

TO BEAR AN IMAGE

PIERRE LEGUILLON'S MANY-HATTED PRACTICE

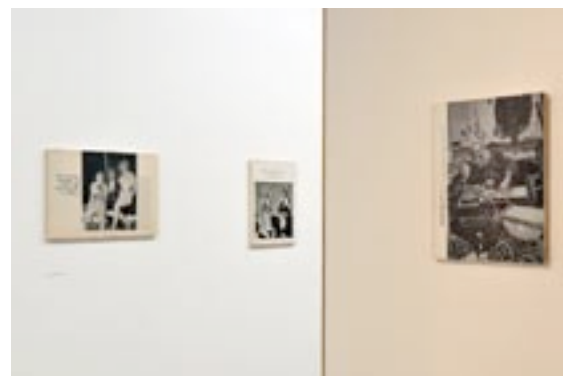
words by MANUEL CIRAUQUI

Between Aby Warburg and Marcel Broodthaers, the strategies of a refined French iconophile who explores the intersections between art and curatorial practice.

"To glorify the cult of images (my great, my only, my earliest passion)." This phrase by Baudelaire could easily sum up the pathos that animates, in all its multiplicity, Pierre Leguillon's work of more than fifteen years. Now that his influence upon a rising generation of French artists (among them, Aurélien Froment, Mark Geffriaud and Aurélien Mole) has become recognizable, it is indispensable to establish a genealogy of a practice that has remained hostile to the categories of the profession, the institutional conventions of interpretation and the usual shibboleths of the market.

As an artist-historian and art critic who expresses himself through images, a collector who writes his *journal intime* with postcards and a curator who "signs with the names of others," Leguillon (born Nogent-sur-Marne, France, 1969) began his activities in the beginning of the 1990s after an eclectic education, which consisted in a series of stints at various universities. In 1991, he published his first issue of *Sommaire*, a magazine consisting of a single page, which hosted projects by artists and writers such as Roman Signer, Koo Jeong-a and Paul-Armand Gette. Parallel to the project, which lasted until 1996, Leguillon collaborated industriously with magazines such as *Artpress* and *Le Journal des Arts* while presenting numerous slide projections, accompanied by the artist's commentaries. In 1998, he decided to discontinue the lecture component of these projections, preferring rather to explore the slideshow as an autonomous medium.

From that point on, the slide projection came to function as an iconological instrument in which images commented upon images, inscribing itself in a tradition that traces back to Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin's work in the 1920s. In 2006, Claude Closky invited Leguillon to put a selection of his slideshows online in the form of a video on the Luxembourg MUDAM's web magazine, which was created and directed by Closky. Accompanied by music



From top:

Crazy Horse de Paris (lobby card, 1977, Collection Pierre Leguillon, auction on eBay), 2008
Courtesy: the artist and Air de Paris, Paris
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Exhibition views of "Pierre Leguillon features: Diane Arbus: A printed retrospective, 1960-1971" at Kadist Art Foundation, Paris, 2008 - 09
Photo: Aurélien Mole

Exhibition view of "The Last Who Speaks" at Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, 2008 (Photo Aurélien Mole)

