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'Art Should Reflect the Complexity of the World Today' AI Hong Kong Interview: Laurent Grasso by Xue Tan
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"Art Should Reflect the Complexity of the World Today" AI Hong Kong Interview: Laurent Grasso

BY XUE TAN, | MAY 04, 2012



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Laurent Grasso's "Anechoic Pavilion," 2012
(Courtesy of Edouard Malingue gallery)

French artist **Laurent Grasso**'s first Hong Kong adventure was back in 2003, when he shot the work "Radio Ghost" on a helicopter flying at low altitude over the city. This beautiful and unusual perspective of the cityscape, Victoria Harbor, and the islands, which was recorded on 35mm film and accompanied with a soundtrack of voices telling ghost stories, would become a milestone in Grasso's career.

After the release of the film, Grasso's career soared. He won the **Marcel Duchamp Prize** in 2008, and has since been recognized as a one of the outstanding French artists of his generation. Represented by **Sean Kelly Gallery** in New York his name has also become established in North America.

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Grasso returned to Hong Kong last week with a solo show entitled "Future Archeology" at the **Edouard Malingue Gallery**, an exhibition of paintings, sculptures, silkscreens, and videos, all reflecting his interest in science and mythology.

Most notable amongst the works is the series of paintings, "Studies into the Past," in which Grasso creates works that

reference the style and techniques of the 16th century, only to subvert them with imagery of meteors and eclipses. Sci-fi aesthetics and arcane metaphors are in fact embedded throughout the works. The luminous silver silkscreen prints, for example, are based on illustrations from **Camille Flammarion**, a 19th century scientist who nonetheless embraced his spirituality. The neon light installation "1610I," is a study of an astrological drawing by Galileo. Installed on a wall opposite a picture window in the gallery, the neon's "stars" and the street view overlap to create a sensory collage.

ARTINFO Hong Kong talked to Laurent Grasso about how time travel, conspiracy theories, and U.S army weapons programs have inspired his work.

Your artistic practice extends through a wide range of various media. How did you develop this range?

I started to do photographs before paintings and drawings, afterwards, I did movies, which became my main language, then I did installation and sound art, as well as creating architectural structures where my movies are screened. Eventually my practice involved more and more media like neon lights and sculpture. I want to create parallel works around each movie, so basically my works are project based, the movie expands to installation and other mediums.

I can see the cinematic influence in the *tableau vivant* composition of the paintings.

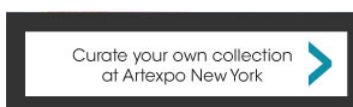
I am interested in building a piece of reality. I am not a painter, I build situations upon the paintings. They are not paintings, they are conceptual works about history and time. There are stories and layers behind each one of them. People like paintings and they like to keep them at home, so you can have the first layer obviously, but there is more content than what you see.

In these works, the notion of time is ambiguous, time collapses, and redefines itself.

For me, the idea of traveling through time is very interesting. "Future Archeology" means my works are towards the past and the future.

Can you tell us how you construct the notion of time within your works?

For example, in "Studies into the Past," the setting is built from the 16th century. First I make the painting with the same materials and techniques from that time. Afterwards, I integrate it with my film work, with objects like the floating rock, or the eclipse in it. The paintings started as an old memory of my present works. I add things from the present into the past.



Do you consider yourself as a time traveler within your works?

I like the idea of it, and I play with it.

Symbols like the pyramid, the meteor, and the eclipse are main elements in your work, but they have many meanings in mythology, astrology, and ancient culture. How do you mediate these symbols into a contemporary understanding?

The eclipse is a very archaic object of fear, I used it because I heard a story that the U.S. army manipulates the climate and creates fake miracles to praise the Catholic religion, its contemporary mythology. I don't know if it's true, but I liked the story, so I used aurora borealis, eclipses, and all those beautiful things. I found connections between those phenomena, and a more sophisticated theory in our contemporary world. For example, I studied one military device in Alaska, called "HAARP," it sends electricity to the atmosphere, and creates a fake aurora. It's a beautiful thing but it can be used as a weapon. What I enjoy is not the eclipse and the things themselves, but the stories around them.

