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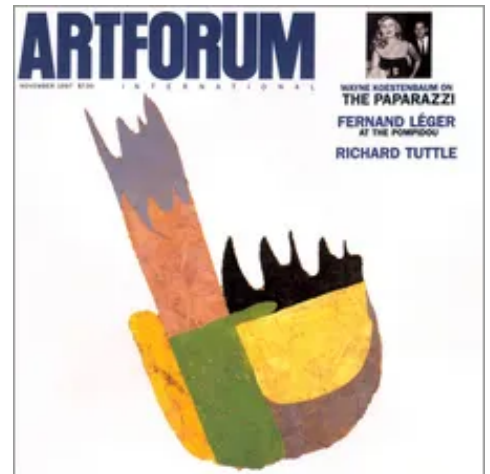


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## STUDIO TIME: FABRICE HYBERT

By Pascaline Cuvelier

**VALUING AN ARTIST AND UNDERSTANDING THE WORK** are two very different things. It's like when you're in love: there's a charm at work, but what? It is irrefutable that the French are smitten with the thirty-six-year-old Fabrice Hybert and, ever since he took the prize for best pavilion at this summer's Venice Biennale, the rest of the art world has been, too. He's been showing work for about ten years, and is considered one of the leading figures of a new generation of artists whose work is characterized by its openness to the world beyond the studio. Yet when you ask in-the-know art types about him, the answer is invariably, "Hybert? Yes, I like his work, but I'm not sure I get exactly what he's up to. How does the whole thing fit together, and where is he going with it?" Surprising words. Other than a vague feeling of entering a real-life situation or of participating in some exchange, the



Cover: Richard Tuttle, *Waferboard 4*, 1996, acrylic on wafer board, 29 1/2 x 18". Inset: Tazio Secchiarolli, *Anita Ekberg, Rome, 1958*, black and white photograph. From "Il Paparazzo/I Paparazzi."

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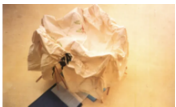
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long-abandoned lead by, say, using a drawing he made a decade back in a new installation. He sticks with a trail like a detective: carrying out multiple investigations and encounters, mapping every twist and turn, constantly shifting methods of interrogation. Nothing is ruled out in advance when it comes to questions of form.

At the CAPC in Bordeaux in 1993, he pinned to a wall his *Storyboard*, composed of 2,000 drawings. The sheets of paper, color samples, and manipulated photos were glued directly onto the wall without any framework or scheme. Like a mind following its own chain of associations, the work took on the form of a sibylline patchwork. This is how he explained the process: “I try to collect my ideas. I come up with a project that is somewhat Protean, one that can give rise to various ‘events’” Hybert’s working process is exemplified by the record twenty-two-ton bar of soap (currently making the rounds of French shopping centers, primarily those of the Leclerc chain) that he molded in the bed of a semi. “What I like is the idea of setting a record and transporting and going around with the soap. The status of the object changes; it becomes an internal communication within the company.” In the process, the titanic bar has gone from being a quirky gesture by an artist to something identified with Leclerc, even a mascot for the company’s employees and patrons.

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Hybert uses the hundreds and thousands of notes and sketches (he calls them the “Homeopathic Paintings”) as a working diary, an everyday form of writing, to record thoughts, statements, and observations that form the basis of his work. “I base my work on conversations I have with people I meet; it is an attempt to adjust modes of functioning, to give form to errors. I try to redefine words that have been spoiled. For example, in 1987–88, while working on [the installation] *Prothèse*, I searched around the word ‘*prothèse*’ and fabricated objects in reference to that word. Another time it started off with the term ‘commerce.’ I wanted to free it from its close association with the notion of economics. I wanted to establish a connection to poetry and the notion of exchange. For me, redefining a word is like a commitment.” Hybert, himself a former mathematics student, approaches this series the way a scientist might, trying out various methods to solve an equation and then testing it against reality.

