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## Voices from the osloBIENNALEN: Carole Douillard

Curated by Daniela Veneri

*"That immaterial space where the interaction happens is my space, it's something which is really a question of seeing, feeling, something very impalpable, delicate, very human."*

- Carole Douillard



'The Viewers' by Carole Douillard on the roof of the Opera House in Oslo. Photo: Niklas Hart, Hartwork / © osloBIENNALEN

#Attention #Sharing #Collaborating #Immaterial #Space  
#Time

**Which projects are you currently working on and which excite you most?**

There are two projects I am working on. One is a three months research project that will take place in California from October 2019 to January 2020, and it is based on the history of performance and questions in contemporary gesture and collective rituals. I will do research in three cities,

Los Angeles, San Francisco and Palo Alto, to work with some of the leaders of the performance art from the 70s.

At the same time I will continue to work on the Oslobiennalen. Initially I was invited to join with one performance, The Viewers, that has been already shown in May and June and will continue to be proposed until October, and that was conceived five years ago, then they also invited me to work on a new project, that I will begin in January or February 2020. After the residency in California I will head to Oslo, and at that point I will be able to re-answer to the Oslobiennalen with new ideas in mind, new propositions.

### **What values and principles guide your work?**

Deceleration, attention, economy of gesture, minimalism, conceptualism, link between performance and audience, link between theory and action, link between action and documents, are what comes to my mind in first place.

I work on the relation between actions/performers and their audience and on the political way to inhabit public spaces. By public spaces I consider the streets of course but also museums and art places which are scales to operate in. I think that the main direction of my work consists on paying attention to what is going on between a performance and its receivers. That immaterial space where the interaction happens is my space, it's something which is really a question of seeing, feeling, something very impalpable, delicate, very human.

Then I work a lot on what is to decelerate, to just be here and now without thinking about what we're going to do tomorrow. It's a question of really being concentrated on what is happening just now.

I also work on the relationship between the history of performance and contemporary questions. In fact, I love to be conscious about what art history and artists produced in the past. For me it's a way to follow themes and other artists, to dig, to continue to research on issues that some people already began to work on. I love to continue to think about ways to pay attention to deep questions and go deeper on subjects.

I think I am mostly working on attention and depth. With depth I also mean a deep relation between people, and this is something very important for me. There is a very philosophical, and quite mystical sometimes, question about what is "being" and I feel a necessity to share this interrogation. Performing is my way to find a balance in this very complicated world, because if I do not transform my sensibility, I will die. Artists don't have any choices. We must do what we must do. I feel it like that. Sometimes it's very difficult, but it's my destiny.

### **What are your most important objectives as an artist?**

My objective is to be a poetic and political observer, in the noble sense of the word. I think that artists are essential to societies, and that their sensibilities are a mode of resistance in a foolish absurd capitalist world.

As an artist I feel like an observer, and that means that I'm always into a certain space and time but at the same moment I feel like I am also in a second space, a bit near myself or near the scene I am living. I'm always in a double position, as if I was living but also at the same time observing what's going on inside me and also in the space around me, what's happening with all the people who are participating in the scenes, how people react to each other, how they manage the space together. It's always like having a double position, being in the space between living and observing life, and this is the space where my imagination works. Artists are good observers

and they create with their sensitivities.



'The Viewers' by Carole Douillard at Oslo Central Station. Photo: Inger Marie Grini / © osloBIENNALEN

### What does it mean for you to participate in the Oslo Biennalen?

It is a really great experience, a very deep one. The connection with the curators is really excellent. The way we work together is quite ideal, because they are really listening a lot, they follow the work in a very authentic way. The all project of the biennial is really interesting because it's a very political one, it asks questions about what it means to be a citizen, what it means to be living in a place in a given time. For me this question is very exciting and allows a lot of answers, it gives a lot of opportunities to work with. I feel like I have a white card to work there in Oslo, I really free to work and the quality of our sharing with the team is really high. I also love the fact that this biennale will last five years, and this is really



interesting because it means that I don't have to work in a rush. I love to have the possibility to take the time I need, I don't want to be an artist who produces fast for the market, I'm not interested in that at all. I am actually interested in the process of creation, which is firstable a human process.

