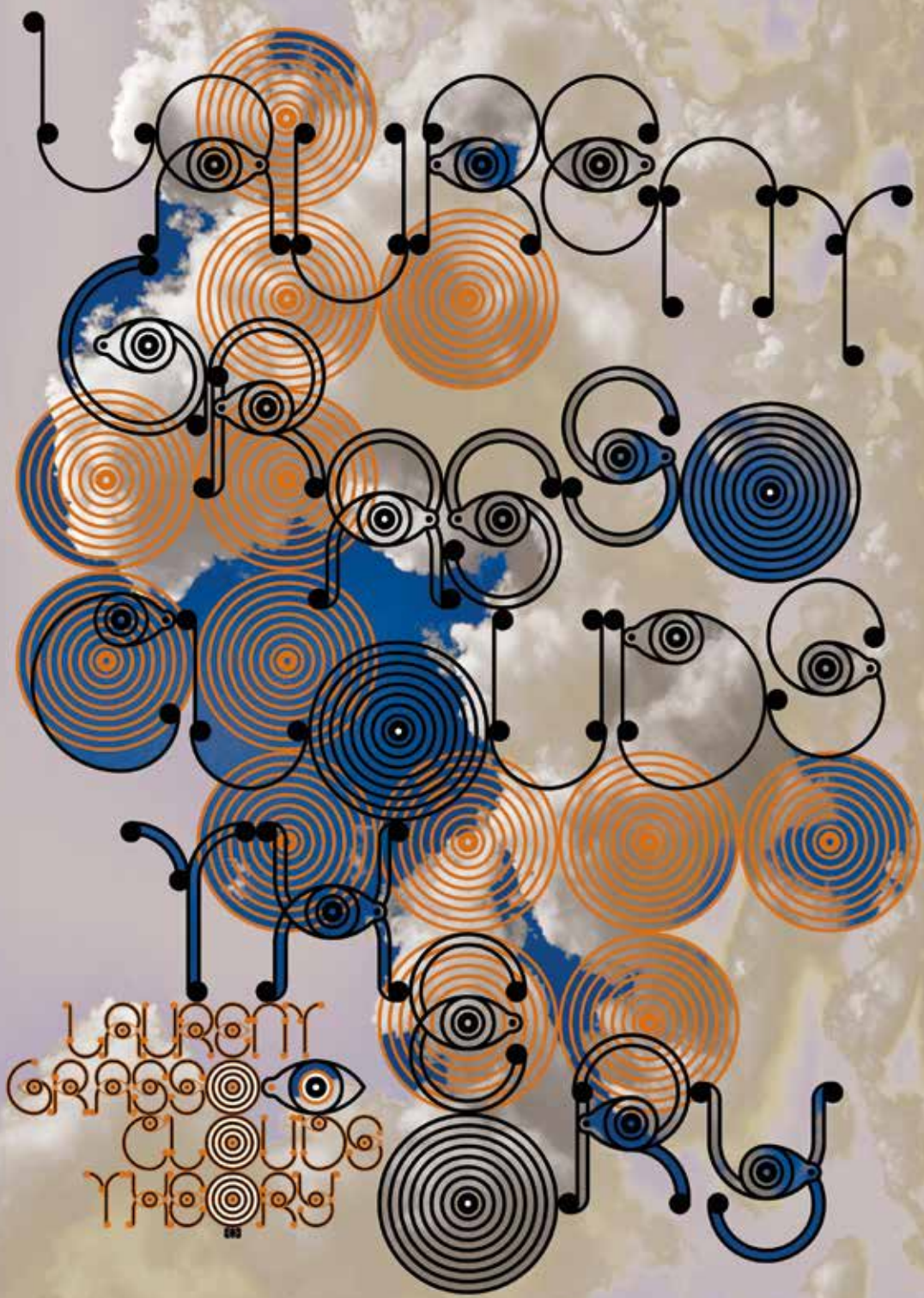


LAURENT
GRASSO
CLOUDS
THEORY



Editorial

As a founding member of the Impressionist Normandy festival, the Department of Seine-Maritime is playing an invested role in the celebrations marking the movement's 150th anniversary.

In 2022, Jumièges Abbey was the setting for a memorable event, with the concert at sunrise provided by the Musicales de Normandie festival and the In Fine company, in homage to Claude Monet's seminal painting *Impression, soleil levant*, painted in Le Havre at the mouth of the Seine.

