

ART & DEAL

ISSUE.141 VOL.16 NO.108 JUNE 2020

₹150 \$38 €30 £28

THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

An interview with
LIONEL ESTÈVE - RAJESH PUNJ

MAJULI:
THE LAND OF BAMBOO - NITYA BALI



BASU CHATTERJEE –
the doyen of middle-of-the-road cinema
- SHANKU SHARMA

PLASTIC POLLUTION

- RAAJADHARSHINI K.K



THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

An interview with
LIONEL ESTÈVE

- RAJESH PUNJ

There is a light-heartedness about Brussels based artist Lionel Estève that permeates his work as a lightness of touch. Seeing the things we leave to the litter as part and parcel of his colour field container canvases and rock sculptures. In the acclaimed novel by Indian author Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, she explains detritus as the details that dissolve into our lives. Citing in one passage 'what came for them, not death, just the end of living.' As with life, so the infinitesimal elements that fill Estève's container canvases appear as though a thousand ideas laid to rest. That for their reinvention reflects on an absence of optimism for what was intended of these kitsch keepsakes. For Estève the initial choice and changing of an object into art, art as the incarceration of ready-mades as relics, involves amusement park-like colours that initially mesmerise one's mind, before becoming more melancholic, for the cutting short of their utilitarian lives. And as if magnetically drawn together by the artist's hand, the array of paper markers and plastic necklace beads are piled high, cascading over one another, are testament to a generation's lost love.

"I would like these latest works to be perceived as a simple gesture, that of pouring materials into the bottom of a frame. The result, this sunken material, can be approached in two contradictory ways: either as a collapse or an elevation, either as a fall or as an accumulation."

Estève his own words sees his works as much connected, for the way he goes about making them, as they appear contradictory, for what we see in them. Saying of his wall works "I would like these latest works to be perceived as a simple gesture, that of pouring materials into the bottom of a frame. The result, this sunken material, can be approached in two contradictory ways: either as a collapse or an elevation, either as a fall or as an accumulation." And within that duality, Estève like Roy, for her referring to the end as neither life nor death but a point of reinvention, prolongs Estève's objects of their utilitarian worth. The measure of his *Chemical Landscapes*, beyond what is visible, is of the artist's preoccupation with the works transformative potential. As his container canvases, filled with broken glass and brilliantly coloured foam,

< Lionel Estève
Portrait of the artist
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin



appear capable of moving within the frame, if taken off the wall and violently shaken - of the contents bursting into life, as the atom-like elements make contact and collide with one another. Which is what Estève wants of our riotous imaginations - to invite them to potentially act. Yet such a reaction isn't available to us in a gallery-like setting, so the static configuration of colours and content take on a decorative, almost delicious quality, that is as much to do with the intrinsic beauty of the objects, as it is about our appreciating them of their new context, and of their suddenly becoming unavailable to us. Window-shopping into a world of bric-à-brac, that as attractive as they might appear, have gone unnoticed, invisible, within the contents of our lives.

And with the Flowers on Rock series, Estève explains how the stones are entirely random, found and physically transferred to his studio, to create something of them. That he then transforms from fossils into a form reminiscent of brightly coloured coral. From which sprout these antennae, that themselves resemble the smallest of flowers, climbing up from the rock as if nourished by the prize pearls. And as with everything Estève appears to enjoy creating collages, assemblages that read like reminders of earth's incredible fragility. As he says himself, 'the energy of everything comes from the atmosphere of the earth.'

Estève is an artist who thinks in the moment and

“these elements, these pearls, these precariously balanced materials, are for me more like sculptures rather than images, since the key here is mainly the law of gravity.”

^ Lionel Estève
View of the exhibition "Narcisse", Perrotin Seoul
January 24 - March 10, 2018
© Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin

allows the everyday that surrounds him to decide his ideas into artworks, as acts of rewarding alchemy. As is the transformative attitude that the artist applies to everything he collects, he talks in terms of becoming acquainted with his finds. Seeing them settled in his studio, enough to envision them as something else. Colours, materials, textures and their multiple tensions, become instrumental in his turning the every day into the extraordinary. Deposited in such a way as to create visual momentum of something entirely still, and in so doing the artist not only sees a visual vocabulary for these element objects, but also a velocity of forms that could have everything turn on its head - that everything can become easily animated, and the image has the potential to advance beyond its static self. As he creatively and quite convincingly explains, that "these elements, these pearls, these precariously balanced materials, are for me more like sculptures rather than images, since the key here is mainly the law of gravity."

Estève will his works to want to transform, confining their contents into an enclosed space, poised by the potential of motion - and the evolution of his objects as involving different and very distinct states. As he explains, "what is shown seems to be accidental, temporary, unstable, open to revision if the work is moved. Strangely, a work of art has become an object in motion. These constructions question the definition of a work of art as something permanent, controlled, chosen." As a more robust way of looking, Estève appears intent on challenging what we see and of how we experience it that dares to defy the distance between the individual and the external world. The idea that instead of believing everything as fact, what we have is a single perspective, of multiple views and visions of the world. Which for its shifting view evokes something of the early intention of Cubism, as coined by the French novelist and critic Guillaume Apollinaire in the 1910's. Who explains the idea of seeing everything simultaneously, as "the art of depicting new wholes with formal elements, borrowing not only from the reality of vision, but that of conception." That idea of experiencing the object in the round, grounded whilst under the influence of gravity, is where Estève works transform from objects into art.

