

# JOHAN GRIMONPREZ J'AI OUBLIÉ MON PARAPLUIE

FRAGMENT INÉDIT DE FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE,  
CLASSÉ AVEC LA COTE 12, 175,  
TR. FR. DU GAI SAVOIR, P.457.

18 october - 30 november 2007

*"I thought I was safe until you guys came along, digging up all those other Hitchcock lookalikes. Now we will have to find ways of disposing of them."*

Ron Burrage, Hitchcock double

Johan Grimonprez is recognised as a master of the de/reconstruction of our world vision, tainted by globalized news, celebrity and superficiality. He re-evaluates our relationship with images by examining the predominant influence of the news on our consciousness of the world and of ourselves. With his fictional documentary *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, "a filmic, photographic and digital compendium of found footage of airline hijackings", the artist presaged 9/11 and the sensationalist, doom-laden TV news coverage that was to come with it. The phenomenal success that accompanied *Dial History*, first in 1997 when it was released, and subsequently following to the global media explosion of 9/11, has underscored the visionary strength of this Belgian artist, today considered one of most important living critics of the mass media.

The cinematic style of Johan Grimonprez is based on the corruption and subversion of interpretation. Switching between fiction and documentary, found footage and real shots, literary citation and invention, his video-collages break down the boundaries between fiction and reality. The artist himself has said, humorously, that his films are "bastards" of contemporary media and channel-hopping: "Our relationship with the world through its representation (its stand-in), has modified our relationship with reality".

The exhibition *J'ai oublié mon parapluie* (I've forgotten my umbrella), conceived by Johan Grimonprez as a miniature version of one of the rooms of his retrospective at Munich's Pinakothek der Moderne is, above all, an excrescence of *Double Take* (to be shown at the Gallery at the end of 2008), the second part of a film trilogy which brings into question the imagery of modern society. This new work uses Alfred Hitchcock's films and TV series to explore confused modern identity, whilst also making overt references to Magritte and Borges. "The idea of blurring boundaries between what is the same and nearly exactly the same - but not quite - is very much a recurrent theme in my work", explains Johan, "hence my interest in Hitchcock and Magritte, who both explore mistaken identity. Both Hitchcock and Magritte pushed a vocabulary that is now common language. The way Magritte constructed his images relates closely, in fact, to what you can do nowadays with Photoshop. Magritte was a cut-and-paste artist before his time".

For the purposes of *Double Take*, Grimonprez held a series of auditions to find Hitchcock's perfect double. In London, he found the ideal "wrong man", Ron Burrage, a professional Hitchcock impersonator who has completely fused himself with the personality of the filmmaker, and whom the artist has made the linchpin of his new project.

*J'ai oublié mon parapluie* can therefore be considered a "teaser", a sort of trailer for his much-anticipated second major film. However, the work also allows us to better understand the Belgian artist's metaphorical vocabulary and his narrative paths. In effect, this furtive installation should be considered a thought in progress. It consists of a mise en abyme of original drawings laid out on the pages of the artist's own book *Looking for Alfred*. Using video, audition photographs, literary quotations and articles based on fact, *J'ai oublié mon parapluie* mixes both original and copy, truth and fake. The work can be seen as a never-ending rebus, a project faced with its own commentary, like the infinite reflections of two mirrors showing the duplicate of a duplicate of a duplicate...

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Yet the key to this work *à tiroirs* is revealed, unconsciously it seems, in the course of Chris Darke's interview with Grimonprez for *Looking for Alfred*: "Thomson & Thompson are utterly Belgian. There's something about their doubleness that rings so true for a country that's embedded in the cultural schizophrenia of two languages living side by side; one constantly translating or repeating the other and never taking it seriously. Everything has to be duplicated or translated. (...) So misunderstanding becomes culture, the poetry of misinterpretation. And words and things start to disconnect. Belgian reality comes subtitled. (...) To always be confronted with the other side of things sharpens the sense of irony. (...) This is second nature so, as a kid, you think the whole world is subtitled. You grow up translating the world."

With *J'ai oublié mon parapluie*, Johan Grimonprez's whole conceptual mechanism gushes forth: a double-helix of thought, expressing the "reality of reality" – the media stand-in for real life, which is also conscious of such certain fundamental epistemological concepts as truth, reason, being, knowledge, imitation and our concept of reality. The latter, in the artist's own words, has become a "Photoshop reality".

This work, with its deliberately surrealist title, quite clearly invites us to question our relationship with the world and how it is presented to us, our trivialisation of lying, and the affect this has had on our relationships with each other and, of course, with ourselves. Imposture? Schizophrenia? Freedom from the burden of the ego... In this *Who's Who*, who is who? And who am I?

Charlotte Léouzon  
(Translation: James Curwen)

Johan Grimonprez was born in 1962 in Roeselare, Belgium. An anthropologist by training, he is currently a professor at the New York School of Visual Arts. His work has recently been the subject of a retrospective at Munich's modern art museum, the Pinakothek der Moderne (10 May 2007 to 26 August 2007), and featured in the *Vidéo et Après* cycle at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in June 2007. The artist's work is also on show at the PLATEAU (Paris) until 13 October 2007, including the *YouTube-o-thèque: Le ciel est peut-être vert et nous daltoniens*, (Maybe the sky is green and we are colour-blind), created in collaboration with Charlotte Léouzon. His work features in the collections of the Pinakothek der Moderne of Munich, the Centre Georges Pompidou of Paris, the Hamburger Kunsthalle of Hamburg, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Oslo, the SMAK of Ghent and the Museum of Contemporary Art of San Diego.

Johan Grimonprez *« J'ai oublié mon parapluie »* will be presented at the galerie kamel mennour from Tuesday to Saturday, from 11am to 7.30pm.

For further information, please contact Marie-Sophie Eiché and Emma-Charlotte Gobry-Laurencin.