familiar.

And like I said before, I'm not well organized. For one, I was trained as a formalist and I worked against that. I was interested in the "new novel" like the work of Burroughs and the "cut-up method." I also became interested in Beuys' work, which was all based on mythic systems, a kind of materialist approach to myth. I really liked the maximist approach of Beuys. But I wouldn't leave out the biographical. I just don't want it to be predominant. I want to treat biographical things as equal to fiction, mixed with fictive elements or historical elements, and I don't want to deny that. As far I remember, I always told stories to people. Growing up in a Mediterranean region places you directly within an oral tradition. So objects and narratives are fundamentally inseparable for me. I became interested in Surrealism for the potential link between images and text. I consider some of those experiments as systems of signs. I recently started to produce more complex things, imagining a link between Surrealism and

the Californian assemblage scene as well as some obscure beat generation writers.

Jennifer Teets: What are your parameters for that link? Do you make a certain kind of methodology for the approach?

Benjamin Valenza: I've always been interested in Surrealism, and I liked that Surrealism had a program – it wasn't just about gushing, it was about taking all these memories and then trying to put

that material back into a kind of sociological context. Which is something that I think was never taken very seriously with the transition of Surrealism into America. The programmatic social aspect was left behind, and it all became really subjective, but I always thought the analytic aspect of Surrealism was not so different from Conceptualism.

My interest in literature is lead by a taste for epic poetry. I'm inspired by individual trajectories, the Bildungsroman, original myths, and archetypes. For example, the first performance I did was built around fragments of texts written by George Maciunas' mother in his diary. I consider those writings as a potential parallel art history. Something equivalent to an official narration or another subjectivity. From that I started to compose a poem. I kept in mind the formal structure of a souvenir or a dream – I wrote something like a long song with verses and choruses, like overlapping waves of anecdotes. After that I made the work I mentioned before "DON QUIXOTE HIP" and I started to use it reading this poem. Maciunas did not fail in his search for the dematerialization of art, and he didn't succeed at all either. Francois Cheng once said that "Civilisation began with myth and ended with skepticism". I began to consider Maciunas among others, maybe myself with Josef Hannibal as a modern Don Quixote.

Jennifer Teets: Who are your frequent collaborators or brotherly-sisterly artists?

Benjamin Valenza: Like I mentioned earlier, I recently collaborated with Stéphane Barbier Bouvet, Philippe Decrauzat, and Guillaume Pillet. I'm of course close to Jeanne Graff and Adrien Missika, since we started all together with Barbier Bouvet, 1M3. 1M3 is much larger than we ever conceived of it. This summer I was part of BABA, an experimental project of an artist run-school in Paris by artists Lili Reynaud Dewar and Daniel Dewar with many of my friends. I did a workshop there. For the last three

years, I've run an ephemeral record shop that lasts one week during Art Basel called ARTIST RECORDS. It is a project by John Armleder and for over 4 years now he has been invited by Lionel Bovier from JRP/RINGIER. John had this idea of an artist records shop. Stéphane Kropf is in charge there of the records selection. I joined the team 3 years ago.

Jennifer Teets: Is it music made by/for artists ? How does the event work at Art Basel?

Benjamin Valenza: Mainly it's records made by artists or collaborations between musicians and artists or in some cases record covers made by artists. It's a great situation during Art Basel. You're kind of outside of the serious game. Just relaxed, listening to music, coffee and cigarettes and later champagne and cigarettes... again, it's a zone of freedom. Generally people are so stressed during this Basel week. I prefer that reality instead of the reality of the market.

Jennifer Teets: You mentioned 1M3 as being a much larger endeavor than you thought of it since the beginning, In which way? The responsibility of the space together with your individual practice? What kind of exhibitions do you focus on and who is your audience?

Benjamin Valenza: Well, both! But one principal point for me in my experience is the relationship with the "other". In this in-between, from where language arises, the exhibition is sometimes created. With this "other" (in the case of the invited artist) you must incorporate another system of significance. That's why our exhibitions are not lead by a statement a group of related people or any notion of style. It's all about a social energy.

