

COP21: MICHAEL PINSKY – THE ART OF WASTE



Questioning our attitudes towards waste and disposal, the environment and our responsibilities towards it, the installation 'L'eau qui dort'/'Breaking the surface', by British visual artist Michael Pinsky, is currently turning heads at Parc La Villette, in the north of Paris.

By Lesley Brown

In the city, water is a preferred spot for discarding the community's burdensome clutter. Throughout history, urban rivers, canals, ponds and lakes have been used as dumping grounds for every kind of object imaginable – contemporary, illegal, criminal, curiosity, historical, treasure trove...

'L'eau qui dort' (November 25 to January 3, 2016) highlights a collection of debris recovered (by divers and the Paris canal services, overseen by Mr Pinsky) from [Canal de l'Ourcq](#), which runs through [Parc La Villette](#).

A total of 40 items have been 'raised from the depths' and suspended over the surface of the water on either side of the canal. And in addition to the inevitable shopping trolley, they include a traffic cone, 'deviation' road sign, fridge, cooker, swivel office car, bikes (including two bike sharing [Vélib's](#)), and a trunk. Each 'find' is highlighted by a bluish-green spotlight in a form not unlike that of an overhanging street lamp. The work as a whole is accompanied by an eerie soundtrack (the souls of the 'discarded' items?). The sounds were created by youngsters living near the park, using the metallic pieces of debris themselves as instruments.

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Both poetic and pedagogic, the installation raises a host of questions – how we **create** and **discard waste**; the concept of **ownership**; **responsibility for the public space**; attitudes towards the **environment** and **recycling**. At the same time, each object stimulates the imagination – how did it end up here? What is its story? Who sunk it here, and why? In the absence of any information, we are free to come up with our own answers, create our own stories...

Formerly lifelines for city economies (essentially supplying water and transporting goods), today urban waterways such as Canal de l'Ourcq are often key features of regeneration projects. Yet despite a polished public face, they still retain their murky role as ideal receptacle for jettisoning the unwanted. Why? Because in addition to its open accessibility, the water has incredible powers of invisibility! The act, the 'crime' of dumping can go unseen. The canal keeps our guilty secrets until it is dredged, or a provocative artist like Mr Pinsky comes along...!

By the by: in 2001, New York City (NYC) Transit came up with a 'creative solution' – the '[Artificial Reef Project](#)' – to dispose of its obsolete subway cars. After being steam cleaned and stripped of components that float (e.g. oils and solids) and decompose, they are dumped in strategic locations in the ocean to create habitats for marine life and recreational fishing.

CLIMATE IS CULTURE

'L'eau qui dort' is being exhibited through a partnership between [COAL](#), the French association for art and sustainable development, and Parc La Villette. It forms part of [ArtCOP21](#), a festival of cultural activity on climate change, initiated by COAL together with its English-speaking counterpart [Cape Farewell](#), and taking place across the globe between September and December 2015.

USE OF OUR PUBLIC REALM

London-based Mr Pinsky has undertaken many [residencies and commissions](#) that **explore issues shaping and influencing the use of our public realm**. Taking the combined roles of artist, urban planner, activist, researcher, and resident, he starts them without a specified agenda, working with local people and resources, allowing the physical, social, and political environment to define his working methodology.

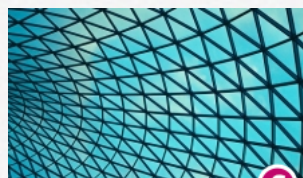
His plans for 2016 include [BeHave](#) in Luxembourg – a collaborative project whereby nine artists will be investing a former steelworks with artworks – and '[The City Speaks](#)' in Hull, northern England.

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Environment Pollution Waste

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