

*How did the idea of “Touching Reality” come about? How did you work (searching and selecting pictures, etc.)? What do you want to simulate in the audience?*

I created “Touching Reality” to give form to the contradiction of the new phenomena which combines the sensitivity of a fingertip touching a screen and the abundance of today’s pictures of destroyed human beings. “Touching Reality” is a collage of these two elements. On one hand there is a sensual interplay, which in fact is only the cold and distancing contact of a technological device, and on the other hand, there is the cruel violence of destroyed bodies, as we can see them in the media and especially on the Internet. The pictures of destroyed human bodies were taken by non-photographers. Most of them were taken by witnesses, passers-by, soldiers, security or police officers, rescuers or first-aid workers. The origin of the images is unclear and often unverifiable; there is no source, whatever we believe a source to be. This unclear provenance and this unverifiability reflect today’s uncertainty. This is what I am interested in. Origin is often not guaranteed – but what can be guaranteed in our world today, how can ‘under guarantee’ still make sense? These images can be downloaded from the Internet; they have the status of a testimony and were put online by their authors for many different reasons. Furthermore, the origin of these images is not mentioned; or confusedly with an unclear and perhaps even manipulated or stolen address, as is often the case on the Internet. We confront it every day. This uncertain provenance is one of the reasons why looking at such images is important. I am especially interested by the unverified, uncontrolled, non-guaranteed, non-authenticated provenance. With “Touching Reality” I want to give form in our complex, conflicting and contradictory world. I want to give form, a self-asserting form which holds up and points out the chaos, a form which is autonomous.

*Could you discuss (briefly) other major works of yours made with pictures that came out in the media?*

My work is based on the principle of ‘collage’ - a principle that I love. What I mean by ‘Collage’ is the act of taking existing elements of our world – which apparently don’t match – and pasting them together in order to re-create a new world. I have done this with ‘flat’ (two dimensional) Collages as well as with three dimensional work or work in public space. I always used printed material, clipped from newspapers and various media, or directly printed out from Internet. Here are some examples of such works using the ‘Collage’ technique: *Fifty-Fifty*, 1993, *Les plaintifs, les bêtes, les politiques*, 1995, *Superficial Engagement*, 2006, *The Incommensurable Banner*, 2008, *Ur-Collage*, 2008, *Collage Truth*, 2012, *Easycollage*, 2014. These are all equally important works, regardless of size and medium!

*What interests and strikes you about ‘information’ pictures? How does an artist’s message differ from the one carried out by the media?*

I’m interested in images. I’m interested by the act of looking. I’m interested in looking and thinking without information! I want and must insist on looking at images without the information that wants to neutralize it. In order to think, one cannot look at an image which has been neutralized by information, ‘facts’ or journalism. In order to think, one cannot accept the fact of not showing images because they are being ‘authenticated’. ‘Authenticated’ by whom? Authentication is not something relevant for making art. Here is where the gap or abyss between journalism, information, opinion, comments, – and art breaks open – or in other words the gap between ‘fact’ and ‘truth’. It is my mission as an artist, to believe in the image and be interested by its truth—in the image-‘truth’ only—and definitely not by its commentary, contextualization or explanation. I am surprised besides, that the Tendency toward ‘iconism’ still exists to this day. ‘Iconism’ is the habit of ‘selecting’, ‘choosing’, or ‘finding’ the image that ‘stands out’, the image that is ‘the big one’, the image that ‘says more’, the image that ‘counts more’ than others. In other words, Tendency towards ‘iconism’ is the tendency to ‘highlight’ something; it’s the old, traditional procedure of favoring and imposing hierarchy in an authoritarian way. This is not a declaration of importance towards something or

somebody, but a declaration of importance towards others. The goal of iconism is to establish a common authoritarian value system. But 'highlighting' and 'iconic tendency' also have the effect of ignoring the existence of differences, of the non-iconic and the non-highlighted. In the field of war and conflict images, I'm surprised by this tendency of choosing what is 'acceptable' in the place of others. The 'acceptable' icon-image stands for another or all other images, claims to be something else, perhaps even a non-image, therefore taking the place of an image that doesn't exist at all. This image or icon must obviously be the right, correct, good, permitted, consensual one – to finally serve as a controlled image. That's where manipulation comes in. I refuse to accept images presented to me as icons; I reject their 'iconism' and I reject the fact that an icon-image stands for anything else than itself. "Touching Reality" is an artwork for itself, in itself and against itself. As an autonomous artwork, this work is an affirmation beyond the 'iconic Tendency'. Therefore my problem, my mission as an artist, is: How can I take a position? How can I give form to this position? How can I give form beyond information, 'facts' and actuality? How can I give a form which creates a truth, a universal truth? This is the issue, as an artist. I must focus on making artwork that doesn't bow down to 'factuality' and stands beyond history and the time I am living. I want and must make an a-historical work.

*In your opinion, how and to what extent did the impact of news pictures published in the media evolve in the past years/decade, as well as their use by artists?*

In today's world of facts, information, opinion and comments, much is reduced to being factual. Fact is the new 'golden calf' of journalism, and journalists want to give it the assurance and guarantee of veracity. But I'm not interested in the verification of a fact. I'm interested in Truth, Truth itself, which is neither a verified fact nor the 'correct information' of a journalistic story. Truth is irreducible; therefore images of destroyed human bodies are irreducible and resist factuality. The habit of reducing things to facts is a comfortable way to avoid touching Truth, and resisting it is a way of touching Truth. Unconditional acceptance of facts is intended to impose on us factual information as 'the measure' instead of having us look and see with our own eyes. I want to see with my own eyes. Resistance to today's world of facts is what makes it important to look at such images. We rarely see images of destroyed bodies in newspapers, magazines and TV news, because they are hardly ever shown. These pictures are invisible or made non-visible by pixelization or blurring. Justification is of protecting us, assuming they will hurt the viewer's sensitivities, satisfy voyeurism, or oblige 'authentication'. But invisibility or non-visibility isn't innocent. Invisibility is a strategy to support, or at least, not discourage the war effort. It's about making the war acceptable and its effects commensurable, as was expressed by Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of Defense (2001-2006): "Death has the tendency to encourage a depressing view of war." But are there really any views of war which aren't depressing? Looking at and showing images of destroyed bodies are ways of campaigning against war and its justification, and propaganda. Since 9/11, the phenomenon of invisibility has been reinforced. Today, an increasing amount of published images are pixelized, blurred or simply not shown. But, in order not to accept invisibility or non-visibility as an action against 'voyeurism' or as a 'protective' action, it is important to look at such images. The images of destroyed human bodies are also important in terms of their redundancy. What is redundant is the existence of such a huge amount of images of destroyed human bodies today. Redundancy isn't repetition of the same thing because it's each time another human body that has been destroyed and is shown as such. It's not about images – but about human bodies, about the human being, of whom the picture is only a witness. The images are redundant images because it is redundant as such, that human beings are being

destroyed. Redundancy is important here. I want to treat it as something important, and I want to see it as a form. We don't want to accept the redundancy of such images because we don't want to accept the redundancy of cruelty towards a human being. Therefore it is important to look and to show images of destroyed human bodies in their redundancy. This is my form, my mission and my contribution as an artist working today.

*Translated from French*