

The Grand Tour

Exhibition of the Collection Lambert en Avignon at the Villa Medici, Rome

7 May – 14 July, 2008

"Cum ex omnibus civitatibus via sit in nostra..."
"Because from all cities there is a road that leads to Rome..."
Cicero, On Behalf of Balbus, 29

"Elsewhere, one reads history from the outside, here it seems you are reading it from the inside : all precipitates around you and newly emanates from you.
Goethe, Italian Journey, 1816-1829

"The Prussian Winckelmann believed that the Greek and Roman worlds were white and pure, in that they had attained an ideal beauty: just after he passed away, mysteriously stabbed during a trip in 1768, traces of paintings were discovered on ancient sculptures. And Quatremère de Quincy could write that the founder of art history was mistaken."
Claudia Moatti, Roma, 1997

To exhibit the Collection Lambert in Rome, in the famous or unknown spaces of the Villa Medici has been a dream since the installation of the museum at the Hôtel de Caumont in Avignon in 2000. It is thanks to the meeting of Richard Peduzzi, director of the French Academy in Rome with Yvon Lambert, art dealer and collector, that this honorary project was made possible. For if everyone could all dream of one day exhibiting at the Villa Medici, this exhibition will demonstrate that this wish was the fruit of a reflection in which it appeared obvious that it made sense to present masterpieces from the Avignon collection in Rome, in one of its most beautiful palaces. If, as it has been stated in the epigraph to this text, Quatremère de Quincy contradicted Winckelmann's theories in proving that he was mistaken in the concept of ancient beauty, the exhibition of the Collection Lambert will demonstrate that the supposed rupture between contemporary art and the art of the past is totally usurped. Better yet, Yvon Lambert's artistic choices resonate with classical culture: Virgil, Cicero, Elagabalus, Dante, Goethe, and Stendhal on the one hand, Poussin or Caravaggio, Corot or Uccello, Delacroix or Bernini on the other, nourishing the collection's orientations, the oldest acquisitions - those of the 1960s as well as those acquisitions that are continuing today.

The exhibition will also show, beyond this specifically Roman culture that Yvon Lambert possesses, the intrinsic relationship with Italy that he maintains, to the point where today, Lambert is considered as the one who has assiduously introduced American contemporary art from the beginning of the 1970s. As Cy Twombly has lived in Rome, or Sperlonga, Grottaferrata then at Gaeta, - there will be more than 25 artworks in the exhibition, Sol LeWitt purchased a house in Spoleto and spent all his summers there for thirty years; an entire generation of minimal and conceptual artists would come to exhibit in the footsteps of Yvon Lambert.

The exhibition The Grand Tour, in reference to the trips of several months duration that European intellectuals undertook through Italy from the 17th century, shows this highly personal passion which motivates the collector for the city of Rome and its history through the work of more than forty artists. Cy Twombly's sublime works on paper are references to mythology are as amorous as the Painter and his model by Matisse or Picasso; Brice Marden's collages are intimately linked with Quattrocento art history. What can be said about Andres Serrano's busts of Dante, or of Virgil by Miquel Barceló, or a Roman emperor by Jean-Charles Blais, references to the three graces or a Niobe drama by Giulio Paolini, these sculptures that we find deep inside the grounds of the Villa Medici...

Yvon Lambert has such a passion for the city of the Gods and for the villa itself that he even went so far as to ask Anselm Kiefer to create especially for the exhibition a large-scale painting of the basin in front of the entry to the French Academy in Rome, in the tradition of such paintings produced by the Academy's illustrious lodgers of the 19th century. Niele Toroni and Bertrand Lavier will also create new works and in the stairwell, an ensemble of photographs by Nan Goldin will reveal this common passion for mediterranean culture.

Paintings, sculptures, works on paper and videos will rub shoulders with installations that have

been adapted for the site: a work by Bruno Peinado in the incredible ancient water tank, another work by Claude Lévêque, that is particularly dear to us, will be found in the vertiginous secret stairway of the Grottone that has never been open to the public, becoming a descent into hell for Orpheus and Eurydice. In the grounds and accesses to the villa sound works will attract the visitor: the voice of Marcel Broodthaers and his art critic cat, Louise Bourgeois and the collector, Louise Lawler and the artists' names whistled like many birdcalls and Roni Horn paying homage to Felix Gonzales-Torres.

Finally, as Greece and Italy invented tragedy and comedy, Avignon has become, for the past sixty years, the summer capital of theatre and the Collection Lambert dutifully echoes the city's theatrical importance. On display in the Atelier del Bosco will be Andres Serrano's commissioned portraits of 42 members of the Comédie-Française playing Phèdre, Cyrano or the Fables of La Fontaine; inside the villa, Roni Horn's series devoted to Isabelle Huppert reinterpreting her favourite roles. A richly illustrated catalogue will be published on the occasion of this exhibition with many views in situ and texts by close friends of Yvon Lambert who will attest to his role and the way in which ancient art, contemporary art and Italy meet in Yvon Lambert's universe. Each text will be a discreet demonstration of this very specific relationship that unites the collector with Rome. As Achille Bonito Oliva will explain the influence of Yvon Lambert on great dealers (Lucio Amelio then Alfonso Artiaco in Naples, Ugo Ferranti in Rome...) and on Roman collectors, then Graziella Lonardi Buontempo will shed light on the intensity of the relations that have united Cy Twombly and Yvon Lambert, whilst Ida Gianelli will write on the visual acuity of pursuing, for forty years now, a collection always anchored in the present and the future, justly because it draws its sources from the art of the past, like Roman palaces constructed with antique columns, Palatine bricks and porphyry from the isle of Cythera.

The exhibition catalogue will be dedicated to Ugo Ferranti, a friend of Yvon Lambert since the beginning of the 1970s, who had opened a gallery in Rome and who passed away last January. Eric Mézil Director of the Collection Lambert en Avignon Exhibition curator

Participating artists

Miquel Barceló, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jean-Charles Blais, Marcel Broodthaers, Christian Boltanski, Francesco Clemente, François-Xavier Courrèges, Nan Goldin, Douglas Gordon, Jenny Holzer, Roni Horn, On Kawara, Anselm Kiefer, Jannis Kounellis, Bertrand Lavier, Louise Lawler, Claude Lévêque, Sol LeWitt, Christian Marclay, Brice Marden, Gordon Matta-Clark, Rei Naito, Giulio Paolini, Bruno Peinado, Charles Sandison, Julian Schnabel, Andres Serrano, Niele Toroni, Cy Twombly, Francesco Vezzoli

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