Interview

Rajesh Punj: Can we begin by your giving me an overview of the exhibition in Paris?

Lionel Estève: I didn't think of the show as having an opening and endpoint, but when you enter into the gallery, you see the works as they are. But it has changed from the original layout because from the beginning I had planned the exhibition in a very different way, and we were not entirely sure of it so we changed it. But from the start, it was, how to say, same size, same room.

RP: I assume you worked with a maquette, to begin with, as many artists do, to determine the layout as you saw fit.

LE: No I never work with a maquette. I realised they could go like this. Maybe I attempted two exhibitions in my life without visiting the space. One was in Hong Kong at Emmanuel's gallery, for which I was given two rooms, and there I created a maquette, and as soon as I arrived at the gallery, what was on the right side I moved over to the left, and the leftover to the right. It was the first thing I did because it wasn't as I wanted it, and with that, I realised not to work in that way again.

RP: Obviously when you are in the space everything becomes about where you are, the light, the atmosphere, the height of the ceiling, the depth of the doorways, the proximity of the door to the centre of the room. Such things can only come from standing in a room and having one's work placed within the space. Size can change according to context as well.

LE: Yes, yes, it is very difficult..., well you know you can't expect something theoretical, you go and see if it is working or not.

RP: Is there an aesthetic or 'branding' of how you display the works?

LE: To begin with I thought in terms of size, as I said, that this room would be one size of work, and another, another size. For example, we knew what was expected of a room, the same size works, very simple, with the image in the middle, and for nothing to have greater attention or a room have a specific meaning. In that everybody can do it, and understand it.

RP: The works are incredibly decorative in that sense.

LE: In a way, they are just disappearing.

RP: How do you explain these container canvases for example? When you look at them, and into them, they initially have the appearance of a painting, of a representation of forms, but they are an accumulation of objects, specks of dust and details that we know from the corner of a room, or the bottom of a drawer.

LE: I think, and I believe I am a sculptor, and that these are sculptures.

RP: For their mass and materiality?

LE: I am not a painter; I have never painted a canvas in my life. Crucially I use paint but I am not a painter, and for me, the gesture of these works are derivative of a sculptor, and not a painter. Because there is more than one way of approaching these works, and there are different angles to how we should see them, including their meaning. They also say something about art history. The frame, the outer edge of the



work, is in many ways like a recipient. And for me to fill it, to introduce an alien element, I had never seen that way of working before. It exists with bottles of sand in popular craft, but to put or pour something into a museum-like frame wasn't something that I was aware of, or visible in the art world. So this is not because of that, but when you are doing something at a certain point you think you are doing something that has already been done. And you might tell me you are doing the same kind of work as..., and I can recall asking a friend 'does this way of working remind you of somebody else working in this way?' But no one has yet to tell me, 'yes, it is the same as a guy you did it in (19)65, and I am sure it will happen. But you know when I started to work as an artist I wanted my work to have a distance from me. I didn't want my ego to interfere with what I was doing. So what I fear or fight for shouldn't be present in the work. I want that they exist in and of themselves, for their material worth.

RP: An autonomous object.

LE: Also close to the meaning and the poetry of it, as an object.

RP: To remove one's emotional self.

LE: I wanted the work to be independent of me, and not easily related to reality, and I was entirely happy with that for many years, and I think, how to say, it was 'comfortable'. Because I didn't wish to pretend I was a clever guy. I didn't want to be seen as an intellectual. I don't wish for a political meaning. So the works as they were were very reassuring. Then a few years ago I was invited to do a show, and I imagined I would be

away for a long time because I had no other big shows to do, only smaller commitments.

And I can remember the director invited me to a huge space in Liège, of almost eight hundred square metres, ten metres high, no walls, just one room; incredibly beautiful - a very old space from 1920's. Usually, artists use the La Comète space, but I had decided finally I could make something for the whole space, an installation as a major work. And with the idea that the show had to be big, I considered having to go to Kinshasa (Congo), Los Angeles, New York, Rome, and Liège, six months after, and I thought 'fuck' I don't want to stay in Europe because of Liège, I want to go to LA, and New York, and so I mentally prepared myself. And when I started to work from the beginning I wanted to make very small sculptures that could fit in my pocket almost. So instead of taking on the space, and intentionally creating big works, on the contrary, I wanted much smaller works coming down from the ceiling, of works that I could easily carry with me, of a show of the things that surround me there. I started with that idea, and it was fine, to begin with, but unfortunately, there was the bomb attack in Brussels, and my family was in Brussels, and being away I was incredibly worried for them. I saw it as an incredibly sad moment because all of the individuals involved were one hundred, two hundred metres from my home, which made it an incredibly difficult moment, for my community and me.