For this exceptional edition of the Impressionist Normandy festival, the Department chose to invite the artist Laurent Grasso to the site to develop a special project linked to the festival's contemporary programme.

Laurent Grasso's mysterious and enigmatic installation in the magnificent ruins of the abbey is themed around the motif of the cloud, which the Impressionists observed and painted to the point of obsession. Fascinated by the light and skies of Normandy, they made clouds a favourite theme.

Here, Laurent Grasso offers a reinterpreted spatiality and temporality in a work that will resonate with everyone, echoing the words of Baudelaire's *L'Étranger* (The Stranger), he who « *loves the clouds... the passing clouds... over there... over there... the wonderful clouds!* »

—

Bertrand Bellanger

President, Department of Seine-Maritime



Clouds Theory by Laurent Grasso

As part of the 2024 Impressionist Normandy festival and at the invitation of the Department of Seine-Maritime, Laurent Grasso is transforming the entire Jumièges Abbey into a vast magnetic field in which peculiar forces operate, whether real or perceived.

The works scattered throughout the site activate the ruins to reveal past narratives and hint at future possibilities. The abbey is treated as a scientific observation zone, marked out with measuring instruments. While the purpose of the latter is mysterious, they suggest the magnetic and energetically charged dimension of the site. The futuristic glow of neon lights dotted around the ruins reveals the spectral dimension of the abbey. Their gaseous state highlights the missing and invisible part of the place.

A labyrinthine trail of bright lights, distorting reflections and electric vibrations plunges visitors into a state of altered consciousness, opening up a temporal rift in the Benedictine architecture.

The abbey becomes a specular tool for capturing and reflecting energies, events and projections from both the past and the future. *Clouds Theory* is thus in keeping with the artist's interest in time travel and that which is beyond three dimensional, from string theory to black-body radiation.

The strangeness of celestial phenomena and their interpretation is one of the key themes in Laurent Grasso's work. The motif of the cloud, explored in numerous projects, from *Projection* to *Anima* and *Polair*, is a receptor and transmitter of representations.

As the art historian Hubert Damisch showed, the cloud has been used for centuries to represent the link between the earthly and the celestial. *Clouds Theory* once again highlights this dialogue between the aerial and the terrestrial, with its massive copper clouds stranded in the heart of the open-air nave. Distorted by corrosive flames on one side, and sliced and polished on the other, the ambivalent materiality of these cumulus clouds reflects the site like a mirror, while hinting at past and future events.

As is often the case in his oeuvre, Laurent Grasso endeavours to capture the signs that are persistently or unconsciously part of our collective imagination, and to recreate them for the public using a sensory language. Through their reflections and distortions, these clouds invite visitors to make a mental collage, where past events reveal future scenarios.

Their polished surface shows a glimpse of the great disasters—invasions, pillages and so on—that transformed the abbey into ruins. The ghosts of the past allow us to imagine the spectres of the future. Thus, the use of cloud seeding for geostrategic and climatic purposes is represented alongside the fires of the Viking invasions, the great plagues and the French Revolution, as well as the radioactive cloud from Chernobyl and the ash cloud from the Eyjafjallajökul volcano.

The abbey's successive destructions are suggested by large sets of neon lights that literally and symbolically set the walls of Jumièges ablaze. Some in the shape of flames and others evoking iconic dates are dotted around the ruins, in the area of the choir.

They call together various significant events, most often astronomical phenomena, miracles or disasters with a direct link to the site: "1348" (Black Death of Rouen), "841" (Viking invasion), "1562" (sacking of the abbey by the Huguenots), "1066" (passing of Halley's comet), and "1755" (the Lisbon earthquake felt as far away as Normandy).

In the chapter house, other neon lights from *Panoptes*, representing a multitude of eyes, observe visitors. They are watchful, timeless figures guarding the memory of the place and at the same time seers, scanning the sky to predict the future.



Clouds Theory, 2024
Installation of 6 copper sculptures
Approx. 138 x 220 x 88 cm (each)

Clouds litter the blackened grounds of the abbey ruins, as if the sky had collapsed along with the vaults of the Notre-Dame Church. Their surfaces, rendered iridescent by fire, evoke the destruction endured by the site over the centuries. They are also a reference to acid rain and the toxic practice of cloud seeding with silver iodide, for the purposes of meteorological control. With their sharp edges and reflective polished surfaces, they are also mirrors in which we might see future events.