Sometimes we take decisions collectively, and sometimes it's an individual proposal. Like others, we also have lists of projects. But there is no need of unanimity on proposals. Josef Hannibal is a great help for this. Since Jeanne Graff fully took over the direction of 1M3 she now regulates this energy. She takes the project to another level. She's very precise and demanding, the result was clearly present in the trilogy of shows "Le vertige de la moraine", with works from Isabelle Cornaro, Louise Nevelson, Marta Riniker Radich, and Delphine Coindet. We just opened a new show with the artist Ericka Beckman that I curated. I saw her films in NYC last year, and this became a motive for me. I wanted to meet her and

share my enthusiasm with my friends in Switzerland. By the way, you have to come and see the show!

Benjamin Valenza by Aliina Astrova
The Ephemeral Cosmogony, Genesis, at FormContent

In his collection of essays entitled *Profanations*, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben focuses on the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Agamben understands “profane” as that which is available to man, whereas the “sacred” is that which exists outside of the realm of “common use.” Applying these definitions to the world of art, the audience, unable to “use” or “experience” art, is reduced to worshipping it. However, can artistic liturgy produce catharsis or, for that matter, any kind of experience? This question lies at the heart of [Benjamin Valenza](#)’s exhibition at [FormContent](#), “The Ephemeral Cosmogony.” A year after his first New York solo show, the exhibition is Valenza’s solo debut in London. Rapidly gaining a reputation for his eclectic, multidisciplinary approach, the show is comprised of a variety of works, from projections to recordings, sculpture to installation. Valenza’s artistic proficiency doesn’t simply lie in creating visually stimulating art, but in developing ideas and works for his conceptually rigorous exhibitions. The idea of the sacred is not new in Valenza’s work, which has previously featured images of sphinxes, religious sources, and allusions to diverse mythologies. Yet this exhibition takes this interest out of the domain of reference, and positions the sacred at the center of Valenza’s practice. Realizing the sacral potential of all works of art—given that they participate in the liturgy of an art exhibition—instead of trying to create an “art experience,” he examines whether it is possible to extract “experience” from the very ritual of worshipping.

Stabbed in the back
Benjamin Valenza by Frédéric Chapon

Le local est immonde. Rien de pire que de nous ramener à la niche, au territoire, à la promiscuité radieuse du face-à-face. Une culture qui a pris le

risque de l'universel doit périr par l'universel. Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories*

Cette massue est à moi, un point c'est tout. Elle est tachée de sang, mais insuffisamment, insuffisamment. Je me suis mal défendu, mais je me suis défendu. »

Samuel Beckett, *Malone meurt*.

The postcard, taken as something which is both complete visible yet which delivers a personal message, is perhaps the last refuge of singular, exclusive, unintelligible writing. What can it do to it to be seen, from the moment when the language which is written on its card is foreign to those who handle it and familiar only to the addressee? It is this paradox which charmed Serge Daney, who was searching for the maximum intimacy possible in the public domain, using a popular vehicle. But it involves the sender writing on the back of the image. Writing somehow behind the card's back, in spite of it. Benefiting from its aura, which thus softens the written message, it is suggestive of vanity. It shows that we scorn it, while letting others believe. That is what is written on the back of the cards written by Benjamin Valenza, picking up on Walter Benjamin's legends or the barely guarded comments by Alix in the film by Jean Eustache. We read on the back of a Piranèse picture which has been attacked with a Stanley knife: "La destruction fut ma Béatrice" ["Destruction was

my Beatrice"]. This is followed by "S.M." a subtle indication as to the author, then by "comme toujours, B.V." ["as always, B.V."], addressed to Jo. The word "destruction" is marked with a cross: it is in the negation of negation that B.V. finds fault. B.V.'s practices are rooted in a context analysed by Jeff Wall, when the Canadian artist looked at On Kawara and his *Today Paintings*: the advent of photojournalism as art and, simultaneously, the culmination of monochrome painting. It is only through imitating painting and having noted its obsolescence that photojournalism, in pushing its own boundaries, can claim to be an inadequate representation of the subject. Thus it marks its parodic redeployment in attempts to document Land Art, Performance Art and above all, Conceptual Art. Halfway between Rodchenko, Walter Evans and Johan Baldessari we find Warhol and *Five Deaths Seventeen Times in Black and White* (1963): two panels, one of which is in monochrome with

nothing to say, next to the other whose images have already been forgotten, despite their repetition. This re-emerges strangely in B.V. who splits a Hokusai, thickly covering half of it in black. While monochrome is the unattainable point of no return for all genres, in particular the painting of history, historical changes are foreign to it, and it distances itself from all progress. Jeff Wall's point of view implies that the continuation of genres in painting is evidence of this halt to progress, this unaccomplished revolution, Rodchenko's failure and the ever renewed success of a painting which can do no more than write "on top of a monochrome – by effacing, supplementing, or disfiguring a monochrome".