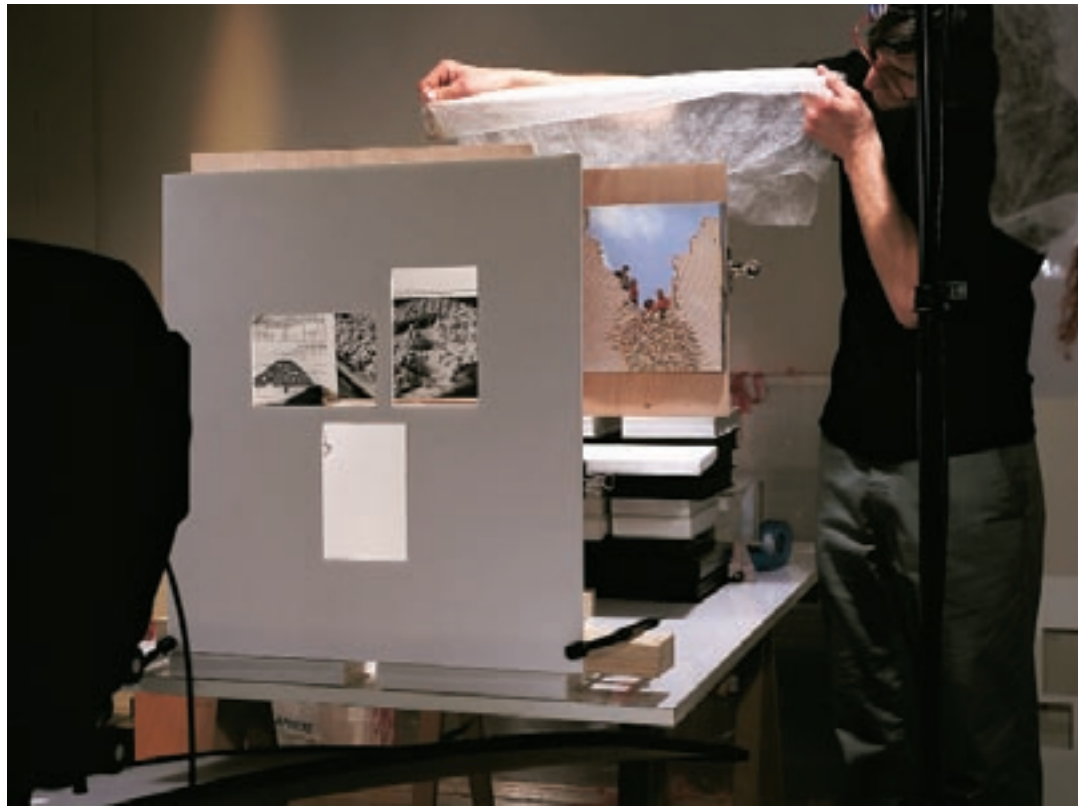


Next page:
Untitled (Madame Récamier), 1996
All images courtesy: the artist

and sound fragments, each slideshow explores the notion of montage as a writing technique, a method Benjamin described as *citations without quotes*. The exposure time of each slide imposes a very specific duration upon the viewer's perception, and the transition from one image to another allegorically evokes a chain of associative ideas that is both rational and capricious. When the slideshows are presented in the form of a public performance, the montage is created from a confluence of discrete elements, including the projected images, live music and a performance-based element. This was the case with the most recent presentation of the *Diaporama Vestiaire (Cloakroom Slideshow)* in the auditorium of the Louvre in Paris last May. The slide projection was accompanied by improvisations on Georges Aperghif's *Récitations* by the soprano Donatienne Michel-Dansac. In the middle of the presentation, the contents of the cloakroom—that is, the spectator's coats—were exhibited under the projection screen in a gesture that revealed both the public and intimate character of the slideshow. "I thought with parentheses void of words." (Marcel Broodthaers, *Correspondance*) Since his first exhibitions in the 1990s, Leguillon's exhibition projects have never ceased to illustrate his preoccupations: they seek to evince the profound formal economy of contemporary icons and the intimacy of images, portraying them in a space full of tensions and abstract effects wherein Leguillon strives to establish an intimacy of his own. In 2006, he organized the exhibition "CNEAI=Pierre Leguillon, Cherchez l'auteur" at the Centre National de l'Estampe et de l'Art Imprimé (CNEAI). The exhibition displayed numerous images that Leguillon has collected since the beginning of his career (promotional postcards, posters and lobby cards from films, engravings and vintage prints), as well as digital prints of original photographs. Most of the images depict exhibition spaces in the broadest sense of the term: museums, private homes, parks and gardens,

and books. They were generally accompanied by a caption or by the expression *nous regardons* (we observe), which appeared regularly like a running motif. One work, for example, bore the legend, *One summer day 2003, at the Union Centrale library des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, we observe a "lecturer, around 1905" in album 21 from the series 330: Professions*. These micro-texts function like subtitles narrated in an indirect style, evoking a fiction greater than what could be recounted in the first person. Vis-à-vis the competition of authors (i.e., of he who signs the represented work, he who takes the picture, or finally he who publishes the image), the idea of the author disappears and cedes its place to the mediator who allows us to see the image.

