

PASCAL NEVEUX

# “INHABITING THE INHABITUAL”

*The space of our lives is neither continuous, nor infinite, nor homogeneous or isotropic. But do we know exactly where it breaks off, where it curves, where it disconnects and comes together? We confusedly experience cracks, gaps and points of friction, sometimes vaguely aware that something is stuck, that it breaks loose or collides. Though we seldom seek to learn more about it and more often than not, wander from one spot to another, from one space to another, without measuring, without taking into account or considering the course of space. The issue is not to invent space and certainly not to re-invent it (too many well-intentioned individuals are already there to reflect upon our environment...), the problem is rather to question space, or more exactly, to read space; for what we call everydayness is not the obvious, but opacity: a kind of blindness, or deafness, a sort of anesthesia.*

*From these elementary findings the book develops, the diary of a user of space.*

Georges Perec, “Prière d’insérer”, *Espèces d’espaces*  
*Species of Spaces*, 1974.

Eric Hattan who lives and works in both Basle and Paris, currently occupies the two large exhibition stages for a three-month period, allowing him to present an important corpus of work in Marseille for the first time, entering into a dialogue subtly echoing writing and the architectural identity of our newly inaugurated building.

This is in follow-up to several visits Eric Hattan has already paid to Marseille since 2006, in the wake of different phases of preparation and construction, culminating in our move from the Panier neighborhood to the heart of the Joliette neighborhood. Also welcomed by the Frac Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur in the framework of the Frac's 30-year anniversary and the "Pleiades" exhibition presented at the Toulouse Abattoirs in 2013, Eric Hattan is quite familiar with the Fracs, their functioning modes and missions.

Formidable spokesman for daily life, keen analyst of our habits and practices, his artistic approach takes full possession of place, inviting us to momentarily rediscover the spaces we inhabit with great sharpness and singularity. This exhibition is an open invitation to the discerning visitor, so that each, through personal acuity and perception at hand, may recognize the artist's intent in regards to the exhibition of each installation, the choice of one object or another, adroitly helping us seize upon spaces wherein we move and settle our traveling eyes.

Taking possession of space is the primordial gesture of living beings, women and animals, plants and clouds, a fundamental manifestation of balance and time. Occupying space is the first act of existence. It is thus a matter of becoming aware of our surroundings and thinking about them, provoking thought by showing, revealing what generally escapes the eye and exists only in its functional dimension. Emergency exits, fire doors, ventilation grills, etc., these are technical elements which, for a time have become esthetic elements, as an exhibit echoes a building's infrastructure, its networks, circuits and flow, like all living organisms. For Eric Hattan inventing a space falls within the realm of a process producing "poetical non-events" or "indexed presences" which become tools and codes of an exploration strategy and renewed narration of spaces proffered, for our listening and awareness. An exploration of space put into practice, practical work inside these two exhibition stages. This reflection on space, this link between sight and place is a recurring theme in all Eric Hattan's productions, not necessarily an objective around delivering some kind of truth or critical analysis on one sort of architecture or another, in private or public space, more a revelation concentrated around the infra-ordinary, the infra-sensitive; thus offering first-hand meaning, albeit no longer quite as obvious as would seem for the users of space that we are.

Whether concerning the practice of sculpture, video or public interventions in space, Eric Hattan endeavors to discrete-

ly reveal details about our environment, often with irony. Simply said, through displacement and diversion, he knowingly modifies our perception of banal objects and our daily lives.

This exhibition elaborated for the Frac is a functioning device wherein the artist's own productions dialogue with the Frac's architecture as we witness its interior and exterior spaces forming a spatial creation the visitor is invited to roam, all while awakening consciousness about what's at play in and outside the building. For Eric Hattan, art is an attempt to understand and complete the relationship he weaves with his environment. By asserting the unspectacular nature of his artistic propositions, he focuses on provoking the spectator's attention, thereby shedding new light on the reality surrounding us. Work of infiltration par excellence, rooted in methodological observation, this exhibit is an occasion to show the installation *Beyroots*, acquired by the Frac in 2011 and featured as a key piece of the hanging presented on exhibition stage 2, on view for the first time in Marseille.