What I really love of this biennial project is that it offers me a real possibility to take time to "feel", "think" and "do". It is a very rich way of working and it's the first time I can experiment such a way to work in such an international high level context. I feel lucky to be part of this.

### **What specific challenges and opportunities does the local context of Oslo offer?**

It offers the opportunity to develop my work in a way I did not think before, particularly with *The Viewers*, the performance the curators proposed me to develop in the Oslo biennial context. This performance was originally created for the Palais de Tokyo's indoor space (Paris), and for me it was more like a sculpture or installation inside an art institution. Presenting this action in Oslo's urban space made me understand that the public space is a really meaningful place for art, as it operates on the work as a scale. This shift from the museum to outdoor spaces leads me to have a more profound reflexion on how contexts operate with artworks.

Also, the way the curators want to develop the biennial on time is really particular, it's a new way to think the rhythm of a huge art proposition and it is really interesting.

The necessity to articulate the work and the context is the most interesting challenge of this project, along with the long time window that we have to work with. I know that if I want to begin a certain work in one year I can then continue with it for more three years, and that's wonderful. You are going to work with people for a long time and so to know them better, and this means that the work that is being produced will have a life-long impact for me. For example, I would like to go back to Oslo and live there for several months. Living the daily life there is also a way to respond to the project and being involved with it.

### **What excites you most about this initiative?**

The idea to develop a work in space and time without any obligation related to the concept of «event». As an artist, it is a luxury to take the time to imagine a work that can take its shape in a subtle relation to space over a long period of time.



### **What kind of impact do you see emerging from the Oslo Biennalen?**

It is maybe too early to answer know. I believe in the human impact of the all biennial on the people/audience who are going to live these experiences. Seeds will surely grow in every person involved. I think the immaterial trace will be the most important impact.

### **How can arts and culture make an effective social contribution today?**

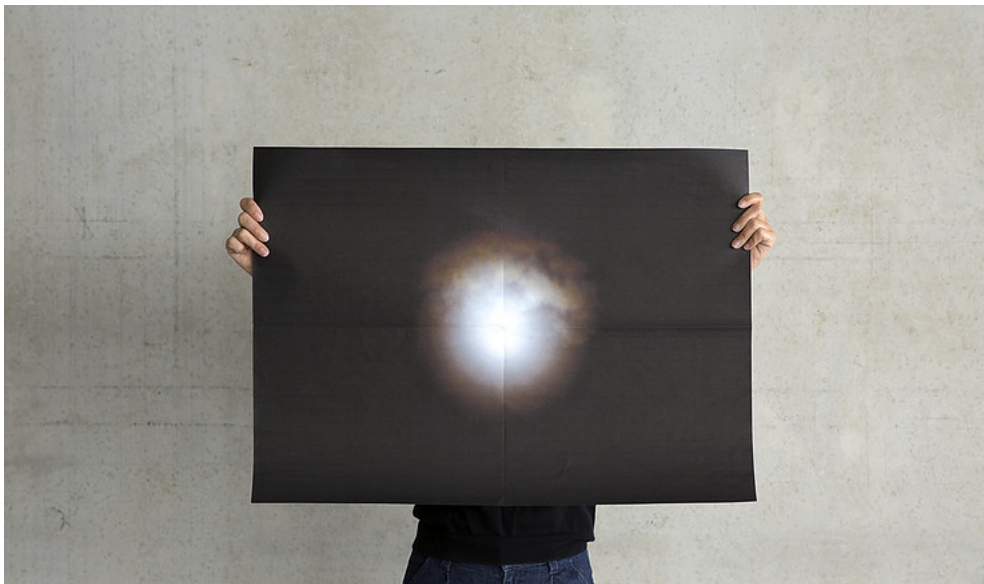
For me art is a necessity, it's obvious that art always had a social contribution. The meaning of art has always been to make people think. Culture is necessary to question what it means to be living, to be here, now, in such a world.

In France a lot of projects are created to have a social dimension, institutions ask artists to invent social solutions that they don't have. I think the issue of the social function of art is a gap. I think artists are not there to solve directly social problems whether they are directly concerned by social questions. Being an artist, for example in France, is an act of social resistance. In every part of the world if you decide to be an artist you are a fighter, even because you often cannot live just with your art, it is economically very difficult to be an artist. We always ask social questions even by the way we live. The contribution of art is to maybe show people that we can choose our way of living.

