

### Artist Dossier: Pierre Huyghe

At the start of the Venice Biennale in June, there was no sight more daunting than the queue snaking from the German pavilion, where Gregor Schneider's house-size installation was on view. Thus it happened that many people sauntered into the nearby French pavilion and discovered the work of Pierre Huyghe. The pavilion's three spaces seemed a temple to digitalized humanism. Visitors could experience a sped-up video of two tower-block buildings during a nighttime blizzard, the apartment lights flashing like binary code pixels; a primitive tennis video game screened on the ceiling, the pixels this time as big as car doors; a large installation composed of something resembling alien body organs, paired with a computer-generated film of Ann-Lee, the character Huyghe and fellow French artist Philippe Parreno bought from a Japanese *anime* company.

Word spread quickly over prosecco and panini. After four crucial days, snaking lines formed at the French pavilion too, and the Special Prize Huyghe received seemed anticlimactic--the crowds had already ranked him among the biennial's few bright lights. "Venice was a consecration for Pierre," says Marseille dealer Roger Pailhas, who represented Huyghe until 1998, when the artist joined Marian Goodman Gallery in New York and Paris. "Before, he was well-known in some circles. Now the whole world lies before him." Indeed, all of Huyghe's dealers have noted a sharp rise in media requests and collector inquiries. "Sometimes I'm not even sure that many of these people get the work," says Michael Krome of Huyghe's Berlin gallery, Schipper & Krome. "They request a lot more texts and background information than normal."

Usually such attention creates an almost immediate spike in an artist's market, but Huyghe is a special case. The Frenchman is a notoriously deliberate worker who rarely produces ancillary works derived from his installations. "We've placed everything we've ever had," says Andrew Richards, a director of Goodman's New York gallery. "And his market has risen steadily, even before Venice. Now even more people want to work with him, but there are still very few works to be had."

So at the moment Pailhas holds a great hand of cards. "Anything Pierre produces now goes through Marian Goodman," he says, "but I have everything that's more than three years old--about 50 pieces total, some of them never even exhibited." Pailhas cites edition-of-three prices of around FF90,000 (\$12,700) for photographs from Huyghe's 1995-96 "billboard" project, a site-specific series featuring billboards that displayed photos of their immediate environs, which the artist then photographed *in situ*. Pailhas also controls some video-based works in editions of three that run roughly FF250,000 (\$35,200) each. Beyond that, the market for Huyghe remains hard to define; Marian Goodman does not disclose prices, and Huyghe's work has yet to appear at a major contemporary art auction.

But one art world insider says that current prices range between \$20,000 and \$80,000, depending on the works' importance and technical difficulty, with the most expensive being videos simultaneously displayed on three separate screens.

Buyers of such pieces must sign a contract detailing the format, materials and conditions for display. Given such stipulations and the size of his pieces, Huyghe collectors have largely been institutions, including the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; Museu de Serralves in Porto, Portugal; Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, The Netherlands; and in Paris, the Musee National d'art Moderns and the Centre Pompidou. As Art & Auction went to press, there were rumors (which the Goodman gallery declined to confirm) that both the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim in New York were seriously considering major purchases.

Ironically, the 39-year-old's selection for Venice raised eyebrows. "Some critics felt he was too young to represent France," recalls Agnes Fierobe, the director of Goodman's Paris gallery. "But the committee wanted someone from the next generation of French artists." Huyghe was also a relative newcomer to the international scene. Though 2000 was a breakout year for the artist, with exhibitions at prestigious venues in Glasgow, Zurich, Berlin, Paris, Geneva and Chicago, he had only one solo show outside Paris before 1998.

Yet Huyghe's ascendance is less sudden than it might seem. "His work has made a very consistent progression, developing and getting perfected over time, and there's nothing gratuitous or self-indulgent about it," says Francesco Bonami, the Manilow senior curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. "He is quite unique, dealing with issues of memory and using video as an instrument for that exploration."

At a time when many French contemporary artists face the charge of insularity, Huyghe (along with frequent collaborators Parreno and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster) looks beyond France, and counts Scottish videomaker Douglas Gordon and Thai conceptual artist Rirkrit Tiravanija among his longtime friends. Indeed, Gordon, Tiravanija and British artist Liam Gillick are currently creating new works starring the Ann-Lee anime character. "In some ways, he's like [Belgian painter] Luc Tuymans, because he focused on being international very early on, and because the quality of the work they both produce is very stable," says New York modern and contemporary art dealer Christophe van de Weghe. "Even if the market softens, his work will do well, not only because his buyers are institutions but also because there's just so little available."

**Marc Spiegler**