Do you agree that you are addressing a political /social critique in your work?

First of all, I think that to do artworks today is a political act. You do works and train people to think and have their own interpretation. That is good work, because the cinema just makes you sleep, it hypnotizes you, same as the artists who do decorative art.

It is important to make people feel and understand, that is the first step, and activate criticism in their minds.

I don't like directly political works, I think that's stupid. For example... I don't want to give names, I think it's very naive and egomaniacal.

The world today is much more complex and sophisticated than in the '70s. Artists should reflect on the complexity of the world today, not giving simple and stupid solutions, like pseudo revolutionary artists. It's naive to use this pseudo politic artist engagement. It's boring in a way, it doesn't work like that. Sometimes it's also fake, some artists pretend to be politically provocative in exhibitions that are sponsored by big groups or corporations who control everything.

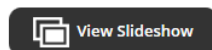
I think the most political act for an artist is to do a real artwork, and say no to people who approach you for their own benefit.

For myself, I like to analyze the devices of control around earth, I created many artworks about "Echelon", a military surveillance program, as well as "HAARP." I try to investigate situations.

"Future Archeology" runs at Edouard Malingue Gallery till June 16. In association with ART HK, Laurent Grasso's installation "Anechoic Pavilion" will be installed on the rooftop of Central Pier No 4 on May 15.

Click on our slideshow for images from "Future Archeology"

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06 May 2012

the Wanderlister

'Laurent Grasso Returns to Hong Kong This Spring, with Future Archaeology' by Andrew Luk

Link: <http://www.wanderlister.com/post/22516377330/laurentgrasso-edouardmalingue-futurearchaeology#.VSy0SpPze4o>

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Laurent Grasso Returns to Hong Kong This Spring, With Future Archaeology

Art on theWanderlister+ by Andrew Luk

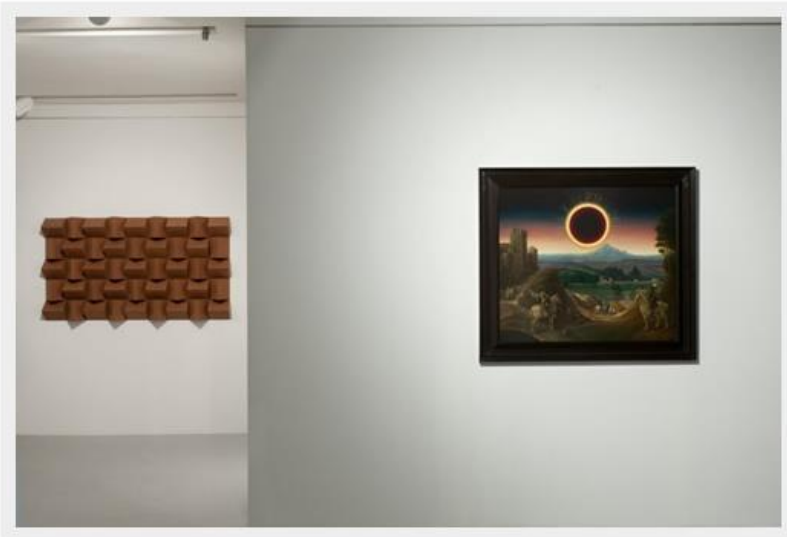


International artist and 2008 winner of the prestigious **Marcel Duchamp Prize**, **Laurent Grasso**, is currently showing at the **OMA-Designed Edouard Malingue Gallery** with his second show in Hong Kong, titled **Future Archaeology**.



Through a variety of media (silkscreen, painting, video, wall relief, and installation), Grasso subverts the progress of human thought and civilization, by reintegrating the unexplainable into that which we have rendered transparent.

