

## Elisa "Lilli" Fantozzi: Invitation to Dream

Is Elisa in on a quest to find herself or is she in search of others? According to the saying in the English language, "*A man is not an island*", which reminds us that we cannot live without others? Elisa's work exemplifies this notion. Her work seeks unconditional love, it aims to charm young and old and it particularly strives to adapt itself to all quests. From self-portraits painted on food packages, embellished virgins or religious statues, bouquets of Annual Honesty to resin balls or moulds of the artist's body... as we will later discover in more detail, her quest for charm is apparent. Because, as I said, in a previous portrayal of Elisa, "*Un Ange Nous Emporte*", she profoundly doubts herself and her self-esteem is very random. Her quest to find the soul in materials and « immaterials » could be understood as self-therapy, however we prefer to qualify it as an attempt to sublimate what is real, and therefore, herself.

Her work makes light, it makes things airborne by spawning growth (remember the badge "*Avec Poum Je Peux Grandir*", that I mentioned in my first portrayal of the artist. That is what we are supposed to get out of any attempt to practice art, only in Elisa Fantozzi's work it is firstly obvious, and made with such grace that we feel as though we are watching a never-ending choreography. Constant, because her suggestions were reduced to their essence, they become imprinted in our minds just like we don't forget our first love...

Material is indeed present in Fantozzi's case, but it is light. No devices, none, including the signature, are justified.

As a child Elisa grew up with a statue of the Virgin Mary in her family home and no-one was allowed to touch it out of fear, apparently. She could have been traumatised, however, as a grown-up at the age of 18, she conquered her restraint and, on tiptoes, stretched out her arm and lifted the statue into her hands. To paint it. This was obviously her first religious sculpture. She would create dozens more after this. Statues of Saints to whom she sacrificed a second life, full of colour and life. These very statues, after witnessing the fear or fascination on devout Catholics' faces, would enjoy the light and bright gaze of young and old, Catholic or not, following the artists' touch.

In 1996 Elisa opened "*L'Épicerie*" in Pézenas, in the South of France. She revived a small grocery store and kept its name; it then became a place of reflection and creation for Fantozzi, a place where she could talk to and meet her audience. She then produced, in a quasi-obsessive manner and based on religious statues mostly donated by the churches, the iconic work "*Welcome to the World* (1996), but she also created sculptures of dogs or televisions found in bins or at the flea market. She never missed a beat, neither Sunday passers-by, nor local actors or alley cats.

She thus spent her life between Pézenas and New York where she had been spending every winter for more than seven years. This brings to mind, for example, the small angel casts suspended from the ceilings of art galleries Elisa chose to bless and on which "*Un Ange Passe - Lili*" could be read.. She has also made dozens of these.

Then she left Pézenas to go to Sète to the "*Jardin des Fleurs*" studio. A shift occurred from the narrowness of « L'Épicerie » to a space spanning two hundred square metres (200m<sup>2</sup>), which enabled her to produce large quantities, but also to entertain friends, organise exhibitions like concerts, always out of her love for others, for herself. Elisa experimented with new production methods, including resin, which firstly involved continuing her work on religious icons by duplicating, this time, plaster statues in double or triple resin, like for example "*Les Marchands du Temple*" (2000). Then Elisa herself was duplicated, firstly for the work "*Inspiration / Expiration*" (2003 - France Fiction, Paris, 2006 ; Chartreuse de Villeneuve-lez-Avignon, Exhibition « La Dégelée Rabelais », FRAC Languedoc Roussillon, 2008), in which "Lili", Elisa's double, was carried by a life-size Jesus. Obviously an inverted Piéta. And so continued the sleeping resin "Lilis", the hanged pig (Château d'O, « *Envie d'Etre en Vie* », Montpellier, 2007) or the plank (Parcours Contemporain, Fontenay le Comte, 2008). In Elisa's studio, still in resin, there were balloons, being blown away, (« *Un Jour Je Serai Rose* », 1996), or some that take a chair into the air (« *Hommage à Larry Waters* », Parcours Contemporain, Fontenay le Comte, 2008). It is in

fact a tribute. To a man who dreamt of heavenly spaces and attached his deckchair to several helium balloons in order to be taken up into the air. It turned out to be a successful wager as he remained in the sky for several hours before being swept up and saved by an army helicopter. He won the Darwin Award for his feat. With this work Elisa, showed us that she still had the capacity to dream. Harboring a fascination for the men and women who go before us. Fantozzi as a little girl... Let us not forget her work "Renaissance" (Le Pont du Gard, Exposition "La Dégelée Rabelais", FRAC Languedoc Roussillon, 2008), that was dreamed up by Elisa but created by a sculpture company. It involves a giant shell, identical to those in which we are supposed to hear the sound of the sea, except that this one is two and a half metres high and a gurgling noise can be heard. A stranger than strange situation, quasi-surrealistic, that could once again be understood as a tribute to Salvador Dali this time. Let us remind ourselves that the first art book that Elisa beheld was a work on this Spanish artist.

This leads us to consider the immaterial part of Elisa's research. Because she conceives the idea of "Renaissance" but has the work created by someone else, she sets the rules and then directs performers to do the enactment; this indicates that she is as much at ease in the immaterial, the complete imaginary sphere, without any physical media. She directs, writes plays and songs. This, apparently, is where her work is going. Because she receives more and more requests, orders... too many for two hands and two feet. But probably not enough for a soul so desperately in need of love!

We understand, Elisa is edging closer to the heavens. Since the appropriation of that first virgin. Every day she takes a step closer and obviously she has not said all she has to say. Perhaps she will make films like her grandmother and her uncle, perhaps she'll move into architecture like her grandfather, perhaps she'll create companies like her father or perhaps she'll be interested in education like her sister. Or perhaps she'll never adapt to her era. Because her work is timeless; it speaks of something that has always been there and always will be...

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