

Interview with Aurélien Gamboni
Swiss Art Awards, May 2016

SAA What are the current priorities within your practice / What are you currently concerned with in regards to your artistic agenda?

AG I mainly work on long term investigations, and although the focus can stay the same over several years, the concerns naturally evolve over time... I like to say that while we work on things, in return things work on us. Which is why I base my investigations on particular « objects » – narratives, images, historical fragments – that bear the potential to operate as conceptual tools... They have a certain empowering capacity that I try to experiment and to put to work.

Edgar A.Poe's tale of the maelström – that I investigate in collaboration with anthropologist and writer Sandrine Teixido – or Hieronymus Bosch's enigmatic painting known as « The Conjurer » (that will be addressed in my intervention here at the Swiss art awards) have been the main objects of my investigations over the past years.

It's a kind of alliance: I attach myself to these objects which will guide my path, leading to certain encounters, gathering new narratives and testimonies, raising new issues. Perception of environmental changes, adaptation and environmental justice, the economy of attention and media ecology, storytelling politics... in the end there isn't really one main « theme » in my practice, rather a set of entangled issues that I will try to grasp from a situated perspective.

SAA In reference to this year's graphic and thematic superstructure "migration": what was / is your route and how has it changed your perception? How relevant is the notion of "Heimat" or "identity" for you?

AG Like a lot of people in this country, my family origins have to do with economical migration and with refuge, but in my case it was quite a while ago. Seasonal workers from Ticino on one side of the family, and French protestants fleeing the religious persecutions on the other. Then after several generations of stability, we often tend to lose our sense of history, and then we come to see the current crisis as somehow distant phenomena, and fail to perceive that these events are at the core of our very existence.

So if there is a notion of Heimat that would be relevant for me in this context, it would require to build these connexions again, to build new possibilities to relate to what might appear as « other », and to consider identity as a process and not a fixed principle, otherwise it can be a dangerous notion.

This is why, in my own way, I have been developing investigation as a form of artistic practice: first of all because in such a world of growing complexity, I believe that we all end up somehow in the position of the investigator (we have to build meaning and relation through inquiry). And secondly because this process precisely allows to build new forms of attachments, to develop new ties with people, with beings, with objects and with issues that, otherwise, we may not have recognized as our own.

SAA This year's Grand Award for Art laureate Christian Philipp Müller "dedicates himself to art education and actively supports the work of a new generation of artists". Is / was there someone on your route that supported your work in a way that it influenced your practice / approaches /strategies?

AG Well many people obviously... First I'd have to mention Catherine Quéloz and Liliane Schneiter who built the CCC Programme at HEAD–Genève which was such a fruitful context for me, as well as Julie Ault and Martin Beck who taught me much about the ethics and politics of art and research. More recently Bruno Latour and his programme SPEAP in SciencesPo Paris also played a big role.

Then as always, in art it's not only about who you studied with, but rather what kind of artistic and theoretical genealogy you build for yourself. Other artists like Fred Wilson (that I had the chance to interview) or Walid Raad, have been important inspirations for their very singular investigation methods, while the ongoing dialogue that I have developed with thinkers and researchers, such as Yves Citton and Grégory Quenet, is a crucial aspect of my practice.

Last but not least, I value collaborations and the possibility that it offers to support each other and to learn from each other. So here I should mention Sandrine Teixido, with whom I have been tracing Edgar Poe's maelström for the past five years; the former members of the artists and researchers collective Save as draft; as well as Kim Seob Boninsegni and the small group who first gathered about ten years ago in the studio « Atelier 304 » at l'Usine...