B.V. does not put something on top of etc... On the contrary, he moves towards monochrome. From Roman ruins towards this never-fixed point where painting slopes definitively away, he returns to monochrome, this outsider so unacceptable that it has to be dressed according to the hue of the moment. B.V. does not act "on top", but rather "on the back". It was both Siegfried and Hagen who made him reveal his secret and re-remember his past in order to be able then to destroy it. The Wagnerian myth exploited by Hitler and which became this stab-in-the-back myth is played out on the sly, between Jo and B.V. and their shared herd of war veterans: Piranèse, Malévitch ...

B.V. writes to Josef Hannibal. Extracts: "N'oubliez pas de me ramener un verre d'eau" ["Don't forget to bring me back a glass of water"], "Je dirai à l'équipe mexicaine de ski de ramener le sel" ["I'll tell the Mexican ski team to bring back the salt"]; Jo sometimes lives in Marseille, sometimes stays at Hamed's in Tunis but most often resides at Avenue de la Harpe in Lausanne, the address of the 1m3 gallery which Benjamin Valenza (alias Josef Hannibal) founded. Josef's branches are nearly as big as Pessoa's but here the inverse of heteronymy is taking place, because hidden behind Josef Hannibal, Stéphane Barbier Bouvet, Jeanne Graff and Adrien Missika sometimes write and sign. Josef Hannibal is the curator residing at the 1m3 gallery. Whatever happens, we always find one Josef painting at Avenue de la Harpe, a painting signed by him, which may be almost cubist or even pastoral... He makes his mark on places and moves around, as he has just organised his first retrospective exhibition in Blancpain contemporary art in Geneva, and is hosting 1m3 booth at the Zoo art fair in London.

In this way, Benjamin Valenza corresponds with this Jo. It is to him that he sends cards and from whom he receives them, upon which reproductions of Piranèse, Malévitch or Hokusai are covered over, cut, customised, erased ... The fate of the card is reduced and the number of intermediaries reduced to zero, the surface is glazed, the back is rid of the neutral quality which makes it seem like a thousand other cards: it is already addressed. It is therefore these alterations, additions and deletions which B.V. addresses to himself, via Josef Hannibal, like so many marks attesting to his historical peregrinations. B.V. and Jo travel in the context of history, not in terms of time zones... They prefer a coma to jetlag and views of Pompei to views from Pompei. Sandwiched between two fine sheets of glass fixed together with a blob of liquid glue, the postcards sit on a precarious shelf and are delicately protected, as if suspended during a process of programmed deterioration. It appears that through his postcards B.V. is attempting to devalue, in a way which is close to the abusive misappropriation of Guy Debord. Turning back to collage, complete darkening, bordering upon the destruction, the extinction of these reminders, reminders of a history which runs until the

extreme limits of the possible, the fatal failure through haste and which will never finish, having missed its end.

Benjamin Valenza at Fluxia, by Simone Frangi

Second event for the pro-French Fluxia and first Italian solo for Benjamin Valenza. Condensed in just a few square meters, a multi-shaped artistic path. Which represents the structural problems of communications...

“A poet is a faker”, wrote Pessoa in 1931. The performer and the visual artist is too, we may add. They double, and even multiply. And sometimes, in extreme synthesis, they overlap and are the same person. Benjamin Valenza (Marseille, 1980; lives in Lausanne) is all these three roles in one, a “fixed center that moves around, if it can be considered a real center, remaining the same and becoming more central, more uncertain and domineering” (Blanchot).

The mixture of writing, reading and sculpture gives life to a plastic work of art completely set in its literary matrix and in its poetic origin, which

leads to a precise objective: the modification of meanings in the oral tradition, the loss of information in communication and the malleability of cultural codes. In other words, a transient meeting between subjects.

In the work in progress *Époopée 9* Valenza faces a difficult multiplication: a series of 15 postcards, sealed in Plexiglas and silicone, witnesses the exchange of letters of the artist with his heteronomous Josef Hannibal. Two names, two lives, two different personalities. And just one epic journey, terrain vague, where Valenza becomes another person by himself, without ever stopping to be himself.

