

you introduced the idea of the ice still moving, there a symbolic message for society in that we all are aiming for something but keep getting it wrong?

LT: No, this is too responsible for me.

KB: I can't provoke you, can I?

LT: This is another element of constraint in nature. Every time I go into nature it's a new programme. I only make a work once.

KB: The works you have shown seem to be big projects, both practically and intellectually.

LT. Maybe about four months is the average time I let something grow in my mind and reflect. I am obsessional about the projects and I take time to research all the connections to the idea and then to distill something logical and that makes sense for me, which is instinctive. Then I ask critically why I want to do that. Each morning when I drink coffee I have a new idea about the same project. I make a new piece in the puzzle.

KB. One last question: it's been nagging me since your lecture. Did you really dig that tunnel?

LT: Yes, of course.

KB: I didn't see any construction outside, only neatly machined materials as kit form in the gallery. They looked as though they had never been used.

LT: Yes, because it was new. The image you saw showed the wood that would be used to support the tunnel before we started digging. We dug for twenty day, living underground like moles, displacing the earth in front of us, moving it behind us so we could advance. It is the space of the other. The tunnel was closed behind us as it opened before us.

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Transmission *P r o v o c a t i o n*

Guest: Laurent Tixador

Host: Sharon Kivland

Interviewer: Keith Barley

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KB: I'll go straight into the questions. The first one is very simple. It is addressed to Sharon as host and you as guest. How did you feel the talk went for you?

LT: It was a good moment. I was just afraid because I don't speak very good English and it was very fast in the conference but it was full of friendly faces in the theatre and in that sense it was terrific to be in front of the world although I was overwhelmed by the size of the auditorium and intimidated by the rising angle of the seating above me. I had prepared to do some activities with a more spontaneous talk but because of

the way I felt it was not possible.

SK: I am always terribly stressed when I have a guest and even when it's someone I haven't invited but am present as co-host/steward of the project it makes me nervous. I am always really worried that the students are going to be rude and because I am not their mother I can't tell them off *[all laugh]*. Today I heard a great deal of whispering and the people I had to talk to about that had no idea that they were heard. Sometimes people are on eBay on their laptops! I hate that... there is an odd acoustic effect in the auditorium that seems to project noise so one can hear it on the stage. So I am tense and I worry about each lecture. Today I was worried that the complexity of the work would be missed in favor of seeing it as merely humorous or absurd instead of pointing to poignant situations of sacrifice, loss, alienation, as well as an analysis of value systems. However, I think – as the discussion demonstrated – there is something very serious at stake and this was recognised by some of the audience.

KB: Laurent, does your work both represent and illustrate how difficult it is to establish a utopian society?

LT: There are a lot of small utopias like the moment when we were in the meadow with a small society living in igloos or in the cavern in the Périgord where we were trying to make a society together. Sometimes its very hard because the character is different to what you might expect and it doesn't work. It's a very specific moment and I regret about the moment where it was very hard, very difficult because it's an event of experimentation. It is important to try to win the moment out of the experiment. When I try to create a utopia, a society, it's like a game, it can become a ball game or a love game.

KB. Do you believe in miracles, Laurent?

LT: Absolutely not. I know that all my experiments with the utopian are just about the title. It's not possible and it's stupid to say more about it in this way.

KB: Your art is provocative because it illustrates with

imagination a different way to be.

LT: I am not looking for a provocation. I want to test a situation in society.

KB: How much do you have to live the life you convey? Do you believe you live a utopian existence in life?

LT: It's not for everyone. I do not have to prove something by making art. As an artist I can be what I want, when I want although in that place it can become art. I am just living the way I want to live, testing all these experiences in the public space, the outside space, rather than being enclosed. I can then make my work in the physical outdoors instead of being restrained by a studio.

KB: You have told me about how the work is for you. But I am interested in the private side of Laurent Tixador [all laugh]. Were you really the first artist to reach the North Pole and if so, how can you be certain about that?

LT: I found a lot of documentation about an expedition to the North Pole led by Robert Peary in 1909.

The expedition had an artist but he was left behind on the boat and didn't make part of the team that went to the Pole. They thought they had found it but a slight miscalculation meant they never got there. The icecap is floating so it's also always moving and would have been very difficult then to determine the exact position, but we can now do this with GPS.

KB: Was your position exact or imaginary at the North Pole?

LT: Yes, it was an exact position. Where I planted the French flag and made photographs of it was the North Pole. But I am sure five minutes later we were not in the North Pole because the ice had moved.

KB: Ah! Is that an illustration of what we believe are facts of the world which actually are not? That we might all be aiming for the wrong things and creating dystopia?

LT: It was important for me to be at the right place. It was a challenge to be the first French artist to get there. This has still not been challenged; I am still

the first French artist to get to the Pole.

SK: I must admit I thought you were lying [all laugh].

LT: I am also the first person on benefits to reach the North Pole.

SK: If you had been a butcher you would have been the first butcher to reach the North Pole. So that it was an artist may be not so important. But while Peary claimed to be the first man to reach the Pole, it appears rather to have been his assistant Matthew Henson, who was Afro-American. It is he who planted the American flag.

LT: The North Pole is horrible to go to. It's very cold, there is nothing to do and everything is ice and snow. The only reason to go is if you want to be the first at something.

SK. Or even more ignominiously, to be the second.

LT: When all the *charcuterie* and *boulangerie* is exhausted there is nowhere to shop! It's not nice.

KB. I am still wondering if when