

**Xavier VEILHAN**

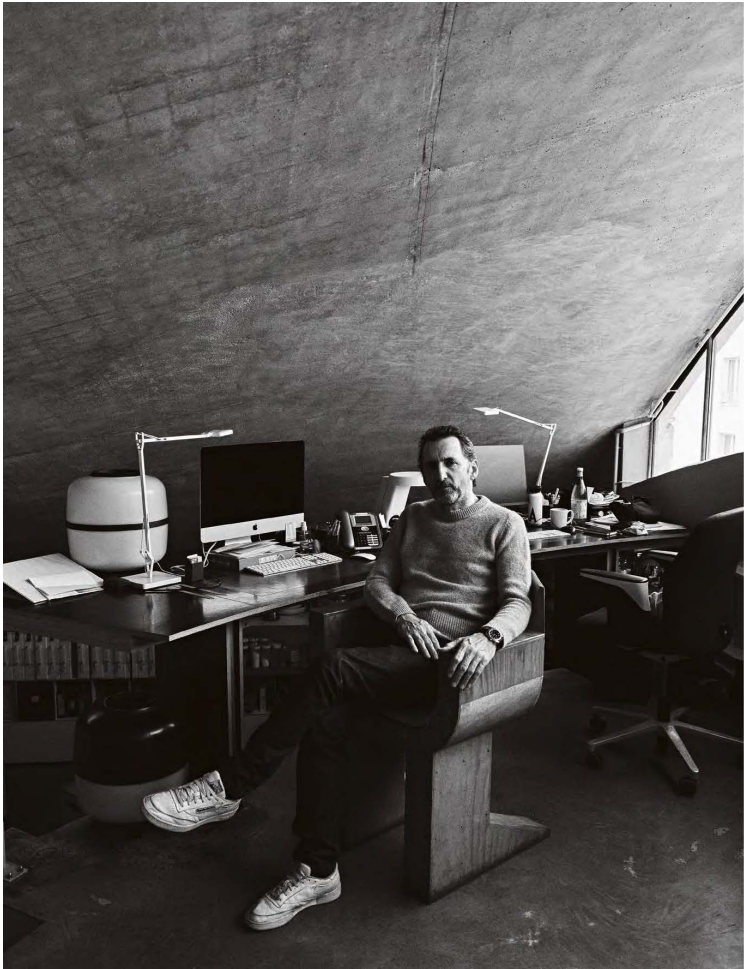
*Shadowplay,*  
*The Eternal Daisy*

*June 2023*

# Xavier

Veilhan

Photography by JORRE JANSSENS



Xavier Veilhan

# The Eternal Daisy

Paris, March 2023 Interview by HANNA PALLOT Photography by JORIE JANSSENS



The studio of Xavier Veilhan takes place under the concrete vaults of a former warehouse rehabilitated by the French architectural duo Bone & Lemerrier; a space at once modest and grandiose which, in fact, reflects the way the artist thinks, creates and shares. We spent an afternoon together talking about his experiences and inspirations, the evolution of his work in view of that of our society while discovering ongoing works, books, prototypes, plans and other objects that create the effervescence of his studio. Throughout our talk, it appeared clearly that Xavier's thinking, culture and creating process are as generous and big as the works he's been making for several years now. Since his beginnings in the 80s, the French artist has multiplied mediums, forms and scales to create both visual and spatial works that have probably crossed your path. From the monochrome sculptures in public squares, modules with variable sizes in museums, the last Chanel Couture shows runway to his new solo show at galerie Perrotin, Xavier Veilhan continues to invest many environments and sees his practice as a daisy, taking multiple paths to return to the same central heart, forever questioning the way we see and feel.

**How has your relationship to art evolved since the beginning of your career?**

I feel much more modest today, both about art and about being an artist. I think what is more important as I get older is humility, especially in relation to the blindness we regularly experience, individually and collectively. All in all, what interests me the most in art are the things that cannot be seen. Even though language and communication are the basis of the functioning within my studio and with the people I work with, what I do is a way to escape from the words and the chronological development of a thought. I'm interested in creating images that short-circuit our linear ways of reading and thinking. One of the strengths of art is to generate a certain form of freedom. Even if the work is finished, everything around it continues to evolve.

**Movement and temporality are very present in your work. How do you consider these two notions?**

For me, movement is the basis of everything, and stopping is the exception. Time is a concept that everyone tries to deal with. Art is both the place where we can deal with the abstraction of this concept and where it can totally escape us. Nobody can really define what the present is for instance. The experience of artists sometimes to be in a situation of present for even just a second and to be able to identify it as such. Art generates passages and tipping points, especially visual arts that can help to identify a before and after.

**Is this the effect you try to achieve?**

I try to make works that are visible in a quarter of a second, a bit like a visual big bang. The most interesting thing is the echo that comes from it. More specifically, the objects and sculptures intended to be in a public space are designed to interact with a world around them, but that world sometimes doesn't recognize them. That's also what interests me, to appear like the bus shelter or the lamp post and let the object be welcomed and interpreted in a way that I don't control.