In the series, **Studies into the past**, landscape paintings are created in the very readable style of the Italian Renaissance.

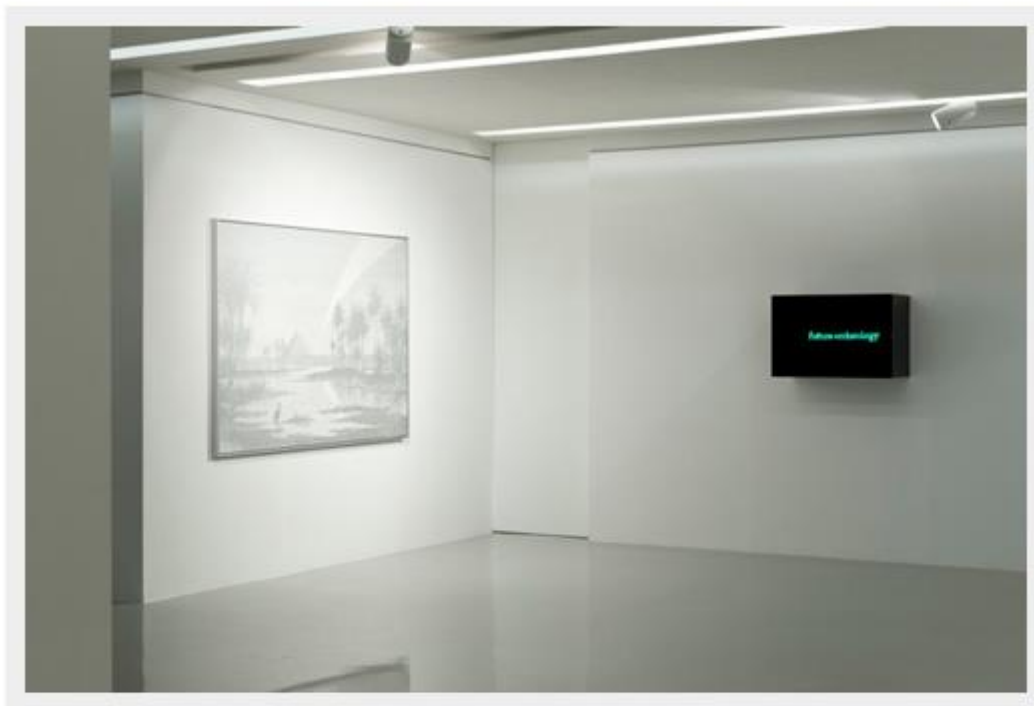


The paintings depict knights and travelers on dirt paths witnessing solar eclipses and hovering boulders. Some of the boulders have sculpted surfaces that reflect the period's architecture. The paintings are tinted to appear discolored by time, increasing the seductive juxtaposition of the paranormal against the man-made.

By putting a contemporary concept within a historical context, Grasso makes the past and the present synonymous, thereby compressing time.



In the same room is the series titled ***Retroprojection*** (2012).