Initially, it didn't affect my work. I went to Rome from the US, and the generation that I was at art school with were encouraged to draw from life, and I tried to avoid that because if you were different, or



^ Lionel Estève
 Untitled (Mirror), 2016
 Porcelain, colored underglaze, crystallizations, platinum
 70 x 70 cm / 27 9/16 x 27 9/16 inches
 © Estève / ADAGP, Paris 2017
 Photo : Clair Dorn / Courtesy Perrotin

< Lionel Estève
 View of the exhibition "Narcisse", Perrotin Seoul
 January 24 - March 10, 2018
 © Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin

attempted to do something different, you were not going to draw as they wished, so I never learned to master life drawing. But of course in Rome and you see all of those iconic torsos and broken busts, and from that, I wanted to try something in clay, which had me make a series of drawings etc, which were intended for the exhibition in Liège. And I was aware to make so many human figures from the original busts, created a crowd.

RP: The crowd of your community.

LE: The title of the show was La Poussière de la Ville, or Dust from the City, so all of those figures created a crowd, and of course, I realised that it reflected or represented the community or crowd in Brussels, of all the people there at the time of the attack. Which had me think of the city in a very different way, and

I realised for the first time the work was related to me directly, and to something I was consumed with at that time.

RP: *Your ego had entered the work.*

LE: And so I realised 'wow,' this is something new for me. I had never expected to bring my life into my work. Well, I am changing; I am reacting, why not? And for one month I was working in this way, whilst also working with landscape and miniature objects. Like, everybody, I am worried about the environment, of the landscape and sustainability, and nature. So I thought to use those concerns and considerations not to give everyone a lesson on how to live well, but to employ those interests in a way to create works that encourage a kind of pleasure. And those works, if I think about it, are very related to our time.

RP: *And those works intended for Liège sound more sculptural. How then did you arrive at this moment, with these works in Paris that are more to the wall, and closer in appearance to a painting?*

LE: That is something that happens because I frame many of my works, and a sculpture can be five millimetres but still be three-dimensional. Many of my works are set within a frame, but that doesn't make them paintings, for their being inside or against a frame. It is an important point. It is all related to space.

RP: *When I look at your work and have seen images of them, you created these 'container canvases', sculptures and floor pieces, and what is interesting of these container works, is that I am committed to the idea of them as paintings, purely for their dimensions, and direction of vision, flat to the wall and looking outward, as we would experience a painting. Crucially painting, unless it is abstract, creates an illusion of space that takes the audience temporarily into an alternative realm. Beyond that what I realise of your work is that what you do, is that you use the physical space of the frame, between the back panel and glass or perspex front, and you fill that space, as a way to affirm if you like, that illusions are based on the physical. Which becomes the material and measure of your work. And then that you carefully control how the physical contents of the fallout of these minute elements are arranged, which is clearly to do with the aesthetic or visual intervention that you want to happen within the work.*

LE: The thing that is happening, and let's refer to the contents as an image, for the sake of argument, I want that the audience sees it as an accident because for me a landscape is an accident. Each of them could appear differently, but as well there are many actions and accidents that are uncontrolled, that have us arrive at this visual moment. And I want that the viewer sees the works and considers that everything that has happened within the frame is entirely random.

“what is shown seems to be accidental, temporary, unstable, open to revision if the work is moved. Strangely, a work of art has become an object in motion. These constructions question the definition of a work of art as something permanent, controlled, chosen.”

> Lionel Estève
Untitled (Mirror), 2016 (detail)
Porcelain, colored underglaze, crystallizations, platinum h.
70x 70 cm / 27 9/16 x 27 9/16 inches
© Youngha Cho / Courtesy Perrotin





RP: Like the contents of an empty drawer, that has for its history, traces of things from before.

LE: They are this way, but as I said, they could appear completely different. I want that for the audience the image and contents are temporary.

RP: Ephemeral.

LE: If you take it from the frame you can imagine everything spilling out onto the floor, like an accident, when in fact everything is fixed. Fundamentally I create a solid structure that I then place within the frame. But I like that we think as a child that if we turn the frame slightly the contents would move with gravity.

RP: So how do you physically go about creating one of these 'chemical landscapes', as you have titled them?

LE: What I want is that the audience imagines each of them in a certain way, so when you look at them that is everything you understand of them - of their fragility and state of flux. When in fact they are not like that at all. The contents are one block, and to

^ Lionel Estève
Chemical Landscape from another planet, 2018
 Foam, ink, acrylic, stones, glue, wooden frame
 125 x 155 x 5 cm / 49 3/16 x 61 1/16 x 1 15/16 inches
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève
 View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.
 Photo: Claire Dorn
 © Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

arrive at that first of all I create a cast to make the block, and then when it becomes solid, I will carefully put it into the frame.

RP: So, in fact, there is 'one' congealed object within a frame, and not multiple objects, that appear thrown in to create these brilliant and very beautiful configurations of form. What we see is constructed to give the illusion of randomness at the roll of the dice. Because we imagine, as you would wish, each of them to have millions of elements that you have painstakingly collected and choreographed into these volumed artefacts.