Benjamin and Josef exchange messages noted on the back of the profaned reproductions of Piranesi and Klein: frequent graphic interventions and small collages hide the artistic authorities, revealing the meta-project of an art history made to be cancelled. The literary fiction of *Époopée 9* is an ever-open performance experience, a linguistic game that reveals a story or, better, an “habitual visiting”, that travels both on the track of daily events and metaphysical events.

The works placed in the exhibition area alternate sculptures with installations. The role of exergue of the entire work is played by *Don Quixote hip*, the megaphone used by Valenza in literary performances, a work tool used by the artist, made of a brass horn and a rod, with a stand and scepter. The symbol of the power and fragility of art, kept in a large case, becomes a mobile sculpture, always ready for departure. The artist is the glorious carrier of his art.

The apology of daily events continues through the assembly of common elements and their virtual allure. With three oak wood cross beams and a portion of steatite, Valenza reproduces in a sculpture the symbol of hold your tongue, an intimidation commonly used among Paris homeless people. Not only elevated poetry, but also lower and slang codes, with an idea of new folklore and a shared feeling for the contemporary.

Avoiding the danger of an aseptic neo-concept, Valenza relies on an ironic levity of tone. Of the conceptual artist there is only a solid project and a great formal cleanliness, declined through in a

more embracing version with strong playful elements. A clear artistic work, without traps or hiding places.

Benjamin Valenza by Jeanne Graff

The stone, the mask, the postcard, the stick, & the megaphone

Benjamin Valenza's sculptures can be read as poetic systems that make sense in the geographic, semantic shift of temporal movement and through a re-contextualization of the use and function of symbolic objects. These lateral movements or shifts in space act not only as a mirror reflecting our codes, but through the production of a mental image that reveals them almost magically, unexpectedly.

Don Quixote Hip includes more than one part, which put together create a disorienting effect. A wooden stick in its primary shape - whose function recalls both that of a tool for walking and a symbol of power - is shaped using aluminum, then painted and it is topped with a megaphone. "Don Quixote Hip" rests in its box, which reminds us of a musical instrument, waiting and dumb. During his performances, Benjamin Valenza uses the element as an extension of his own being: the stick as instrument that embraces the people present and draws attention, the megaphone as a prosthesis of expression. He reads the poem hidden in the envelope, he performs in front of an audience while the amplified sound unfolds in space.

Canned Panthéon is a mask freed from its original function: hiding from others, embodying a person or protecting one's self. Made out of shaped mirror-polished aluminum, it is hung in space to become mobile. Blind, it reflects a deformed image of the exhibition context where it hangs and shines in the light. Just like the mask, the stone on three feet - crutches that help it stand - will recall an object belonging to another community, eluding its function.

Hold your Tongue uses a symbol that only the community of vagabonds would understand. The object dominates, unprepared and out of its context, just like a residue favorable to the projection of a different sense. Its shape, a pink stone fixed to an oak beam - also leaning on metal crutches - recalls the shape of an open mouth and its tongue in a soundless scream. The title Hold your Tongue is written on one of its sides, whereas the text is present on most of its objects. Etched, glued, burnt, declared or painted it creates a poetic dimension that will overlap with the sculpture.

The texts refer to standard of epic poems and literature: Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Journey to the End of the Night by Céline, Cervante's Don Quixote or the Time Machine by H.G Wells.

Benjamin Valenza considers the gesture in its physical and sculptural shape, but also in a literal sense, as the task started by the hero to complete his great journey or crossing.

The layers and the time in which they appear are very important, just like the sculpture, the text, and the image created through their dialectics. The spaces between the signs form places in which the imaginary tends to unfold.

The postcards, objects with a long popular tradition, are frozen under glass. The written part, hidden until the object is handled, acts as a trap into which a mental story or journey is projected. Each one evokes a gesture such as erasure, overlapping or even replacement. The verse is matched with a shift – the postal stamp – besides the text with an epic narration form. The hidden differences of sense, matter and shape, recall more an assembly of elements than a collage of elements – layers assembled one by one to start a story – and create an aura around the object, an enchantment linked to the different uses past and present.

The co-existence between the elements, the sign, the text and the image created spaces of freedom with a variable set-up, dotted with anachronisms and cracks, both in meaning and matter.

The exhibit presented by Fluxia moves towards the format of the book and the epic poem.