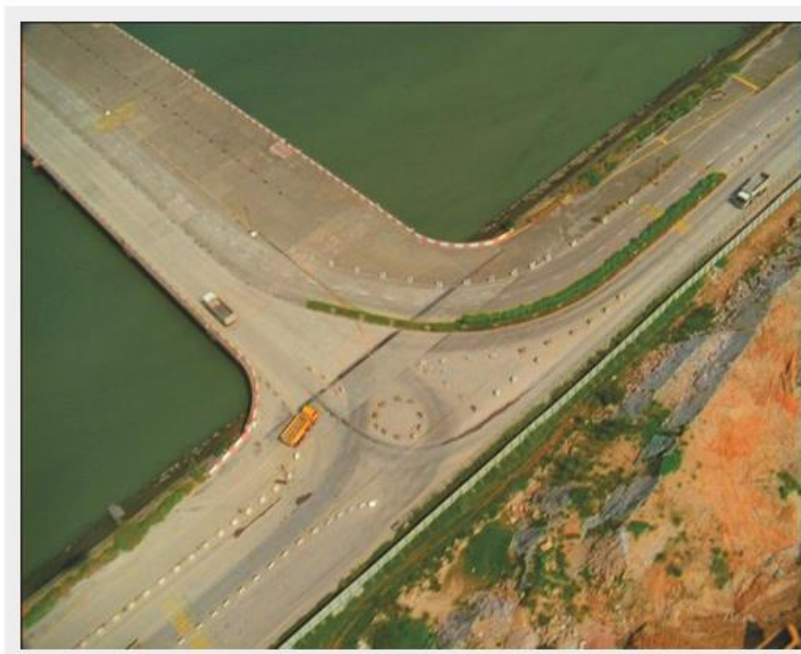
Silk-screened white horizontal lines of varying widths on shiny 3x4 ratio aluminum sheets read as television screens. The imagery consists of natural phenomenon such as eclipses and shooting stars which would have most likely been "alien" to star gazers centuries ago.

Retroprojection (2012) / Silvered ink silkscreen on paper mounted on aluminium, flush frame, framed / 138 x 199 x 5 cm / © Laurent Grasso, ADAGP, Paris 2012



Inside the second room is **Radio Ghost (2003)**, which harks back the artist's first showing in Hong Kong at the **agnes b. librairie du jour**. A video taken from an aerial view pans slowly along Hong Kong's suburbs seemingly by satellite.

Radio Ghost (2003) / 35 mm, 32 min, looped / © Laurent Grasso, ADAGP, Paris 2012



Dubbed over the footage are oral accounts of encounters with "spirits"; a combination of the two stimuli, the first, an entire landscape of visual information, and the other aural, limited, questionable, yet personable; making for a subtle sense of conflict.



Also part of the show is Garro's **Anechoic Pavilion** located above the **Central Ferry Pier 4** which overlooks Victoria Harbor. The piece invokes an introspective internal meditation while acting as a framing device for the the harbourscape that surrounds it.

*Anechoic Pavilion (2012) / Utile wood, laminated wood, glass / 300 x 400 x 370 cm
© Laurent Grasso, ADAGP, Paris 2012*



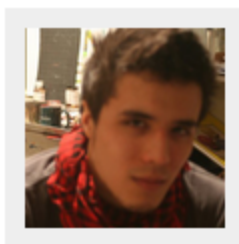
As indicated with the title of the show, *Future Archeology*, Grasso compromises the notions of time and transparency as progress, aiming to disrupt the viewer's sense of truth and security while stimulating uncertainty and paranoia in our psyche, gently nudging us out of a comfortable coma.

Future Archeology (2012) / neon tubes, transformer / 53 x 80 x 40 cm, edition of 5 & 2AP / © Laurent Grasso, ADAGP, Paris 2012



**LAURENT GRASSO, FUTURE ARCHEOLOGY / 26 April 2012 - 16 June 2012 /
Edouard Malingue Gallery, First Floor 8 Queen's Road Central / *Anechoic
Pavilion* installation venue: Central Ferry Pier 4 Rooftop, Hong Kong /
Edouard Malingue [ONLINE](#)**

All Images in this post © Edouard Malingue Gallery. Thank you so much for the pictures.



Andrew Luk is a prodigal son of a fine artist recently returning to Hong Kong after many years of exile overseas. His work is multidisciplinary, but usually rooted in collage and painting. For more information on Andrew and his work email him at luk.andrew88@gmail.com or log on to his blog <http://andrewluk.wordpress.com>.

Tags: LAURENT GRASSO, ART, ANDREW LUK, FUTURE ARCHAEOLOGY, HONG KONG, HONGKONG, EXHIBITION, DESIGN, ARCHITECTURE, EDOUARD MALINGUE