LE: Each work consists of a constructed 'plate', which is how I work. Of collecting everything together and casting it as a solid object. It is very strange because when I am in the studio creating a plate, it can initially appear to look like something, referring to something real, but when we take the solid plate to the framer, and as soon as we frame it, there is the feeling of 'oh yes', that it makes sense. The frame creates the weight the plate needs and also gives the plate context. Telling us something about the contents, and delivering a kind of story, its own story.

RP: So do you see them as abstract involving reality, for your choice of objects?

LE: Involving reality, no. I see them as one gesture.

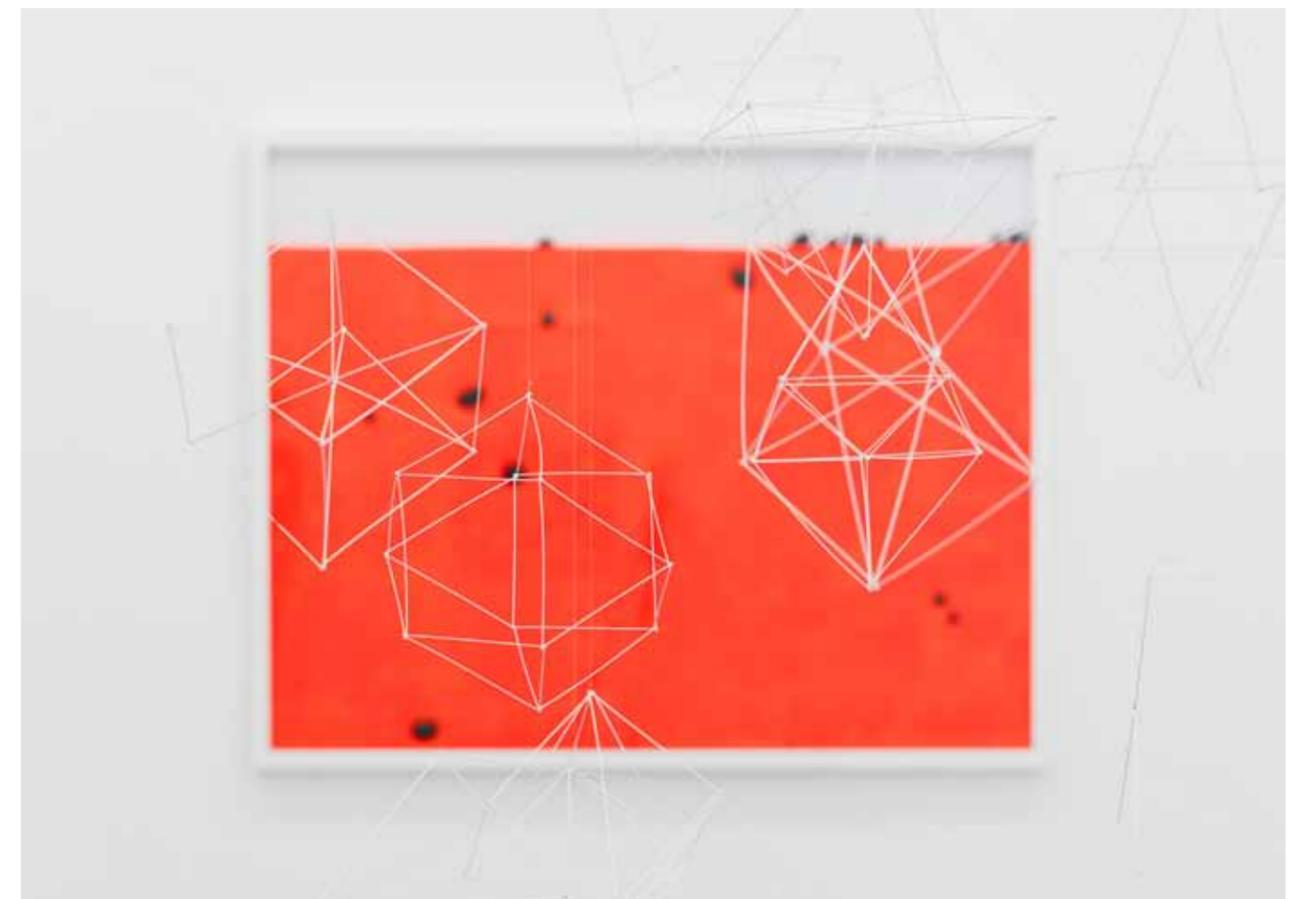
It is something I want that the audience understands the fact that okay everything becomes something else.

RP: And I want to understand better your choice of objects? Why you have selected the elements you have? Was it something intentional, or entirely involuntary, like 'dust' details as you talked of with your time in Liège? Are you constantly collecting and knowing what makes for a good artwork?

LE: I am always working with what I have around me. So the last show I did here at Galerie Perrotin, the purpose of the exhibition was to examine what would happen if I moved my studio from the city to the countryside? What could I do there? And so I did it, and that became the basis of the show, of working with and within the environment I am in. So for that show, I was back in town, and I already knew the gestures I wanted to make and to begin with. I thought of 'what I could take?' so to begin I took what I had in my studio, and then objects to me.

RP: In front of us now, this work *Chemical Landscape from Rio de Janeiro 2018*, appears like birthday confetti.