Eternal Flames, 2024
Installation of 48 neon lights
Approx. 35 x 14.5 cm (each)

Suggesting the ransacking and destruction that resulted in the ruined abbey we see today, this neon light installation is also a reference to a naturally occurring phenomenon observed in various parts of the world—when natural gas seeping out from the depths of the Earth ignites, it burns forever, creating fields of eternal flames.



Panoptes, 2024
Installation of 30 neon lights
Approx. 15.7 x 30.7 cm (each)

These neon creations evoke archaic representations of the single, all-knowing eye, as well as alluding to ancient theories of vision in which the eye was conceived of as a conveyor of light. The piece also highlights Laurent Grasso's long-standing interest in surveillance systems such as the *panopticon*, astrological observation systems and entoptic vision.



Time Travel, 2024
Installation of 15 neon lights
Approx. 24 x 25 cm or 33 x 25 cm (each)

Iconic dates have punctuated Laurent Grasso's shows for many years. Looming out of different timelines, they call together significant events, often linked to disasters. For the *Clouds Theory* exhibition, a specific set of dates has been imagined. They place the turbulent history of Jumièges Abbey in the broader context of global upheaval.

536: A volcanic haze attributed to the eruption of the Krakatoa or the Ilopango (in present-day Indonesia and El Salvador, respectively) plunges the world into darkness causing a sharp drop in temperatures, followed by widespread famines due to poor harvests.

841: Ransacking and burning down of Jumièges Abbey by the Vikings, on their way up the Seine to Rouen under the command of Danish leader Ragnar.

942: Assassination of Guillaume Longue-Épée, Duke of Normandy, bringing the Renaissance of Jumièges Abbey to a halt.

1066: Passing of Halley's Comet, depicted in the Bayeux tapestry as a sign of the divine disapproval for Harold II's coronation, when the throne of England had been promised to William the Conqueror.

1348: Black Death epidemic in Rouen.

1358: Hundred Years' War and the invasion of the abbey by a troop of eight hundred mercenaries ordered by Charles II "the Bad", King of Navarre.

1562: Raiding of the abbey by the Huguenots.

1755: Lisbon earthquake felt as far as Normandy.

1788: A very harsh winter during which the Seine freezes over for fifty-six days.

1795: Following a revolutionary decree ordering the abolition of religious communities, Jumièges Abbey is sold off as national property, marking the start of the successive demolitions of its various buildings.

1802: The chancel of the Notre-Dame Church is blown up with dynamite.

2020: Covid-19 pandemic.

2030: Date on which the Meadows Report predicts the collapse of the global economic system due to scarcity of resources and the impact of industry on the environment.

2046: Asteroid 2023DW due to pass close to Earth. Until March 2023, it had a Torino Scale value of 1 for a potential impact with our planet on 14 February 2046.

2182: Asteroid (101955) Bennu due to pass very close to the Earth, with a 1 in 2700 chance of impact, which would have catastrophic consequences.



Projection, 2023
Black marble (nero Marquinia)
100 x 65 x 30 cm

The strangeness of celestial phenomena is a major theme in Laurent Grasso's work. The cloud motif, explored in films such as *Projection*, *Anima* and *Orchid Island*, is geometrised to the extreme here. The black marble cloud, simplified into a pictogram, is an abstract presence which allows us to see more than something peculiar. Black rather than white and terrestrial rather than celestial, this antithetical cloud image is a surface projected by the mind.



Projection, 2019
Onyx, LED
47.9 x 70 x 6.2 cm

A luminous onyx sculpture evokes the simplified silhouette of a cloud. *Projection* is part of a series commissioned for a permanent installation at the Institut de France in Paris, for which Laurent Grasso chose ten historical symbols of universal significance. The sculpture resonates with Grasso's film from 2005 with the same title, which shows a cloud moving through the streets of Paris, consuming and concealing everything in its path.



Projection, 2005
Beta digital video and animation, 3:00 loop, Brionvega Doney television set, plinth
36 x 33.5 x 36 cm

With a dull roar, thick cloud invades the streets of Paris, engulfing buildings and cars, including the camera filming it.