Hybert refers to his working notebooks as “houses,” spaces meant to be lived in. At one point in our interview he picked up a book, placed it face down on the table, and showed me how much it resembles a house or a tent, like the one he built for the Venice Biennale. “I take lots of notes,” he told me, “unfinished sentences, punctuated by drawings. These composites help me focus. I’ve done a lot since 1988, in many different directions. I have to restructure this kind of drawing into a form of thinking. I



always need to be in a state of vertigo.” Hybert then “inhabits” a project, trying out the various everyday objects that he either modifies or has fabricated. He even bought a house in the Vendée region so that other artists could come live in his “project.” What the artist terms his POFs—*prototypes d’objets en fonctionnement* (prototypes of functioning objects)—are test-marketed, like consumer goods, by friends as well as, on occasion, by visitors to his exhibitions (who can win prizes by filling out a questionnaire). Hybert often uses sensuous, slick materials like elastomer, resin, and latex, materials that can be washed when they get dirty, in these POFs. One notable example of the sort of fetishized object he uses repeatedly is a swing whose seat is augmented by two rubbery dildos to bring the consumer an extra dose of *jouissance*.

Hybert’s working strategy: an attempt to avoid aesthetic reification and seduction, anchoring his objects in the everyday, making them available for anyone to experience through use and exchange. They are exhibited but can later be marketed and (ideally) sold in shopping centers.

Hybert is interested in anything connected with trade or commerce. “In ‘commerce’ there is a strong sense of exchange—exchanging things, exchanging humor.” His impressive *Hybermarché* at the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris in 1995 was made up of multitudes of commercial products laid out on tables. Like the bestiaries one sees in his drawings, the items suggested a domestic taxonomy: stuffed animals, store dummies, sets of vases that nest one inside another, and wigs (indicating his predilection for prostheses). They were supposed to be for sale on a cash-and-carry basis, at near-wholesale prices, but museum protocol would only permit this mercantilist gesture in the final days of the show.

Hybert's strategy of creating alternative situations and contexts was carried out winningly in his powerful if slightly teched idea of transforming the French pavilion at the Venice Biennale into a television studio, with all its nuances: an announcer, make-up artists, technicians at work, prerecorded documentaries, the chatter of live interviews. But for all the similitude, at work was a notion

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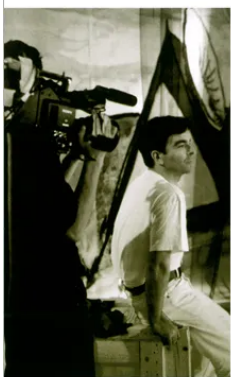
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a new meaning that ultimately has nothing to do with the fossilized consensus of TV as we know it. What resulted was a spontaneous and improvised "being there." The notion, according to Hybert, "was to spread an idea as far and wide as possible through different adaptations, a different tone, and to make this thing happen in such a way that for twelve days there would exist a place for intense encounter and exchange." What he liked most was setting in motion an operation beyond his control. "I liked the nerve it took to go through with it all, a team of thirty-two people, 150 including those who appeared on the programs, which were shaped by the participants themselves, the exact opposite of the usual production methods. The essential thing was to keep discovering, to go all the way, not to let inertia slow us down, to break records."

Hybert now wants to set up an entire television network, on the model of a home-shopping channel, with the idea of "proliferating thought, providing a very flexible setup with responsibility delegated to others, and working in unexplored domains." In keeping with this idea of proliferation, he is presenting one hundred new POFs along with one hundred of his short films this fall in

Leipzig, arranged within a 2,000 square-foot labyrinth at the city's old trade-fair. He has also set up *Unlimited Responsibility*, a company that manages his individual and ongoing projects as well as those of other artists. "Some people say my work is over the top, but that doesn't bother me. I do like to break up the conventions by going all the way, by following ideas through to their conclusion. They also say I make a lot of money, which is not true! The French don't like success in general." The friendly network he has established often invites comparisons to Andy Warhol's Factory crossed with Gilles Deleuze's desiring machines. Indeed, the origins of the artist's POFs draw heavily on erotic temptation and pleasure (think of the swings outfitted with dildos) and are heavily influenced by Deleuze's writings. Hybert summed up his aesthetic of proliferation and the body in a postcard quoting a line from poet Pierre Giquel, a text that is the very basis of any event: *"You are given a body; spread it around."*

