

THE LITERARY SHOW PROJECT

Meeting Michel Houellebecq: Ceci N'est Pas Une Interview By Prune Perromat

Last Friday, LSP met French lit star Michel Houellebecq in New York City at the opening of his first US art show "Michel Houellebecq: French Bashing," a miniature adaptation of his Paris 2016 exhibit "Rester Vivant" (To Stay Alive).

Two rooms, one dark, the other brightly lit, each covered with photographs, photo-montages and a multimedia setting designed to convey Houellebecq's bleak but bizarrely humanist vision of France: suburban areas, tollbooths, barbed wires, almost celebrated rust belt vestiges, a crumbling concrete EUROPE sign.

"I had no more reason to kill myself than most of these people did." - "Balzac", "Lamartine", "Perec", "Vonnegut", "Bernhard" - the names of authors, poets and lines from his novels and poetry were superimposed here and there with deadpan humor onto some black and white images.

Further, in the brighter room, fluorescent lamps shed an almost hostile light on a floor covered with a collage of hundreds of kitsch postcards from most French tourist destinations.

The atypical novelist, who wasn't feeling well, made an obvious effort to appear in public, smiling weakly, elusive. He had canceled earlier in the day a public conversation with Paris Review publisher Susannah Hunnewell at French bookstore Albertine Books on Fifth Ave. In the intimacy offered by a room with darkly painted walls, he shared a few words with a couple of reporters, in a whisper, while visiting a room and then another. Here's a short excerpt from our elliptical Q&A, translated from the French. And then, some pictures.

THE LITERARY SHOW PROJECT: Art, like literature, does it come from intuition?

MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ: All choices are intuitive. ("Tous les choix sont intuitifs.")

LSP: Why getting inspiration from photographs when writing?

MH: To apprehend a place. It helps me visualize the setting. ("Pour figurer les lieux. Ça m'aide à visualiser les décors.")

AFP/LSP: French Bashing, in this Macron era, is it still a relevant theme?

MH: It will come back. ("Ça reviendra.")

AFP/LSP: Trump, what do you think of him?

MH: Nothing. I never think about him. ("Rien, je ne pense jamais à lui.")

LSP: What are those postcard collages? What do they mean?

MH: Well, it's tourism. ("Ben, c'est le tourisme.") **LSP**



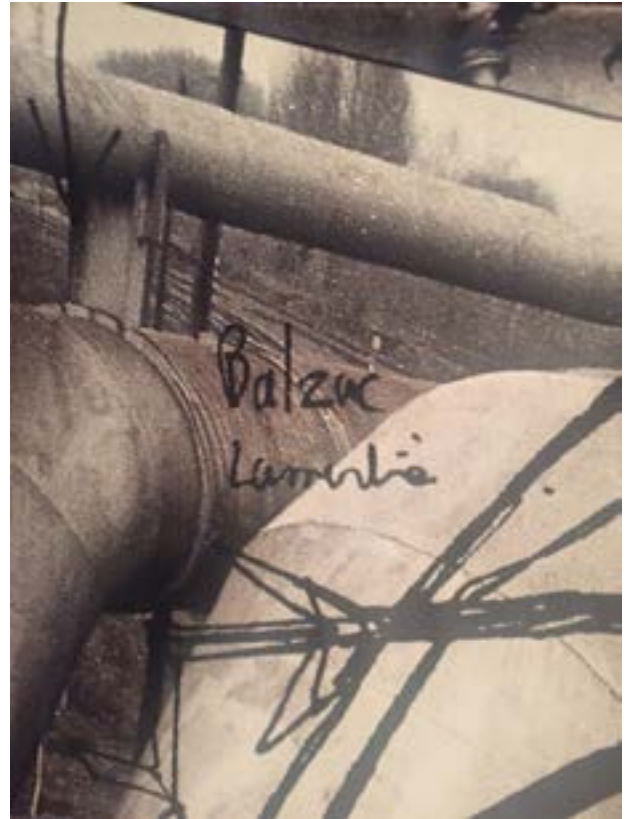
A MAN STARES AT A QUADRPTYCH BY MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ AT THE OPENING OF "MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ: FRENCH BASHING," THE AUTHOR'S FIRST ART SHOW IN THE US ON FRIDAY IN NEW YORK



VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

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