Studies into the Past
Aubusson tapestry made at the Manufacture Robert Four (Aubusson, France), hand-woven on the reverse side as per the Aubusson tradition, custom-dyed by the Manufacture's dyer
225 x 200 x 2 cm

Produced in collaboration with the Manufacture Robert Four, this very large-format tapestry is part of the *Studies into the Past* series, a vast conceptual project based on time and time travel that Laurent Grasso has been developing for several years. In this series, the artist blends elements of his own work with elements inspired by historical paintings. The works in the series (paintings, drawings, bas-reliefs), which are undated, are most often inspired by pre-existing compositions. Each style is scientifically reproduced, to enable a shift into another temporality by introducing discordant phenomena, most often borrowed from the artist's films: a cloud of pollen, an

eclipse, a double sun. Here, the tapestry medium is used to insert the cloud motif borrowed from the *Projection* film.



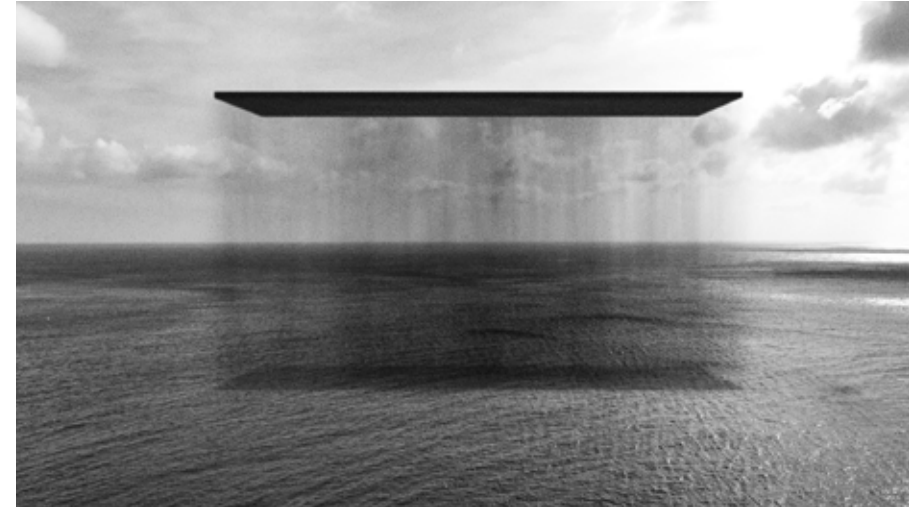
Radionix, 2018
Walnut, amethyst, citrine, copper
and silver
25.3 x 37 x 9 cm

A lacquered wooden case, studded with control buttons and gems, is placed in the exhibition space like a thermo-hygrograph. The sculpture, whose function is enigmatic, is inspired by the design and operation of the machines conceived by physician and inventor Albert Abrams (1863-1924). He developed “Radionics” in the early 20th century, a form of alternative medicine based on the radiation emitted by living organisms. The various components of the cases—quartz, copper or wood—function as frequency transmitters and catalysts. Between piezoelectricity and wave forms, this sculpture is part of a long-standing formal research project revolving around historically dated machines with mysterious designs, envisaged here almost as anthropological manifestations of utopias, and parascientific theories and beliefs.



Projection, 2024
Neon light
20.7 x 30 cm

The cloud motif is re-employed here in neon form. With its pure graphic lines and compact size, it can be perceived as a kind of sign or evocation. Grasso has worked with the neon medium for several years, regularly using it to display the title of a work, or to simplify a form.



Orchid Island, 2023
HR film, 20'

Shot on several islands off the coast of Taiwan, *Orchid Island* features a mysterious, levitating black rectangle, moving slowly and casting its shadow over the landscape. This enigmatic form, which is both solid and evanescent, seems to influence its surroundings through the radiation of particles. It can be interpreted in a variety of ways, evoking abstract art, a political threat, a futuristic object or a symbol of climate change. As a projected surface, it arouses fantasies and fears.