Eric Hattan has always been particularly mindful to everything around him. In this spirit he has created his body of work, especially videos, whose sequences extracted from the real prove their astonishingly poetic and comic potential. Awareness given to the gestures of everyday life, a fleet-

ing scene or an unexpected situation illustrate how the most touching and strange event may arise at any time, first and foremost in the street. He also attempts to create or modify spaces by tinkering with the notion of scale (the unexpected dimension of objects, sculptures and micro architectures), by involving the spectator who is confronted with the opposition of physical reality versus visual illusion (dividing and rerouting architectural and functional elements). The exhibit is itself designed as a succession of synopses and narrative sequences forming a poetic and cinematographic web, weaving a potential interpretation of the building. Displacement in its myriad forms resides at the heart of Eric Hattan's artistic gesture, because movement and what it implies is of utmost importance for the artist in terms of both body and spirit. Take for instance his videos, visual notebooks capturing dislocated moments because isolated: birds larking about in water, a dog walking, pedestrians crossing. But he also shows what's happened, this time markers trace out time, revealed in houses, cars or fallow ground. Artist of the existing, Eric Hattan perpetually produces his work starting from a real element, departure point sweeping the spectator along towards a revealing unknown. "Look while you may" as the famous quote states inside Jules Verne's novel *Michel Strogoff*, an epigraph for George Perec's *Life A User's Manual*; it's also exactly what Eric Hattan invites us to do in this exhibition.

Spaces are multiple, changing, fluctuating and all needful of limits, obstacles and borders to make them exist. Space is in fact composed of emptiness and if we direct our eye towards the blue infinite of the sky, it is impossible to be fully conscious of this space. A cloud or bird allows us to feel this seemingly infinite space and recognize the distance of the sun for example. Confronting a new space – virgin, public, where we work, live, etc., – is always a source of inspiration and change; changing space also means starting over.

But why is it so important to question these “Species of Spaces”, to use Perec’s terms? Simply for their heady political importance, in the etymological sense of the word. Private or public, spaces take shape in our minds as they consciously govern our lives or not. “Space is a doubt: I must constantly mark it, designate it, it is never mine, never given to me, I must conquer it.” Georges Perec said.

Describing the banal in any public space, everyday life’s common places and our mundane routines of perception is in no way obvious. Thus, what can be said about something accepted as insignificant and trivial? What’s enticing about observing the goings on of a street that usually offers nothing surprising, exceptional or exemplary? How to realize the importance behind things so familiar we don’t see or notice them? How to clearly depict details of a building’s functional and esthetic side? Just so many questions Eric Hattan in-

vites us to explore in his diverse artistic propositions. This undertaking is all the more risky, perhaps even perilous, in that it shakes up our perceptive habits, questioning the very likelihood of our familiarity with the world. Under cover of a simple stylistic exercise, isn't it merely about questioning the visual background of our ways to inhabit? The hypothesis is bold, doubtless even immeasurably ambitious. However, Eric Hattan's relentless determination to take these infra-ordinary inventories, the precision and "systematicity" of self-imposed constraints duly tackled and revealed for us, the time and energy spent on such a task, give us a sense of such a project's implications. This decidedly explains how the relationship between places of everyday existence and our way to approach them gradually unwinds.

More than image, it's therefore a question of the way Eric Hattan seeks an optic using "Perecian" propositions. By way of his experimental practices on exhibition space and vast introspection inside its infra-ordinary dimension Eric Hattan tests the obviousness of the inhabiting eye.

Translation: Holly Dye

PASCAL NEVEUX headed the FRAC Alsace in Sélestat from 1999 until 2006 and since seven years he is the director of the FRAC Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. Since 2013 he presides over the association Marseille Expos, a network uniting about 30 exhibition spaces and galleries for contemporary art throughout Marseille.

**ERIC HATTAN** was born in Switzerland in 1955. He lives and works in Basle and Paris and had numerous solo and group exhibitions in Europe and overseas. More information on [www.hattan.ch](http://www.hattan.ch)

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