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As told to T. Cole Rachel, 2002 words.

Tags: Art, Beginnings, Adversity, Inspiration, Process, Multi-tasking.



# Laure Flammarion on redefining what it means to be an artist and a curator

**When people ask, "What do you do?" what is the first thing that you normally tell them?**

I usually feel bad because I don't know what to answer. In France people like to put you in a box and they want you to stay in that box. When you say that you do many different things they immediately think that means that you don't do anything well. That's really, really a French thing. When I used to live in the U.S. it was very different and I really enjoyed it, because if I said that I was doing five different projects people were immediately super enthusiastic about it. It felt really good because for years I was suffering in France where people were like, "Either you are a filmmaker or you are a producer or you are a curator, but you can not do both. You need to choose."

Especially in the French artistic institutions, you need to decide which medium is your medium. You cannot be a painter and also take pictures, it is one or the other. More and more people are enjoying the freedom to use different mediums, but people still try to put you in a box. So when people ask me I'm always a bit uncomfortable and I say I'm a filmmaker and a creator.



from the shoot for *Somewhere to disappear*, photo by Arnaud Uyttenhove

**The concept for Honoré Visconti is interesting—an artistic "label" that isn't necessarily a gallery or a publishing imprint, but can be any of those things. There is a lot of freedom in being able to take on and promote work that isn't bound to any one form.**

The same way people want to put other people in boxes, it is the same thing with a label. People are always asking what exactly we are. We are not a gallery, so we are not representing others. I don't have contracts with any artists. I enjoy talking about them as much as I can all the time, but I don't want the responsibility of representing anyone and I don't want to be stuck in one same place all the time. I had the idea years ago when I used to live in New York and I had a good friend who was doing these little

shows in galleries and spaces that were in between other shows or in spaces that were temporarily empty. Say there was nothing going on in the space for three weeks or so, and so the space was open just for this very limited period of time. My friend would do these very fast shows with a lot of energy that were super cool and it was an interesting way to make use of the gallery spaces when they had gaps in their programming.



stills from my new project, *The Art Collectors*- a series of art collectors portraits

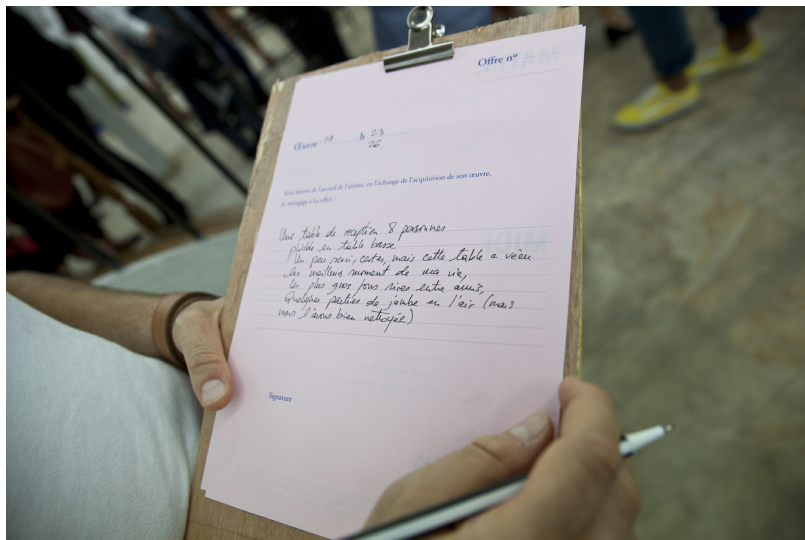
So, say a gallery has two weeks where there is nothing happening and they aren't really using the space-no show is up, nothing is being installed. I don't pay them anything, but if I sell something I give them a part of the sale. That way they cannot lose money, the only thing they can do is make money. It won't cost them anything, they won't spend anything. It's not even really their name on the show, it's my name, but I'm using the space. I worked with a gallery for almost two years doing little shows like this and it became a great tradition. Because of my shows, a lot of new people also came to their gallery and to see their other shows. I'd like to do shows like this in other places, but it's not always easy. The way I think about shows is not always the way a gallery thinks or a museum thinks. Sometimes this makes things super easy and sometime it makes things super difficult. Using the word "label" made sense because people would often say, "Okay, if you don't actually have your own space then you can't really be called a gallery, so what are you?" Calling Honoré Visconti a label made sense because it could mean very different things to different people, but it felt like exactly what I was doing.



Alec Soth

**It's interesting that more and more people are creating their own path outside of the established gallery systems. It's encouraging to hear that there are other viable approaches to putting on shows and selling and showing your work.**

I think we have no choice but to explore different ways to do things. When I started going to lots of galleries years ago there was so much about the gallery experience that bothered me. For one, they were never welcoming. There's always someone sitting at the door who never says hello or often refuses to even look at you. I'd go to galleries and the experience made you feel like shit. I'd leave without understanding anything I'd just seen, feeling stupid and annoyed. It didn't make sense because so many of my friends who were actually artists were these super warm people who wanted people to see and understand their work, but there was a disconnect between them and the audience. The gallery experience kind of got in the way of that happening.



