

## Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros, a duty towards imagination upheld

by Guy Tortosa

The first time I saw one of Jakob Gautel's artworks was on the platform of a Parisian subway. I had noticed how for some time already the traditional benches on which the "down-and-outs" could just about stretch out had been replaced by seats which had been especially designed so that no one could lie down on them anymore. On that particular day, these seats, which were of thermally moulded plastic, and which lent a perfect orange-coloured perspective to the scene, were all empty - not a single traveler had dreamt of sitting down on one. For in the middle of each chair, a sticker was posted saying: "Reserved for the homeless".

Several days later, the RATP employees in charge of cleaning were given orders to get rid of these labels which were so well printed that, at first, they had thought they were in fact a new rule.

I discovered Jason Karaïndros' work a little later when I saw a video in which one could see the young Greek artist fighting with a camera which was trying to register the image of his face. To protect himself, Jason Karaïndros was holding his right arm out in the direction of the lens and putting his index finger up in front of it so that he could try and hide behind it - a fragile form of protection. The result of this silent experiment, of this infernal dance punctuated with numerous jolts, was an impression of an exhausting task conjuring up images of Sisyphus' agony. The film seemed to be dedicated to *stars* hassled by the *paparazzi* as well as to viewers being pursued by cinematographic or televisual *marketing* products.

Later on I got to know Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros' joint artwork in the form of the portable version of their "Angel Detector". It is a small instrument composed of a wooden pedestal dissimulating an electronic device which is sensitive to the slightest sound, a small lightbulb attached to the device itself, and a glass bell surrounding the bulb for protection. When all is silent around the "detector", and it is plugged in, the filament of the bulb begins to shine, and continues to do so until a noise, even one that is tenuous, breaks the silence and leads to the extinction of the frail luminous breath. This marvelous object, the use of which is recommended in the winter, the season most favourable for the presence of angels, heralds a "monumental" version, which Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros would like to install one day in a square to replace a fountain or a statue...

Jakob Gautel, who is German, and Jason Karaïndros, who is Greek, belong to a community of artists who, despite the prevailing economic precariousness, or should one rather say "because of it", have chosen to work in the public arena, in drafty spaces, and at a respectful distance from those places specially prepared to receive them... In their hands, poverty is richness, it represents a choice, it's the expression of a form of solidarity and of a generous interpretation of the world. Their artworks are ecological because they are made of so little and take up very little space, a space in which the spirit and dreams constitute the actual expanse. I particularly appreciate the fact that their works don't wait "to take form" as a result of administrative authorization or public commissions. One is fully aware that if they had chosen to wait, then Yves Klein or Felix Gonzalez-Torres would no doubt have had to wait until their deaths without ever having been able to produce their projects for illuminating the Obelisk at the Place de la Concorde for one, and for the Boulevard Raspail project for the other. I do appreciate, however, that Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros' artworks betray a great force, despite their fragile appearance. In such a way, and without advertising's characteristic spirit for conquering, they participate fully in the democratic public sphere. Of the rest, of Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros' gestures, inventions, little bits of paper or lights, they are over-included into the public space, they are an integral part of this space, at the very least they are part of the elements which are diverted from it. I remember one of their recent works, produced in Ireland in 1996 for an exhibition of public art in which I had asked them to participate. Jakob Gautel and Jason Karaïndros had noticed the instructions painted in great white lettering on the edge of the roads, which were meant to alert pedestrians of the danger

related to the change of direction (for us Continentals) of car traffic. They decided to add to the traditional formulas ("LOOK LEFT" or "LOOK RIGHT"), with some instructions of their own. As such, pedestrians at a bus stop could read "WHAT'S LEFT?" or "WHAT'S RIGHT?". At the start of a pedestrian crossing, they wrote "NEVER LOOK BACK", and further on: "LOOK UP". Along with the succession of illuminated fairy lights along the main street by the American artist Felix Gonzalez-Torres, it was the most "natural" intervention in the exhibition. The confusion was such between the artwork and life, that one began to doubt the necessity of the first. And yet, something like the wings of a human angel, well-meaning and mischievous, were beating over the town. Art was no longer something that had been added to the city, it was rather the extension of it, the emanation. The artwork was the expression of a duty towards imagination upheld.

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Translation : Carmela Uranga