

# Pierre Huyghe

Teaching Resource

## 2017 Nasher Prize Laureate

### About Pierre Huyghe

Born in Paris in 1962, artist Pierre Huyghe lives and works in Chile and New York. Huyghe has expanded the boundaries of traditional sculpture through artworks that incorporate a variety of materials and disciplines, bringing music, cinema, and dance into contact with biology and philosophy, and working with time-based elements that include fog, ice, parades, computer programs, games, dogs, bees, and microorganisms.



Pierre Huyghe. Photo: Philippe Quaisse.

### Worlds, Ecosystems and Landscapes

Many of Huyghe's artworks could be considered evolving, independent worlds that others engage with. As viewers experience these works, they may encounter living things, unpredictable situations, or moving and still images combined into one environment, inviting them to question the relationship between art and life. Huyghe has stated, **"To start [a work], I always need to create a world. Then [I] enter this world, and that walk through this world is the work."**

### Interactivity

Some of Huyghe's work is associated with an art movement called **relational aesthetics**, a term coined by the critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud to identify a new type of art based on human interactions rather than the creation of independent art objects. Artists associated with this movement often work to create communal, or shared, experiences for participants in their works, rather than focusing on the individual experience a viewer would have with a traditional painting or sculpture.

In his 2012 installation, *Untilled*, Huyghe introduced a sculpture topped with a living bee colony into a park in Kassel, Germany. The beehive, two dogs that roamed the property and a variety of plants Huyghe planted, were allowed to "co-evolve," within the framework he designed.



*Untilled*, 2011-12. Living entities and inanimate things, made or not made. Installation: Documenta 13, June 9 – September 16, 2012, Kassel, Germany © Pierre Huyghe

Huyghe's 2003 film *Streamside Day* documents a celebration he devised for the new community of Streamside Knolls in New York. After creating the conditions for the activities, Huyghe stepped aside and let the community's inhabitants carry them out.



*Streamside Day*, film still, 2003. Film and video transfers; 26 minutes, color, sound. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris/New York. © Pierre Huyghe.

The Nasher Prize is an annual international award presented to a living artist whose work has had an extraordinary impact on the understanding of sculpture.

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LEFT: *Zoodram 4*, 2011. Live marine ecosystem, aquarium, resin mask after Constantin Brancusi's *Sleeping Muse* (1910) © Pierre Huyghe. Photo: Guillaume Ziccarelli.  
 RIGHT: *Untitled*, 2013-14. *Chalet Dallas* (Installation view, Nasher Sculpture Center right), live marine ecosystem, aquarium, resin shell, 2015-16.

## Aquariums

Huyghe's aquariums (sometimes called "underworldscapes" or "zoodrams") present a type of sculptural theater in which Huyghe sets the stage for unpredictable interactions between carefully chosen sea creatures. The aquarium you see, originally created for an exhibition called [Chalet Dallas](#) at the Nasher in 2015, includes arrow crabs and a soft-bodied hermit crab that wears a shell designed by the artist. By creating this environment, Huyghe poses questions about an artist's control over his own work and human control over nature.

- What makes up the world of the aquarium? Create a list outlining which parts seem "real" and which seem staged?
- How do the living aspects of the work interact with or alter the objects that surround them?
- If you could introduce a new element or creature into this environment, what would you choose? How would the new addition affect the other parts of the aquarium?

## *La déraison*

*La déraison* ("nonsense" or "unreason") is a concrete sculpture cast from a fragment of a historic monument originally created by Jean-Baptiste Belloc for the International Colonial Exposition of 1931, which took place near Paris. The original monument depicts France as a female figure set above her subordinate colonies. Though dismantled in 1961, sections of the monument have remained in Paris's Garden of Tropical Agriculture, and have been altered by time, weather, gravity and plant growth. *La déraison* presents the form representing Africa as a reclining, headless nude, laden with moss. Her concrete body has been chemically treated to create a weathered surface that resembles the eroded surface of the original. Inside the sculpture is a custom heating element that references the human circulatory system and the warmth it gives.



*La déraison*, 2014. Concrete, marble, heating system, water, and plants. The Rachofsky Collection. Photo: Kevin Todora.

- In the original monument, this figure stood upright. How does its current, horizontal orientation change its meaning? How might seeing it on display in a museum differ from encountering it in its original location?
- The figure in this monument glorified the idea of colonialism, the practice of conquering other countries to exploit them economically. Why do you think the original monument in Paris fell into disrepair?
- Imagine seeing a well-known monument 100 years from now. How might its physical structure have changed? Will the ideas it celebrates still be relevant to people in the future?

## Responding to Huyghe's Work

If you are in the museum, spend time experiencing the works on view. If in the classroom, review the images and video links related to Huyghe's work. Then, **respond to the questions below** in a small group discussion or in writing.

- Choose one of Huyghe's artworks and describe in detail what you see.
- What feelings do you experience, or can you imagine having, when viewing his artworks?
- What questions do you have about Huyghe's artworks? Write or discuss.
- In what ways are these artworks alive? Write or discuss.

## Varied Parts

Think about the surprising mixture of elements that Huyghe incorporates into his artworks.

**Make a list of objects, events or ideas** that you find delightful, strange or exciting. Have fun with this process! Your list of things doesn't have to make sense and it does not need to relate to familiar ways of making art. The items on your list can be human, plant or animal; mineral, fluid or solid; visible or invisible, animate or inanimate. (i.e. Beyoncé, peat moss, rain, banana peel, rodeo clowns)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_

**Where will your art piece or event take place?** (i.e. at a gallery or a museum? In your basement? At the coast? In a park or an abandoned building?)

Consider your list of components and the context you've imagined. **What might happen when you bring these things together into one space or place?** What colors, shapes, sounds or smells do you imagine being a part of the experience? Write about this scenario on a separate piece of paper.

## Living Art

Consider the sea life and the setting of Huyghe's aquariums, and use the template to the right or a blank piece of paper to **design your own aquarium** artwork. Use collage and/or drawing techniques to create your design.

## Further Resources

**Watch** the segment about Pierre Huyghe's work from the PBS series Art21:

<http://www.art21.org/videos/segment-pierre-huyghe-in-romance>