Group show 'Matin, midi & soir' - Exchange offer form. Picture from Cédric Bolusset

I'm not like an advisor, but I am more like... how do you say when you put people together? A matchmaker! I'm more of a matchmaker in a way and I love when people meet each other. I love to advise people with their first artwork and help create a special relationship between the new collector and the artist. I think that there was sometimes a lack of a bridge between young people who want to meet up with artists and the artists themselves. I don't want to speak badly about all galleries—I know many super cool galleries—but they are not always good at making that connection.

This is not always their fault, though. It is so difficult to be a gallery today. They are all struggling so much to pay the rent and they need to find a way to sell the work—all that costs so much money and it's so much pressure. They don't always have time to talk to curious people that are not collectors but could possibly become collectors. When we do a show I always say that when somebody arrives, you *always* say hello. And then if they feel like they want to talk, you talk with them...and if they don't want to talk, you don't have to. But you say hello and people need to feel like they are really welcome.



Group show 'Les adoptés' - artwork from Thierry Struvay. Picture from Grégoire Eloy

**I first knew of you because I'd seen a film you made about the musician Gonzalez. Is making these short films a way to figure out how you feel about something? What motivates your filmmaking practice?**

It's a funny thing. Right now I'm struggling because I really want to continue this series about art collectors and I cannot find money for it at all. People are very enthusiastic about the project but nobody wants to give any money for it. That has been an issue for years for me. People are always enthusiastic about your idea, but when it's about raising the funds you need, it's really difficult. At the end of the day there is never enough money, but I keep doing it. I just have a very strong respect and curiosity about artists and people, so that's always the beginning for every project I do. A lot of times I'm not really asking myself a lot of questions about why I'm doing it, there is just this need to do so.

I just sort or jump into this projects without questioning it too much and suddenly you realize, "Oh, I'm doing this now" and sometimes it's really difficult. You never have money, it takes a lot of time and energy, and you are often asking yourself, "Why am I here?" The only answer, at least for me, is because I want it. You don't always understand what you're actually learning while you're in the process of doing it—that is something you might not understand until years later. It may sound a bit stupid, but it can take me years to understand and realize what I learned from the experience. I'm so much into the process of making it and I'm struggling so much at the time, so I don't have much time to think about myself. My only goal is to make it happen, finishing the movie, finding the money to produce it.





stills from my new project, *The Art Collectors* a series of art collectors portraits

When it's over, I take one year recover and then I realize what I learned about myself, what I've been through but each time while I was shooting I was just focused on the artist. I'm a bit older now, so maybe today I would shoot differently. When you're young, you don't protect yourself. You just jump in. I just put a 100% of myself in each project and I would not think about me. I would just be obsessed with my subject and my project.

**That's a valuable skill to learn as you get older-how to balance throwing yourself wildly into projects but also knowing how to protect yourself and not totally burn out. When you're younger it doesn't matter so much. When you're older, it does.**

Yes, but at the same time I think that if you protect yourself too much, you don't do anything. You don't learn anything. You don't risk anything. Making movies about artists is a no money thing and it takes time and it takes energy, it's always a lot of dealing with stress and it's exhausting. If you really want to protect yourself, you just run away the opposite direction, you know? I think there's it's a good balance to try and find, but it's not easy.



Group show 'Matin, midi & soir'- opening. Picture from Cédric Bolusset

Essential Laure Flammarion:

Matin, midi et soir / show

Somewhere to disappear / film

*The Art Collectors* / film

*In the Corner* / film

Les Adoptés / Show

Laure Flammarion recommends:

Bad news: Contrary to what one may believe in difficult times: it is not easier for others, everyone struggles!

Good news: It's very naive but I remain convinced that the work makes the difference. Work is time. It's like wine, the best wines request time!

Nobody is unattainable. When you really want to work with someone, ALWAYS find a way to tell them. You might end up working with your hero !

Stay curious. We are all super short of time but we have to continue to see exhibitions, look at books and movies and more than anything : meet people. When you lack inspiration go back to basic, an exhibition (by Sophie Calle) , a stop in a good bookstores (Ampersand or Yvon Lambert), museums like Le Bal in Paris or the Met in NYC will always give you some fresh air.

When you have an idea or a desire: do not hesitate forever, make it happen. It's horrible to be faced with your own idea carried by someone else because you let it go. THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE MAKERS.

Name

Laure Flammarion

Vocation

Filmmaker, Curator, Writer

Fact



Manfredi Gioacchini

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