The landscapes over which the black rectangle flies seem unaffected at first glance. Yet they were filmed on Orchid Island, where the construction of a gigantic nuclear waste dump has sparked conflict with the indigenous Tao population, and on Thousand Island Lake, an artificial reservoir formed by the construction of Taiwan’s

largest dam. By almost completely erasing all human presence to reveal only idealised nature, the film questions Western representations of exotic, fantasised landscapes. It echoes images linked to the exploration of supposedly virgin territories, often envisaged as a new Garden of Eden. Added to the confusing nature of the rectangle and the landscapes, is the confusing temporality of what we are seeing, reinforced through the use of black and white. Between archival images and futuristic projections, the film transports us into a multiplicity of temporalities.



Studies into the Past
Oil on wood
24 x 16 x 4.5 cm

Studies into the Past is the generic title of a conceptual project bringing together drawings and oil paintings on wood panel, the style and execution of which are inspired by historical paintings. Typical references from this historical period are mixed with strange celestial phenomena, such as eclipses, aurora borealis, meteorites, swarms of birds or a levitating stone, most often borrowed from the artist's films. This mixture of past, present and future is intended to produce a false historical memory. This work depicts the presence of an UFO shooting out rays, alluding to the "ancient aliens" myth, according to which UFOs can already be seen in ancient sources.



Strader Aparat, 2018
Copper, stainless steel, nickel,
borosilicate glass, wood, horn
190 x 157 x 198 cm

This copper, stainless steel, nickel and glass sculpture features a machine prototype by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the founder of anthroposophy. Developed in the early 20th century, this "science of the soul", represented today by the Universal Anthroposophical Society, headquartered at the Goetheanum in Switzerland, manifests itself in artistic, theatrical, musical, architectural, educational, medical, scientific and technological forms.

"Strader's machine" was one of the stage models in Steiner's play *Four Mystery Dramas* (1910-1913) as well as a utopian scientific project. It was designed to generate energy solely through the interactions between the soul and the machine, with no need for an electrical supply. According to an anthroposophical law, the "etheric vibrations" of the human soul enter into resonance with the mechanical and electromagnetic processes of machines, which amplify and multiply them in return.



Studies into the Past
Oil on wood
150 x 200 x 5 cm

A levitating black rectangle casts a heavy shadow over an idyllic landscape devoid of any human presence. This painting from the *Studies into the Past* series dialogues with the film *Orchid Island*. The menacing presence that flies over Taiwanese territory in the film is here introduced into a landscape inspired by a painting by Louis Rémy Mignot (1831-1870). Representing an Ecuadorian landscape in the convention of the Hudson River School, the idealised nature here is imbued with a religious vision, evoking an earthly paradise upon which the first explorers would gaze. It is thus part and parcel of the imagery of the religious missions that colonised a territory by romanticising it.



ARTIFICIALIS, 2020
HR film, 27'33"

Featuring sites where nature has mutated, as well as radically evolving polar regions, the film *ARTIFICIALIS* reveals a post-Anthropocene world where the environment has been profoundly transformed. Through the occasional integration of special effects, the work generates hazy, ambiguous images that blur the notions of reality, nature and artifice.

The film bridges the gap between conceptions of nature as they developed at the time of the great explorations, and the prospects that are opening up today, at a time when the blurring of the now outdated boundary between nature and culture is the real area of exploration.

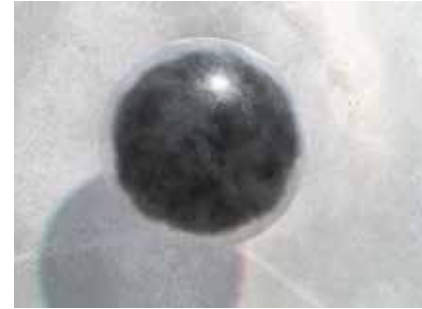


OLOM, 2018
Copper, aluminium, electrical oscillator
Ø 210 cm

Following on from earlier works, and building on Grasso's interest in the aesthetics of machines with mysterious functions, a concentric circle made of copper and aluminium is positioned near the *Otto* film.

OLOM is a sculpture inspired by the Multi-Wave Oscillator, developed by Russian engineer Georges Lakhovsky (1869-1942) in 1930, whose research echoes the vitalist principles of Henri Bergson. Interested in the influence of solar storms on vegetation, the radiation emitted by animals, and the treatment of disease by waves, Lakhovsky claimed from 1923 that the cell is an oscillating electromagnetic circuit that transmits and receives signals regulating physiological processes. He designed a spiral-shaped metal antenna that produces healing electromagnetic vibrations, restoring the oscillatory balance of the human body. *OLOM* is a hybrid sculpture that combines the strangeness of a

modern electromagnetic device with a universal graphic form. Equipped with a real electromagnetic function, the spiral antenna emits waves sweeping a frequency field ranging from 1 GHz to 0.83 MHz. This opens up a whole new field of scientific and fictional possibilities.



