

# Dossier | The Perishable Papers of Pierre Pilonchéry

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## **The Perishable Papers of Pierre Pilonchéry**

**By Florence Jaillet**

With its bin tilted backwards, a truck prevails at the centre of a quadrangular metallic structure. Thousands of sales catalogues similar to those that invade our mailboxes and homes each day escape from the truck's container. These fliers rarely command our attention. In general, the garbage can is their immediate destination, followed by the city dump. Only just printed and shipped out of the manufacturing plant, already these ephemeral documents are almost garbage. Pilonchéry draws his raw materials from this uninterrupted flux of printed paper. He appropriates this proliferation of images, surfaces, and colours, modifies its contours, and transforms its destination. He pulls even strips from these thousands of brochures and weaves them methodically, endlessly, creating immense surfaces destined to be staged, manipulated, posted up, suspended, and crumpled.

In the project titled *Les Catalogues Publicitaires (P7)*, 1999-2001, one of the 3 by 10.8-metre canevasseges (weavings) is suspended to the structure behind the dump truck. For the pile of degraded materials, the weavings' inclusion in the installation materializes the possibility of escaping its usual fate through the intervention of "artistic recycling." By means of cutting and interlacing the various strips, the original images become fragmented and disappear in favour of a new weft.

Following the collagists, Pilonchéry appropriates reality and collects this new, proliferative brute matter. His promotional apparatus, moreover, brings us to the public space or, more specifically, to the billboard space: the weavings cover a series of roadside advertising panels. Pilonchéry's approach nonetheless differs from the principle of "anonymous - laceration" adopted by Jacques Villégly, insofar as the former transforms this substance, manipulates it, and turns it into a module that can be both multiplied to infinity and displayed in the public as well as museum spaces.

The thousands of tracts printed daily for mass distribution constitute a considerable pool of materials and facts providing information about our era. The displaying of consumer products reveals our society's desires, needs, not to mention its conditioning. By means of the portioning and reassembling of fragments as well as the patient entwining of catalogue strips, the artist rehabilitates and transforms them into a noble substance. Unencumbered by their primary function, the strips of glossy paper make up a mosaic; the sales pitch unravels and gives way to a new language. The catchy pictures become fragmented to form a new body, an infinite surface that captivates the eye without privileging any one image in particular.

Despite the multiplicity of documents processed, and perhaps as a result of the nature of these documents, a dominant colour imposes itself: red. It is without a doubt not by chance that publicity garbage bears its stamp; red is known for its strong visual impact and is the choice colour of advertising. Furthermore, the artist pits time against the speed of catalogue production, its consumption, and its transformation into garbage: the time of fabrication and weaving, as well as the patience required to execute his work.

This displacement of values, this underscoring of the speed at which the flux of images and information travels in our era of disposable commodities, calls to mind the works of Wang Du: his amassing of newspapers, not to mention the attention he devotes to details, a fragment, or to a single sheet of crumpled paper elevated to the status of a monumental sculpture. In displaying refuse, what Du's installations propose is a highly critical denunciation of media society. Pilonchéry's procedure, however, does not position itself in that manner. If he employs certain waste products of consumer society, it is to disturb the clear-cut distinctions we maintain between art and life. In an operation of visual recycling, the impoverished and disdained objects that constitute the remainder of daily life rid themselves of their consumer content and morph into colours, forms, and fragments of a whole.

When faced with these weavings, spectators can amuse themselves by finding pieces of images in a manner similar to their seeking out a familiar fabric in a patchwork. Nevertheless, the principle of intertwining thousands of strips of paper above all suggests an effect of unity and submersion. This is particularly the case with *Passage (P23)*, 2000-1, where the spectator is led to trample on catalogue pages strewn across the floor and to traverse a corridor created by two suspended woven panels.

The publicitages (advertisings) take on different meanings in function of their exhibition spaces. In October of 2006, Pilonchéry presented his work, characterised by a "return to sender" or loop effect, in a hypermarket in the suburbs of Lyon. After weaving thousands of its expired brochures, the artist then displayed the product of his toil in the market's circulation spaces. Inside one of those modern, consumerist temples, he showcased his project in six installations framed as stations where clients were encouraged to pause while shopping and in which the perishable publicity canvas occupied a central place. In this arena of intense commercial and visual competition, the works' intrusion intrigued and distracted the gaze, offering spectators the chance to cast a fresh glance upon the most banal reality or an object as familiar and trivial as a supermarket catalogue. In the area surrounding the mall, moreover, three publicity billboards prolonged the work. With their primary function subverted, these scaffolds loaned by a private society were covered with posters evoking the motif of the publicitages. In contrast, a few months later the surfaces presented in the mall were exhibited in a completely different environment: a disused warehouse in Lyon's Confluence district. The project, titled *Quelques Lieux et leurs Moments*, involved the

collaboration of circus artist Amaury Jacquot. During two weeks in a vast, evolving construction site open to the public, the moving, recycled surfaces were continuously placed, displaced, and manipulated by students.

Other bland images, mere remains of contemporary activity, permit Pilonchéry to weave his work. In the Visionnages (visionings), television images reworked by computer are entangled and projected onto different surfaces, cloaking the latter like animal hides. If, as the artist writes, "art can affix itself onto all of the surfaces of life it meets," then his procedure equally shows us that he can integrate, absorb, and recycle all of life's products, including those counted among the most innocuous and impure. From this flux of worthless images that permanently inundates us, from these weak forms, or from these residues of daily consumption, the artist creates potential loci: nomadic surfaces capable of opening up new spaces and making way for a new perceptive regime.

These devices are nonetheless bound to the universal cycle of nature. The combined frailty of his surfaces and the multiple manipulations of his paper canvases increase their vulnerability to decomposition. This coming into being finds its significance in Pierre Pilonchéry's approach, which, rather than seeking to create relics, aims to bring these fragile, perishable paper surfaces to life in a series of moments and in the many places we frequent.

[Translated from the French by Vivian Ralickas]