

VEILHAN VERSAILLES

INTRODUCTION BY
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Veilhan Versailles is an exceptional opportunity for the Estate of Versailles to renew its acquaintance with contemporary artists through a stroll allowing visitors to (re)discover known and unknown parts of the estate. If there is a place where the risk of creating a truly contemporary event – and not merely a facile pastiche, the temptation often preferred – is worth taking, it is Versailles. Contemporary artistic creation introduces another perception of this living monument, an ever-changing reality that is not a frozen model of a single era, in itself difficult to define, but, like any element of our heritage, the fruit of a complex stratification of observations and interventions continuing up to our own time. It challenges the usual stereotyped images of Versailles, built up from often conventional and very concentrated presentations. The idea is to offer fresh ways of perceiving a monument that everyone thinks they know by revealing its contemporary complexity, its substance, and the dense strata concealed by habit.

Veilhan Versailles is a stroll, an itinerary, a journey through the «landscape-territory» of Versailles. It is not a retrospective of the artist's work – every piece has been newly commissioned. It gives the general public – another elusive concept – an opportunity to see and appreciate the artist's works, many of which are feats of technical bravura. The exhibition presents seven original works laid out on an east-west axis across the estate, from the Court of Honour to the Grand Canal. Each sculpture – for that is the medium of this exhibition – has been carefully placed in relation to the setting, the architecture and the function of this perspective, the most prestigious and symbolic in our national heritage. Allegories and other myths dialogue with the explorations of Xavier Veilhan, whose implication in the classical/baroque dialectic has so often been underlined. Statuary, speed, vehicle, fiction, anthropomorphism, contemporary heroes – these are some of the words in the Versailles lexicon of Xavier Veilhan for a new way of presenting the estate by playing with scale and our perceptions. As he likes to say: «I construct more than create.»

This temporary installation of the works of one of the best-known figures of the contemporary art scene in one of the world's most visited monuments offers an intriguing mirror effect, whose underlying proposition is the question of «positioning».

Many cultural institutions have attempted this type of confrontation between historic monuments and contemporary art. To my mind, this exhibition is radically different, both for the place chosen and the choice of a circuit of exceptional dimensions that gives primacy to the outdoors.

Echo, dialectic, opposition, counterpoint – the question is not ours to decide. This unique exhibition should, above all, nourish reflection around the contemporaneity of our monuments and the vital necessity of the creation of our time. Notre-Dame de Paris, Les Invalides, the Pantheon, the Louvre, Versailles – to mention only the most well-known – are multi-layered interventions, in their own contemporary era, beside which *Veilhan Versailles* is more modest. And yet the objectives are the same: never to dismiss the singular nature of any artistic gesture and never seek to confine the free-flying imagination of the artist in the straitjacket of heritage and tradition. A few principles that guided us in setting up this unique three-month experiment: avoid the trap of contemporary art «grafted onto» into an historic monument; allow visitors to (re)discover a place; capitalise on the know-how of the estate's own teams, and particularly its fountains; rejoice in working with a living artist and the emotions, setbacks and surprises this entails; give pleasure. Place our trust in one of the best artists of our time to reveal another Versailles, a Versailles of today, a monument that continues to live through the value of its employment: this is the intention of the exhibition. The pleasures of the senses in a stroll, a new Versailles labyrinth, whose sole purpose is to divert – in both senses of the term – while at the same time transcending clichés.

A transient folly, a risk worth taking, since Versailles, once a multidisciplinary «experimental workshop and laboratory» for the boldest creations, most notably in its great entertainments, deserves this contemporary artistic exploration.

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