LE: Yes, birthday or a carnival. At the time of my making the work, it was the Belgian carnival. Another work was based on recycling what was in my studio.





^ Lionel Estève
 Chemical Landscape from the North, 2018
 Various papers, epoxy, wooden frame
 82 x 62 x 5 cm / 32 ⁵/₁₆ x 24 ⁷/₁₆ x 1 ¹⁵/₁₆ inches
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

Not just recycling, but of introducing things I had bought. Then another piece, Chemical Landscape from Siberia 2018, I cut a series of perspex pieces to sit one on top of the other.

RP: *It appears, as with all of these chemical landscapes, that you have created your own vocabulary of the most extreme colours. Which are very appealing, appetising even. Likened to the windowed glass jars of a confectionary shop, which we are all drawn to the touch and taste of.*

LE: My family come from the very south of Europe, so I should be excused for that. I am allowed to use such things.

RP: *You want to draw on the most intense colours, to animate and attack our senses.*

LE: Yes.

RP: *And many of the works, have me think of the images in old science books of the earth cut open. With the core at the centre, and then older rock and sediment surrounding it.*

LE: Yes of course, but what is strange is that today we relate these livelier colours to Pop Art, to all those things Pop. Which I don't understand, because if you go to the Musée d'Orsay, and look for a (Paul) Gauguin, you will see the most incredible choice of colours applied to his canvas, much more than Andy Warhol or any of his contemporaries. And today if you use strong colours you are considered (eccentric almost). I know nature very well because I love being outdoors, and when we look at a flower, I admit the colours are super strong.

RP: *So I think of the last show, of your moving to the country, it intrigues me, and of how that affected your palette. Was it entirely different, or more subdued as a consequence, from these incredibly kitsch colours here? For two shows possibly you went from one extreme to another, with your work.*

LE: Yes.

RP: *As well if I look into these works for long enough, I realise that they are made up of the things we ignore, if you like, of the elements that inhabit our lives like 'dust', entirely present but invisible at the same time. Not only do we notice them here, and you have us consider them worthy of our attention, but you multiple them, like two-penny toys, until they become something else again. Of the object multiplied becoming abstract.*

LE: Yes, abstraction comes of collecting.

RP: *I wonder of your statement, about the works being reflective of the environment you are in, and of the people around you. Considering that, can the works be read as biographical visions of the people you have around you, where you live and work? Not*

literal portraits, but landscapes of our lives as society and community? Every element belongs or has the potential to belong to someone. But as well these are not objects as we think of them, of the possessions that fill our lives, but the details that we come into contact with regularly without noticing them. And again we come back to your analogy of 'dust'; one might call the chemical works as representative of the 'decorated dust' of our individual lives.

LE: I am using what I have in front of me.

RP: *Inspired by our modern culture for the fake and false as well. And we do think, as we have talked about, that if you were to vigorously shake the works that the coloured contents would fall more evenly within the frame. Like a child's plaything that you turn over and over until the coloured matter disperses in all directions. As if our physical intervention would allow us to experience the works in a more rewarding way, but for you, it is entirely about the potential movement, as we might imagine it, and not of motion itself.*