If we are not there to ask some questions, who is going to ask them? The social necessity of art is to continue to ask some questions and to involve the audience in the process, the cultural field is there for that.

### **Who are your most important partners and interlocutors?**

My main partners are the curators I work with, because they make me think and ask myself some questions in a very deep and interesting way. I listen a lot to the people I work with, they are my main interlocutors. I also have some people around me, my friends, the people I meet every day, they also make me think, including the people who have very different ideas, like political enemies, make me think, so they also are in some ways my partners. Then there are many artists, researchers, people with whom I love to share ideas and that are really nourishing me. But also pieces of art and books that open my mind. Also immaterial things like people I think about, literature, music. I consider as my partner anything that makes me think.





To Hold, moon, Photograph 120 x 90 - Carole Douillard, 2017. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**Where do you see current shifts in the evolution/transformation of the role of arts and cultural players, institutions, curators, art managers, artists and big events like art biennials? Where do you see risks and challenges and where do you see opportunities?**

I think that art is too much connected to the art market and money. This money issue is quite a problem because it's becoming to be the first value of everything, even for art, and I do not think that's a good thing. I am quite beginning to hate this kind of events that are just showing big art, big artists, big... We don't care. I don't care about that. I think this is not what we need. We need, I think, events and a cultural field that act on questions and challenges about how to live together on this planet, what we can do today for us and for the world we survive in.

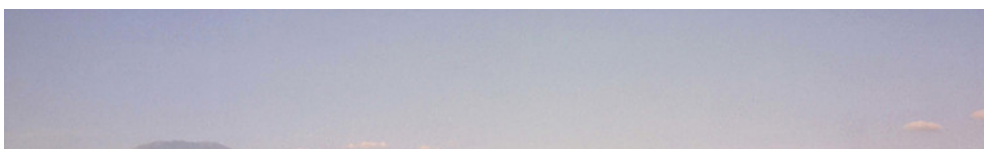
We can't continue to make art as we did in the 20th century. I don't believe in objects for example, as objects for me are from the old world, but this is my position because I'm a performer. I do not think we need these big objects, I don't need to make a big art object to have big money, to be a big artist. I don't care. I think this is the old model. That's why I also love this project in Oslo, because it is not that at all, it is a much more interesting way to think at the process, the audience and the collective way to produce art. It favors immaterial works, it is showing art in the city, offering it to an audience which is not that of art experts, it is challenging political and social positions. I would like big art events to be more involved in politics in a noble way.

I think we must really rethink everything. These big sculptures or installations which take a lot of space and want to be very impressive, they seem very show business. I feel that the role of art is really to go against that.

**If you were able to change one or two things in the area of responsibility of arts and cultural institutions, curators, cultural producers, what things do you think would create the most value and benefit for all?**

I don't want to praise excessively the Oslo Biennalen, but I really think it offers a new way to work. I have worked for 20 years as an artist now and this is the first example of this kind that I experienced. The way Oslo's curators work with artists is for me exemplary. It is much more a collaboration than a top-down process, we share a lot, we develop together the concept of the works and their articulation within the context, it's a kind of ideal relation based on trust, it is smooth and respectful, and each of us has a specific complementary role. It's much more an horizontal way of working and to collaborate to create something together.

I think this example is really very interesting for the future. I would like to continue to work like that and I hope that we will see more examples of ways to collaborate together and share the creative process.





Alive, Cover Poster, California-Kabylia, 1979-2016, Carole Douillard, 2016. Photo courtesy of the artist.

**What forms of artistic proposals and contaminations do you think are particularly representative of current transformations and challenges taking place in modern society?**

I think that the contamination between the art field and the non-art field consists now in a circulation of ideas between political actions and art actions. I think there is something closely related to the process of creation and to the process of taking decisions. That's why I also believe in performances in art as a political way of thinking and being, and that's why I said that I don't believe in objects anymore, because I think it's something from the past. For me contamination is also a way of being.