*Translated from the French by Warren Niesluchowski.*



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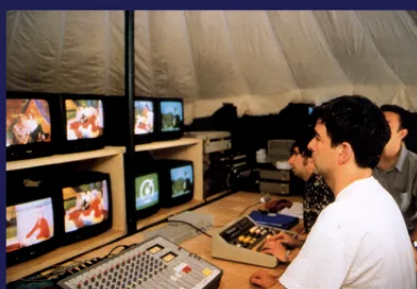
## Studio Time

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Opposite page: **Fabrice Hybert**, 1997. Photo: Laurent Locat. This page: **Fabrice Hybert**, *Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR—La danse des cameraman. La télévision est un lieu insupportable de sexualité (Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR—The dance of the cameramen. Television is an insupportable site of sexuality)*, 1997. Color video installation, French pavilion, Venice Biennale 1997. Photo: Laurent Locat.

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Top to bottom: **Fabrice Hybert**, *Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR* . . . , 1997, color video installation, French pavilion, Venice Biennale 1997. **Fabrice Hybert** with children on television. Photo: Laurent Locat. **Fabrice Hybert**, *Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR* . . . , 1997, color video installation, French pavilion, Venice Biennale 1997. Left to right: **Fabrice Hybert**, Peter Feris, Hans Ulrich Dorst, Michelangelo Pistoletto. Photo: Laurent Locat.

Top to bottom: **Fabrice Hybert**, *Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR* . . . , 1997, color video installation, French pavilion, Venice Biennale 1997. **Fabrice Hybert** on the central control room. Photo: Laurent Locat. **Fabrice Hybert**, *Eau d'or, Eau dort, ODOOR* . . . , 1997, color video installation, French pavilion, Venice Biennale 1997. Debate on hypnotic trances and drugs. Photo: Laurent Locat.

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Fabrice Hybert, *Translation (Translation)*, 1993–94, still from a color video, 10 minutes, showing "the biggest soap in the world on a truck," 22 tons, ca. 22' 11" x 98" x 67".

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Top to bottom: Fabrice Hybert, *Hybermarket (Hybermarket)*, 1993, installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1993. Photo: André Méric; Fabrice Hybert, *Hybermarket (Hybermarket)*, 1995, installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995. Photo: André Méric.



Top to bottom: Fabrice Hybert, *Elane Pine Carriageway Test*, 1996, still from a color video, 10 minutes; Fabrice Hybert, *P.O.F. No. 3*, 1990, nylon, steel, wood, resin, and glass tower, dimensions variable, installation view. Photo: Wolfgang Weich.



types of functioning objects)—are test-marketed, like consumer goods, by friends as well as, on occasion, by visitors to his exhibitions (who can win prizes by filling out a questionnaire). Hybert often uses sensuous, slick materials like elastomer, resin, and latex, materials that can be washed when they get dirty, in these POFs. One notable example of the sort of fetishized object he uses repeatedly is a swing whose seat is augmented by two rubbery dildos to bring the consumer an extra dose of jouissance. Hybert's working strategy: an attempt to avoid aesthetic reification and seduction, anchoring his objects in the everyday, making them available for anyone to experience through use and exchange. They are exhibited but can later be marketed and (ideally) sold in shopping centers.

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Fabrice Hybert, *Hybermarché* (Hybermarket), 1995. Installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1995.

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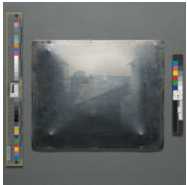
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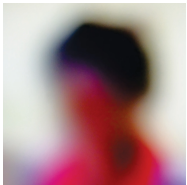
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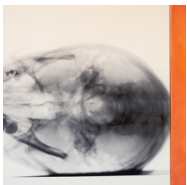
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