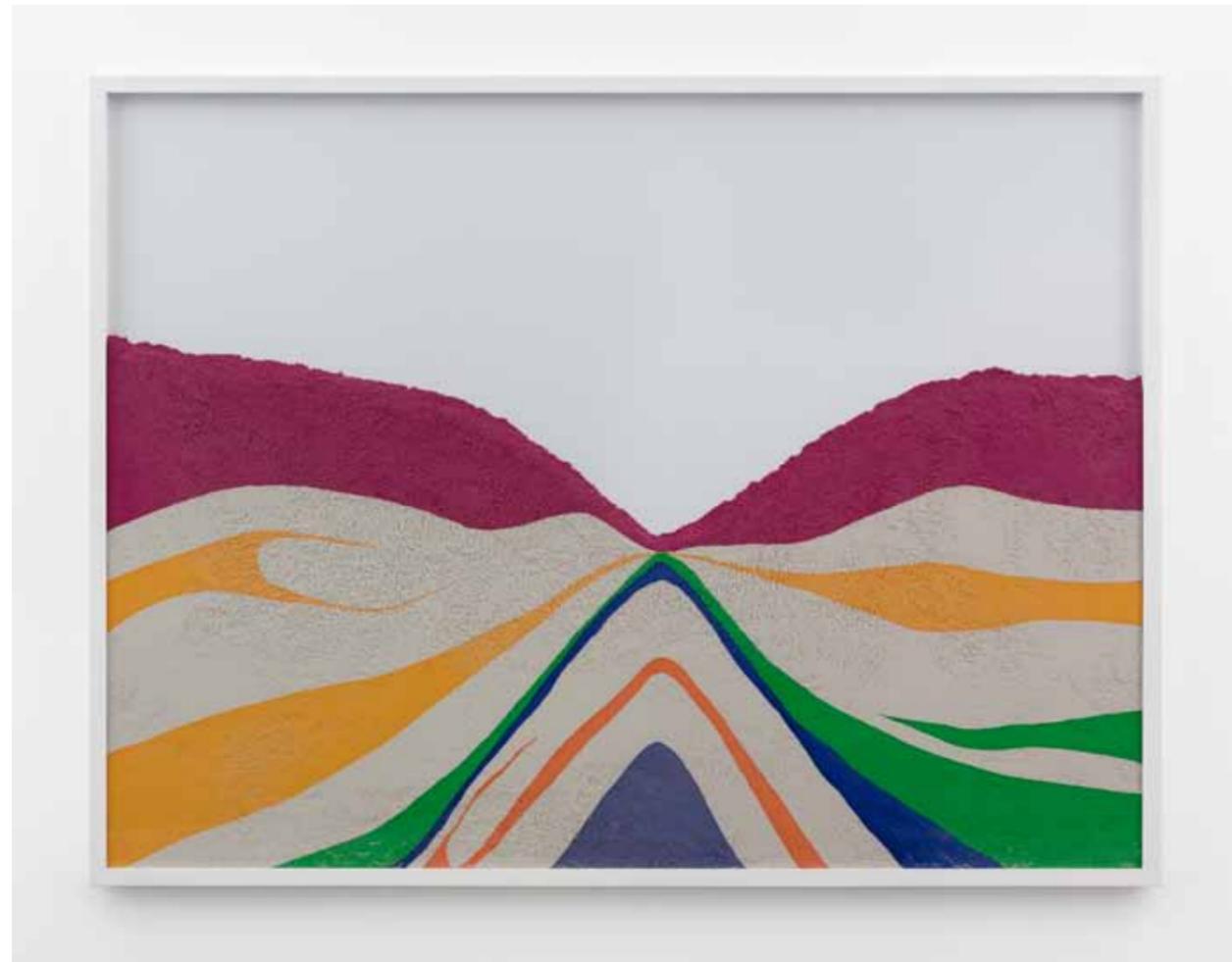
LE: I was in India, and there there was a place between Bangalore and Goa, a small state where the landscape was incredible. I don't recall the name of the region exactly. But there you had huge stones the size of a building. And I can recall how, at the time, the environment had a major effect on me. Back from that trip, I decided to make the India work. Notice for each of the works the title is where the works are mythically meant to come from, Chemical Landscape from Siberia, Chemical Landscape from China, Chemical Landscape from Congo.

RP: *So they are not necessarily all of the places you have been too, as with Chemical Landscape of the Ocean, or Chemical Landscape from another planet.*

LE: No, but you can imagine things and you may very well be wrong.

RP: *The Chemical Landscape of Siberia 2018 work intrigues me possibly more than any of the others, for its lack of anything. These pieces of perspex, one on top of another, are so simple, yet for whatever reason, possibly their transparency, they elude to so many things - of the environment, of material as a mirror, and everything outside as much as the world within. Which is critical to our understanding of the works, of the picture plane functioning as a facade for a vessel of visual forms that you have pressed and pinned together. But this particular work I find beautiful for its absence of everything. As if the simplest forms have within them the greatest truths - I could see so many works coming from this one, do you envisage that?*

LE: Possibly, I don't attach myself to one particular work. With this exhibition, I had the feeling that I was opening a door, and with some of the works, they



could lead to something, relating to simple things, of the next exhibition and of what will happen. I have yet to decide. But as well there are other works that I would wish to do bigger.

RP: *And is that something, if we consider these all being of a similar size, of making much larger works.*

LE: No, but Chemical Landscape from Brazil 2018, is a work in which I encountered a great many accidents.

RP: *Its appearance makes me think of nougat, and all of the ingredients within that. Another work, Chemical Landscape from Japan, has an element of erosion about it - was there a reaction whilst making that particular work?*

LE: No, there wasn't a reaction, but when I make them I cannot necessarily control what I am doing. I do everything as a kind of procedure; I wait, and then open each of them from their casting, and see what comes. I made one that was very beautiful, but unfortunately, it broke, and so I made this version, which is very good as well, but I (feel that was a better version).

RP: *Which emphasises how each of them are unique, impossible to replicate.*

^ Lionel Estève
Chemical Landscape from Brazil, 2018
 Sand, epoxy, gouache paint, wooden frame
 156 x 204,5 x 5 cm / 61 7/16 x 80 1/2 x 1 15/16 inches
 Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève
 View of the exhibition Chemical Landscape at Perrotin Paris.
 © Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

LE: Yes, exactly, because of the technique involved the works are random and independent of one another. If you are working in ceramics it is as impossible to control entirely the outcome of a work.

RP: *And you appreciate that, the randomness of what comes?*

LE: I want to try and create an environment in which an accident can occur if you like. I put things in position in order I have the desired effect, but not to control the process entirely.

RP: *If I understand it, the alchemy as art occurs in the accident. Of the transformation of the elements or objects you collect, becoming the chemical landscapes we see here.*

LE: We speak about my collecting objects, the sculpture Flowers on Rock I, 2019; I found the original rock maybe ten years previously, on the ground, and I had with me a backpack, so I took it with me, and it was in my studio for years. And then I decided I wanted flowers to appear to come from the rock - flowers or vegetation because I liked the idea of one impossible element giving life to another, and the same with the other work from the series, Flowers on Rock III, 2019.