In France a lot of citizens now are using actions to make the government realize something or change, there is a lot happening in the streets, in public spaces. I think that this is something that is moving from art forms to daily life. It is an impression that I have.

**What is one cross-sector collaboration that you find successful, inspiring or interesting and why?**

This question makes me think more at what influences my work. I can share about what inspires me from other professional fields. I can mention cinema, research, literature, dance... For me it all connects to contemporary art and contemporary thoughts or ways of creating. For me it is important to keep an eye on what my contemporaries are inventing, what researchers are researching on, what writers are writing on, what are the key issues that others are thinking about. Keeping an eye on what is going on in creation is very important for me.

**What I did not ask you that you think is important to mention?**

I come from two cultures, Africa from my mother and France from my father. I think my identity is giving me a different sensitivity to work with, and this is maybe related to what I have said about living two states, being and observing, that I believe comes from my double culture. This gives me some space to work at the borders. I think catch a lot of very subtle things that people around me don't really understand. When you have two visions of something, you have a lot of keys to understand that thing. I'm really, really proud of this and working with this double eye for me is also a gift, I always try to pay attention to different facets when I work with people.

**Can you think of three or five keywords that express your impressions and feelings about the topics we just talked about?**



impressions and feelings about the topics we just talked about:

*Attention*, which is a very important word for me. *Sharing* or *collaborating*. *Immaterial*. *Space*. *Time*.

### Anything else that you would like to add?

I did not mention what the body question means for me. I talk a lot about the immaterial being, but of course when I say immaterial it means human, it refers to our corporeity, what does it mean to have a body and to live in it, to be alive. Performance for me is a material way of working on immaterial, a way to question what it is to feel alive.



Carole Douillard

French-Algerian artist, born in 1971 in Nantes (France) from a Kabyle mother and a French father, **Carole Douillard** is graduated from the School of Beaux-Arts, Nantes, in 1997 and from the University of Franche-Comté, UFR Science de l'homme et du langage (DU in Art, dance and performance) in 2012. She's part of the research laboratory ACTE at Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne run by pragmatist philosopher Barbara Formis. Artist and performer, Carole Douillard uses her presence or that of the interpreters as sculpture for minimal interventions in space. Situated on the edge of the spectacular, while taking care to avoid it, her work calls for a redefinition of the spectator, the space of performance and the power struggle between the contemplated object and the person contemplating it. Her work is plenty part of the first Oslo Biennial 2019-2024. In fall 2019, before going back to Oslo, she'll develop a 3 months research project in California on performance and contemporary gesture. In 2018, she realised a performance film (Idir) with the american filmmaker Babette Mangolte which consists on a politic and poetic reenactment in Algiers's street of an historic Bruce Nauman's performance from 1967 (Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square). This fall 2019, Idir will be exposed at the Musée d'arts of Nantes (France) and at Lace (Los Angeles). Before that, her projects have taken place at the Lyon Biennale (France), the Ferme du Buisson (Noisiel, France), the Musée de la Danse (Rennes, France), at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), at Centre Pompidou (Paris) the Mac Val (Vivre-sur-Seine, France), at the French Institute in Algiers and Oran (Algeria), at the Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo (Madrid, Spain), at Wiels (Brussels, Belgium)... A first copy of her performance The viewers was acquired in 2014 by the Centre National des Arts Plastiques (France) and is now performed at Oslo's Biennial. In 2012-2013, she was artist researcher within the cooperative of research at the Ecole Supérieure d'Art of Clermont



Métropole (university year 2012-2013) and regularly collaborates with Laboratoire du geste – Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne. Alive, her first monograph was published in march 2016, its authors are Chantal Pontbriand, Janig Bégoc and David Zerbib (Ed. by Christian Alandete/Cabin agency - Les Presses du Réel, Fr). She is the co-founder with Entre-deux (ML Viale & J Rivet), Manon Rolland, Oro/Loïc Touzé, Fabienne Compet, Isabelle Tellier of think think think, a platform for research in performance (Nantes, France, 2014). She also regularly teaches performance art in European and north Africa universities and art schools since 15 years.

Note: [This interview was published on Rondò Pilot, issue no. 0.8, 2019.](#)




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