**You have invested many spaces, both indoor and outdoor, public and private, and more recently a fashion runway in collaboration with Chanel. What does this configuration bring to your practice?**

Collaborating with brands allows to set new situations of production and perception. I worked with Chanel in order to create the scenography for their three last Couture shows. Combining the specificities of an Haute Couture House and an artist can lead to an exploration of new exhibition forms. So, I put my work at the service of a clothing collection in a rather incredible context where there are almost no limits of means. At the same time, we discussed a lot with Virginie Viard about this debauchery of means and what defines luxury today in view of the ecological reality. I think it's time for the fashion industry to face environmental issues.

**Do you think it's possible to bring an ecological dimension in such ephemeral projects as fashion shows?**

Well, Virginie Viard is a very straightforward and consistent person. This consistency is important for a good development, whatever the field, especially regarding environmental issues that cannot be solved in one month. Virginie wanted to establish this consistency by working with an artist over several seasons. This way, we made sure to reuse some objects produced for the first show in the following settings, to remove some elements like carpet on the floor, to use floor and unpainted materials, to rent some of the equipment like bleachers and lights. The idea was to initiate a process of anticipation and recycling. All this may seem insignificant, but still we started to move on from the usual codes of Haute Couture shows and the perpetuated image of luxury. We are meanwhile far from a so-called ecological project, but we question the limits of what we produce.

**Is there a greater ecological awareness in the art world than there is in the fashion industry?**

Not necessarily. There are plenty of artists who don't want to change their way of producing or the materials they use precisely because they are artists and see themselves as exceptions. This is no longer an argument, and personally I don't consider myself as an exception. I have changed my attitude towards all this thanks to my children, both in the fact of looking for alternative ways of production and going to Venice by train. All of this obviously changes our relationship with matter, time and movement.

**Have you seen a lot of changes regarding manufacturing techniques?**

The first massive change is the digital, and I think it's much more important than what we perceive in real time. The second one is the materials. Technological progresses make possible to do things that were impossible but there is a real lack of standards to supervise the production methods, in the wood sector as well as in the food industry. It's pretty hopeless. There must be quality and control in the way things are set up. I am almost 60 years old and I was already told about environmental issues when I was at school. These issues are certainly not new, it's just that no one is really addressing them.

**I guess it also brings new constraints.**

Of course, and it can be problematic especially with regard to materials both cause some don't have any equivalent. But we try to find new ways of doing and sometimes, we miraculously find solutions that bring new possibilities. Most of the time, constraints close doors, but when they open one, it's all the more interesting.

**What do you present in your current exhibition at galerie Perrotin?**

A part of the exhibition are new marquee pieces. These pieces are restitutions of photographs of faceted sculptures that I created several years ago. The elements that make the overall image are triangular shapes, each painted in one of the original color shades, assembled together like a puzzle. These pieces are both images intended to restore something and pure objects with a technical and aesthetic quality. I'm really interested in this tension between the perception device and the object as such.

**What does this installation say about the current state of your work?**

To prepare the exhibition, we projected images of the works on the walls and the floor, then I realized that I was trying to create a specific atmosphere. The more time goes by, the more I am interested in ambiances and contexts, in what appeals to emotions and simultaneously in down-to-earth notions such as the weight of a piece of art. Our relationship to an object can change according to whether we know that it is full or hollow. It's interesting to see how these very formal notions can influence the general atmosphere that will be generated.

**We come back to the modes of perception that you have always questioned.**

Some of the works you present today are actually new images of objects you made before, again to propose new ways of seeing. It feels a bit like a leap, doesn't it?

I rather call it the delay. There is a central heart surrounded by many petals which are the image of the journeys we make. We feel like going very far but we always come back to the same central point in the end. The notions that have always interested me, the scale, the presence of the body in space, our relationship to movement, to science, to music, are permanent and persistent.

**Are there any images left to create, or is the daisy complet?**

I believe that technology will continue to create new possibilities. There are advances that are actually very important, like geolocation. The extent of what it allows is impressive, in terms of control too. Technology brings new ways of creating and conceptualizing, but also very political questions.

**Art can also be political.**

Sure. The first question related to art is who has access to it. For example, the concept of galleries is to be able to enter them for free, but that doesn't necessarily make art accessible. I think there is such a conditioning in our society that people who live by the sea never go to the beach, in the same way that many people don't take advantage of things even when they are free. Our society is a failure in matter of access to culture and knowledge.

**Do you want your art to be accessible to everyone?**

I don't think the art I make has this ability. I can create situations where an object is going to be tolerated by its environment, but I don't decide how that graft is going to work. There are actually many reasons for it to fail and few for it to work. I find very beautiful the desire for objects and the value we can put into them, like people collecting stamps or other things. It could provoke the same intensity between the object's creator and the audience that some people feel towards what they collect, it would be wonderful. The physical effect that happens in our relationship to objects, to architecture, to music... that's what I keep looking for.

*The solo exhibition Portrait Mode by Xavier Veilhan is currently on view at galerie Perrotin Paris until July 29, 2023.*

