RP: *The work makes me think of a circuit board laid out over a rock. As though the rock has transformed*

into an electronic object that is artificially able to give life to the tentacles reaching out from it.

LE: They are the inside of a plastic rope, which I tore open and took all of the minute beads from, to which I added nail polish.

RP: *And so it appears like a natural phenomenon. As if from the remotest of places life can still emerge or mutate from another entity.*

LE: It could easily belong underwater.

RP: *Like a fossil or coloured coral. Another work that attracted my attention is Chemical Landscape from the Ocean, 2019, because within that work there is as much space as there is activity. And as intended, you create this wonderful illusion to a seascape whilst still holding onto the materiality of your choice of object. It would be very easy to fill the frame to the top with the gelatine, but you decide against that, and it works.*

LE: Ah yes, to go to the top, of course, it's a possibility.

RP: *So how you decide that, of when you stop with a solid mass? Because again I think you are pouring objects into the frame when of course you are not.*

LE: For this work, I created a skeleton and then put it into the frame, and by having it, as it is I wanted this idea that if you were to touch it, the colour paper will move the way of water.





RP: *Of gravity becoming involved. Which of course is all an illusion, as there isn't that kind of fragility, as we might think of it, to what we see.*

LE: But when I make it there is gravity involved. Because before a work of art was meant entirely for one place, a specific location, a church or ceiling. Today art is related to a great deal of movement, a work can move from Basel to Beirut, in light of so many exhibitions and events. And so it was also interesting for me to do something that makes the spectator consider 'what will happen if we move these work?'

RP: *So it is something you divulge to your audience?*

LE: Yes, yes, but maybe I shouldn't.

RP: *I like the idea of playing with people's minds. That they think they have the potential to alter everything.*

LE: If they are considered that then the illusion exists.

RP: *You do imagine, as the audience, that if you take one of the chemical works off of the wall, and turn it upside down, everything inside will fall unceremoniously to the bottom. And again it interests me the idea of your allowing for as much space as material forms within a work.*

LE: If I were to entirely fill a chemical work then there

^ Lionel Estève
View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

> Lionel Estève
View of the exhibition *Chemical Landscape* at Perrotin Paris.
Photo: Claire Dorn
© Photo: Claire Dorn / Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin

is no possibility for the accident, or of the illusion of change within the work.

RP: *So then when you create a solid structure of so many random elements, do you know that it will fit into this sized frame?*

LE: Yes, many of the elements are glued onto the back. I come to the framer with all of the pieces and can spend a day or more transferring the solid mass into the frame. Which still requires thinking everything beforehand.

RP: *So it about accidents waiting to happen, of objects naturally falling one way or another.*

LE: To make some appear accidental, you have to consider all of the possibilities.

RP: *The illusion is what holds our attention.*

LE: This work *Chemical Landscape* from another planet, 2018, involved one piece of material, and the small stones fall between the glass front and the foam.

RP: *Strange, because it almost has the look of a landscape about it.*

LE: This work remains me of the photographs that come from NASA's mission to Mars because you don't immediately understand it.

RP: *Which makes me think that each of them takes*

*you somewhere, and for each everything is entirely different; a landscape as universe. There are so many directions I can go with each of these works. Twelve versions of *Chemical Landscape* from Siberia, in a room, could look quite incredible.*

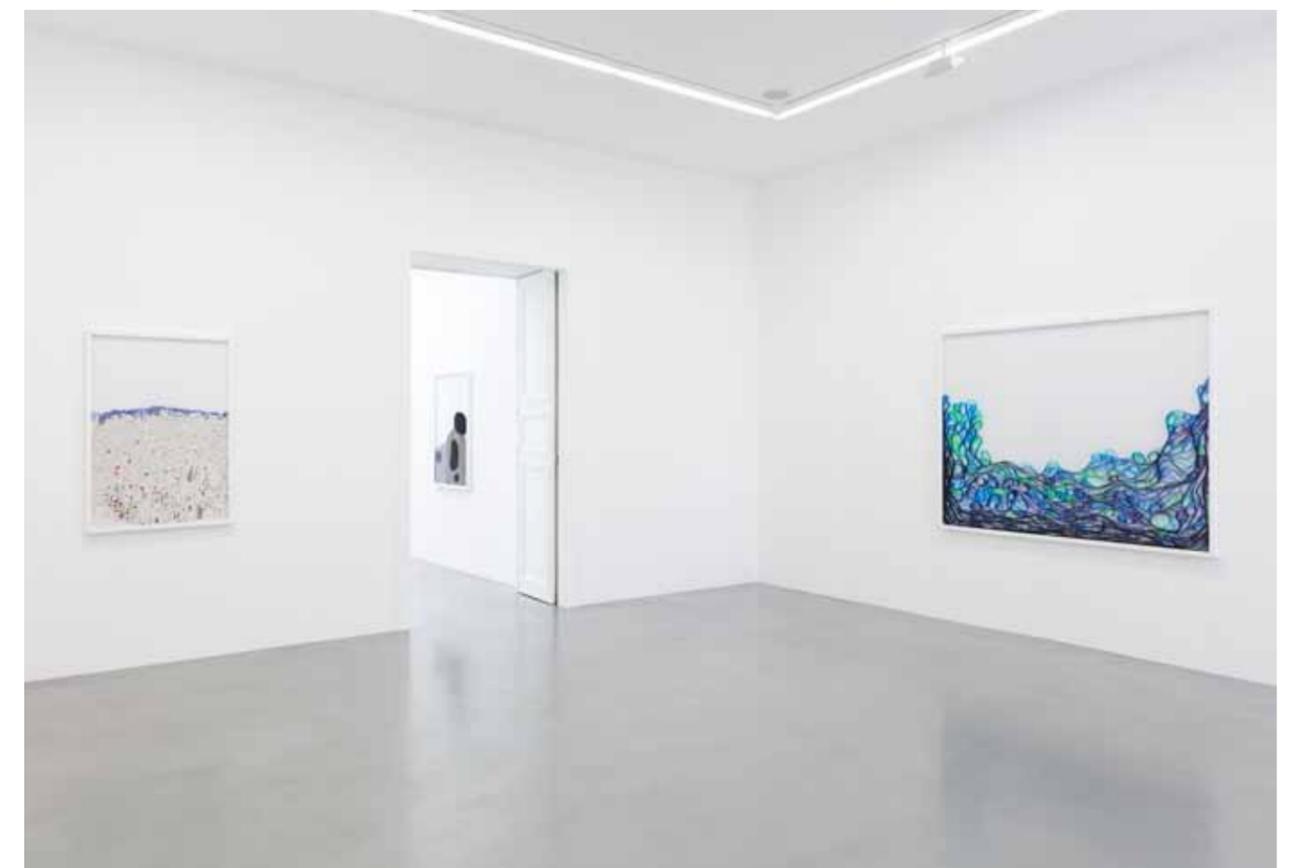
LE: Possibly that would be too minimal for me.