Otto, 2018
HD film, 21' 26"

Produced in collaboration with the Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Corporation and the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu in Australia's Northern Territory, the film *Otto* explores the physical, sensory and spiritual impact of places on individuals. Wondering what the "power" of a place is, and suggesting that perhaps one day this power might be scientifically measured, Laurent Grasso filmed sacred Aboriginal sites using thermal and hyperspectral cameras mounted on drones. The artist worked with Traditional Owners, who are those with an intangible right to each of the sacred sites and the custodians of "the Dreaming", or story that is tightly associated with them. *Otto* attempts to capture, measure and reveal—as if it were a form of radiation—the intangible force emanating from these places. The translucent spheres that roam the sacred landscapes are abstract materialisations of secret narratives, presences and potential forces arising from them.



Argon, 2021
Glass spheres, argon gas, transformer
Ø 10 to 25 cm

The neon technique is used here to create glass sculptures through which argon gas flows. A system of spherical neon lights circulates around a bluish glow. Like an immaterial entity, the luminous gas inhabits this enclosed environment with its vibrating presence, reminiscent of the way spheres come to life in contact with landscapes in the film *Otto*. These bubbles are an attempt to encapsulate an intangible phenomenon—in the way Thomas Edison's last breath is held in a sealed test tube at Detroit's Henry Ford Museum.

Biography

French artist Laurent Grasso, who lives between Paris and New York, has shown his work in numerous solo exhibitions around the world, including at TAO Art in Taipei (*Time Leaves*, 2023), at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris (*Anima*, 2022), at the Jeonnam Museum of Art in South Korea (*Laurent Grasso: A History that Became the Future*, 2021), and at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (*ARTIFICIALIS*, 2021). His exhibitions have also included installations at the Musée Zadkine in Paris (*Panoptes*, 2020), the Palais Fesch in Ajaccio (*PARAMUSEUM*, 2016), and the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C. (*The Black Box*, 2011).



Laurent Grasso has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and international biennials of contemporary art, including the Sydney Biennial (Australia, 2018), EVA International (Ireland, 2018), the Gwangju Biennial (South Korea, 2012), Manifesta 8 (Cartagena, Murcia, Spain, 2010), the Sharjah Biennial

in the United Arab Emirates (2009), the Moscow Biennial (2009), the Lyon Biennial (2007), and the Busan Biennial, South Korea (2006 and 2004).

Laurent Grasso has created several installations for public spaces, such as for the Olympic athletes' village in Saint-Ouen, (*Les Racines du Futur* [Roots of the Future], 2024), for the Institut de France in Paris (2019), *Revolving History* (2018) at the Jacobins convent in Rennes, *Solar Wind* (2016) on the Calcia silos in Paris, and *Memories of the Future* (2010) at LEEUM in Séoul, among others. He will soon inaugurate the ceiling of the Montrouge station, designed by architects Marin and Trottin as part of the Grand Paris Express architect/artist tandem.

His work is widely represented in public collections such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, the Pérez Art Museum in Miami and the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, as well

as in prestigious private collections around the world.

His work has also been documented in several major monographs, including *Time Travel* (Rizzoli, 2024) designed by M/M (Paris) graphic studio, *Anima* (Gallimard/Collège des Bernardins, 2022), *Paramuseum* (Silvana Editoriale/Palais Fesch, 2016), *Soleil Double* (Dilecta/Perrotin, 2015), *Uraniborg* (Flammarion/Jeu de Paume, 2012), and *The Black-Body Radiation* (Les presses du réel, 2009).

Among his many honours, Laurent Grasso has been named Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2015), winner of the Prix Marcel Duchamp (2008) and resident at the French Academy in Rome - Villa Medici (2004).

He is represented by Perrotin and Sean Kelly gallery.

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Works, films and installations
Laurent Grasso

General coordination
Sandra Prédine-Ballerie and Jeanne Taconet

Artistic coordination
Studio Laurent Grasso

General management
Étienne David assisted by Christophe Santais

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