



Pierre Huyghe's
L'Expédition Scintillante,
Acte 3: Untitled (Black Ice
Stage), 2002

Nasher opts to traverse
the more challenging
and risky course

Kub, Marcus Tretter

Sculpture is a moving target



Nan Coulter/Special Contributor

Nasher Prize Laureate Pierre Huyghe creates artistic "situations" that include living organisms.

If you thought that the Nasher Prize for Sculpture would go to an artist who sculpts objects that sit on pedestals or stand still, think again.

For that, you have to go to the *other* sculpture prize. Japan's Praemium Imperiale for Sculpture has been given annually since 1989 to recognizably great sculptors like Eduardo Chillida, Richard Serra, Anthony Caro, Louise Bourgeois, Niki de Saint Phalle — often at the end of a long and productive life producing, well, *sculpture*.

Even the latest winner of the Praemium Imperiale, the French artist Annette Messager, makes room- and wall-size installations of things that stand still, although they *never* sit on pedestals!

The Nasher has elected a more challenging — and risky — course, and, in the first two years of what is promised to be an

ART



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annual award, the Nasher has once again assembled a distinguished international jury of sculptors, curators, scholars and a former museum director to think collectively about "the state of sculpture." These women and men will have none of those fuddy-duddy bronzes or marbles on pedestals or those artful objects that remain immobile while the viewer moves around or through them.

Doris Salcedo, the first Nasher laureate, creates "installations" made mostly by assistants and craft-people for particular exhibition venues.

And the second, the French artist, Pierre Huyghe (pronounced *weeg*), who will accept his Renzo Piano-designed award object in Dallas on Saturday, is even more difficult to force into the already porous category of sculpture.



Kub, Marcus Tretter



Pierre Huyghe/Nasher Sculpture Center

Left: Nasher Prize Laureate Pierre Huyghe's *L'Expédition Scintillante, Acte 1*, 2002; *Untitled (Weather Score)*, snow, rain, fog, programmed precipitation with *Untitled (Ice Boat)*, ice. **Right:** A dog, named "Human," often has a pink painted foreleg and moves throughout various situational installations.

Nasher winner defies orthodoxy

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Artistic 'situations'

Much of modernism and postmodernism has been a conscious attempt to rethink the canonical media of traditional art and art history. Indeed, by the second decade of the last century, artists like Marcel Duchamp were simply going to the store and buying an object (a urinal, a bottle-drying rack, a snow shovel, for example) that was placed in a gallery or museum setting so as to become "sculpture." Yet, others have stuck to the traditions of "objects in space" that have been essential to the concept of sculpture for generations.

Not so Huyghe, who creates artistic "situations" that include living organisms of various forms, objects, liquids, gases, films and more arcane media in dizzying combinations. Rather than "sculpture," Huyghe engages with the idea of sculpture. Huyghe's work is supremely intellectual and, for many first-time viewers, difficult to understand and aesthetically challenging.

If there is a current-affairs aspect to Huyghe's work, it involves the Earth's environment and the tenuous nature of the biosphere. Many of his "sculptures," including one at the Nasher, are essentially aquariums that force us to

consider small and fragile ecosystems, often with living organisms, some in a hunt for others, and surviving against many odds as we watch them in the gallery environment.

Another piece in the Nasher Garden, loaned by Dallas' own Rachofsky Collection, is a concrete-marble cast of a headless nude female sculpture from the 1930s, in the crevasses of which mold and lichens grow (or die) in puddles of water.

One of the few downsides of the Nasher Prize is that, because it is given annually and announced only months before the award dinner, it is essentially impossible for the center to create an exhibition in conjunction with the award itself. There are simply too many scheduling obstacles that stand in the way.

Last season's award was accompanied by an entire room-size work by Salcedo. This year, the experience is limited to an impressive borrowed work in the Entrance Gallery and the locally owned work in the museum's sculpture garden.

Restless questioning

Huyghe is so focused on his work and so reclusive that he was unavailable for an interview due to his busy exhibition schedule. He will be in Dallas to receive the award at a

formal dinner at the Nasher on Saturday and to speak to students and the public with Nasher Prize juror and senior curator at the National Gallery, Lynne Cooke, at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts on Friday.

On Thursday, the inaugural Nasher Prize Graduate Symposium, which hosts scholarly discussions of contemporary sculpture, will have French scholar-administrator, Nicolas Bourriaud, talking with graduate students from throughout the U.S. about Huyghe's work.

Huyghe takes on the mantle of an arts prize with ease — he has won many others, although the Nasher is the latest and probably most prestigious. His previous awards include the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Program, the Hugo Boss Prize of the Guggenheim Museum, the Smithsonian Museum's James Dicke Contemporary Artist Prize, the Roswitha Haftmann Prize and the Kurt Schwitters Award.

There is little doubt that many Dallasites will scratch their heads when they Google Huyghe's work and try to make sense of it by looking at the many photographs of his "time-based" art. Like his countryman, Marcel Proust, he is concerned more with time than with physical form. Yet, where Proust fetishized memory, Huyghe meditates through art about the condition of life on our planet and about the fragility of art in a changing universe.

To me, two of his "living" sculptures best embody his restless, ambivalent questioning. One is his white dog, named "Human," who, often with a pink painted foreleg,

moves throughout various situational installations by Huyghe. The other is a hermit crab, which lives in a Huyghe-designed aquarium emerging not from another aquatic shell, as hermit crabs do, but from a hollowed-out cast of the great modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse*.

Wrap your mind around that, and, if you come out with a perplexed smile, you are well on the way to appreciating the mordant and intellectual aesthetic of the second Nasher Prize laureate.

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Plan your life

For a full discussion of Huyghe's career, go to the Nasher website and click on Nasher Prize. A lengthy and highly intelligent essay will give you a more complete sense of the artist's concerns, and there are full details on all the events. nashersculpturecenter.org