RP: *For me, the work alluded to the sensation of something, whilst delivering nothing, which appeals to me. And within that, I could envisage one work of coloured glass that operates as your signature or fingerprint if you like, that brings the work back to you.*

LE: As I said, with this show, I feel like I am opening a door to many more possibilities. With the choice of materials, and by referencing the landscape, it could, for the first time, lead somewhere.

RP: *Do you feel already the urge to follow an idea further?*

LE: Not exactly, next I will do something else entirely because I have a great deal of desire. I love to work, and for a year now I have been waiting for the moment to do something new. I have no relationship with this technique, as I am always trying to invent new ways of working. Even if a technique exists already, I want that I learn it myself, and at the same time to experiment with that technique, until I understand it. Which will sometimes take years. For example,



I have done glasswork, which I learned myself. That required a lot of money and time that proved incredibly interesting.

RP: And are you with your work, always looking or learning for new ways of working, and do keep those misshapes or mistakes?

LE: When I can, but if it is beyond saving then obviously not.

RP: Because those elements can have a second life, they too can become something.

LE: Sometimes it is not just about the technique; you also need to understand (how to do something).

RP: Should I assume with this series of works that there are many more?

LE: No, this is the first time I am showing these particular works, in their entirety.

RP: And so what comes next for you?

LE: I am not entirely sure, I was meant to exhibit in Seoul, but I wait to know. I have a gallery there, and they told me that I would likely have a show next April.

RP: In 2020?

LE: Yes, so I will know soon enough, and the works are already done. They have asked me to make the work I had made before this series. Which I call Papier de Provence or Paper from Provence, something related to the landscape and nature, and the gallery said they wanted a show of that work. And I have never shown that work alone before, so it will be interesting, and all is done.

RP: So now you have a moment to experiment?

LE: Yes I have a proposal to do for a show in New York, so I will prepare for that, and I certainly have something to do in Berlin in May, and a gallery show in one year in Brussels.

RP: It feels with your work, that you have created a kind of freedom that allows you to move very easily between materials and techniques, as you say.

LE: Yes.

RP: So you don't have that obligation about your work of making it again and again on demand, as other artists might do.

LE: No, maybe they are right, I don't know. For me, I have a big desire, as I told you, of producing different things. I am not loyal (to a technique).

RP: With your going to Berlin, to New York and Seoul, do you try and go many days in advance, and consider everything around you as collectable, as you said before?

LE: When I can, I love to make the work on-site, and in the place I am. But of course, that requires you to know the work before, and the technique well enough already. You cannot experiment too much. I will also have something in South America in the winter and plan not to go there with the intention of experimenting. I have to arrive to work.

RP: I assume there is too big a risk of going somewhere and not producing.

Not exactly, next I will do something else entirely because I have a great deal of desire. I love to work, and for a year now I have been waiting for the moment to do something new. I have no relationship with this technique, as I am always trying to invent new ways of working. Even if a technique exists already, I want that I learn it myself, and at the same time to experiment with that technique, until I understand it.



^Lionel Estève
Chemical Landscape from India, 2018
Rubber, colored pearls, epoxy, wooden frame
125 x 90 x 5 cm / 49 ³/₁₆ x 35 ⁷/₁₆ x 1 ¹⁵/₁₆ inches
Courtesy of the artist & Perrotin