Leguillon thus formulated an invitation, not without a certain narcissistic affectation, to read and inhabit his life as an iconophile. His idea of the museum as a space of fiction and an arbitrary system of signs has a clear link to the *Musée d'art moderne, Département des aigles*, founded by Marcel Broodthaers in 1968. The abundance of signage, the interest in technologies of reproduction and the products derived therein, as well as in the distribution of these reproductions, are several themes that Leguillon's collection takes up and renews. Just as Broodthaers did with his *Financial Section* of the *Département des aigles*, Leguillon put a part of his collection up for auction last year on eBay under the aegis of the gallery Air de Paris, after exhibiting it at the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Champagne-Ardenne, in the context of the exhibition "Le dernier qui parle." Pierre Leguillon's most recent exhibition "Diane Arbus: Printed Retrospective 1960-1971," coproduced by the Kadist Foundation and the Centre Régional de la Photographie du Nord Pas-de-Calais, and soon to be presented during the Tirana Biennial, took as its point of departure an homage to the great American photographer in order to trace a history of the magazine as a medium, from the 1940s to the present day. Diane Arbus's printed retrospective not only brought



Untitled ("L'Archipel" with Aurélien Froment), 2003
 Next page: Untitled (exhibition view of "The Song Song
 Speechless Show", Song Song, Vienna, 2008), 2002
 Photo: Pierre Leguillon
 All images courtesy: the artist

about a significant new development in Leguillon's post-appropriationist relationship to the images he collects, but itself transgressed museum standards by presenting magazine pages as framed originals, since the images had been conceived for magazine form before Arbus ever produced them as silver gelatin prints. This conferred upon the exhibition an indeterminate documentary status, halfway between fetishism and historiography, while putting the central questions of Leguillon's practice into sharp relief: *what is an original?*

"The sandwich board man is the final incarnation of the flâneur." (Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*) The man who bears an image revolts against the ungraspable nature of memory through a process of inversion: rather than remain inwardly cherished, the memory or thought itself is projected into the public space and converted into an image. The tendency to exteriorize one's inner life reveals the impossibility of existing without exhibiting oneself; it is linked to the current epoch's disenfranchisement of subjectivity. Many of Leguillon's photographs engage the paradox of the character who looks at the world *through* an image, who uses photography like a mask or a book like a telescope.

The figure of the man-exhibition recurs in his exhibitions and slideshows, but this motif stands out especially in his performances. It reformulates the hanging and un-hanging of an exhibition as theatrical moments, partway between ritual act and ordinary gesture. Thus the un-hanging of "Cherchez l'auteur" was filmed as if it were some kind of apotheosis of a comedy, just as the hanging of Leguillon's solo show at the gallery Song Song (Vienna, November 2008) was enacted as an inaugural performance in front of the public.

These acts, derived from the projection of slides, allude to a certain inadequacy in the presentation of images, while emphasizing the forms of life that can be generated around them. The same observation was the point of departure for a project initiated in November 2007 under the title *La promesse de l'écran* (The

Promise of the Screen). A hybrid of a projection room and a speakeasy, this project is composed of a 4:3 projection screen behind which is hidden a small wine bar. Screenings, "dedicated to the peripheral aspects of cinema," begin with a projection of artist's videos selected by Leguillon, which is periodically interrupted by the rise of the screen and the festive opening of the bar. The initial editions of *La promesse de l'écran* were held in a private space in the rue de Trévise in Paris, but a franchise opened a few months later at CAPC in Bordeaux and last April, the Centre Pompidou hosted single edition sponsored by the winery Château Chasse Spleen. For the upcoming project "Un Nouveau Festival," curated by Bernard Blistène and scheduled to take place in October at the Centre Pompidou, Leguillon will design an exhibition layout inspired by Blinky Palermo's *Teatrino*, which will host works and performances by artists, designers and writers selected by the artist. Through these two formats, Pierre Leguillon seeks to engage a problematic that haunts the strategies of all image reproduction: how can reproductions represent, i.e., include, our relationship to them? In other words, how can our relationship with images be represented? Perhaps, as seen in Leguillon's work, it is necessary to modify the forms of life that take place around images, if only to better explore their inevitably peripheral character. Such are the terms of a paradox that circumscribe Leguillon's work: conceived for a fleeting appraisal, these images are nevertheless saturated with a multitude of possible meanings, through which only an arbitrary gaze can sift.

—Manuel Cirauqui is a writer and an independent curator based in Paris. He has recently curated exhibitions at the *Jeu de Paume*, and is currently developing two theoretical works, *An Inquiry on Chaos* and a cycle of lectures titled *Adieux à la dialectique*.

