



Photo: Aurélie Leplatre.

Allan McCollum. *Each and Every One of You*, 2004. The installation consists of an inventory of 600 male first names and 600 female first names, according to the United States census, printed with ink on paper, and installed in the order of popularity. Installation: La Salle de Bains, Lyon, 2010-11.

Allan McCollum.

Interview by Paul Bernard

Could you tell me how you got to collaborate with Jill Gasparina for the piece you are presenting here, at La Salle de Bains?

Jill had written an essay about my work in the revue *20/27*, and we had exchanged some emails. I really liked her text. Afterwards she invited me to do an exhibition here, with this particular project. It had been a while since I last had an exhibition in France, so I accepted with pleasure.

—I didn't know this work...

I've only exhibited this project once before, in the U.S. It's an edition of prints I did in 2004, with Graphicstudio, a print publisher in Florida. Starting in the early 90s I had become interested in "communities," how

communities of people define themselves. I did a number of so-called "regional" projects in small towns, in different parts of the U.S., focusing on what sorts of symbols people came up with to represent themselves, and the groups of people they identify with. I began to think about how we all form our identities, and how the exchange of artworks and other objects plays a role in that. It became a sort of social practice, I did lots of traveling around the country, doing projects that didn't involve commercial galleries, collaborating with local people from all over, learning some of the ways civic identities are formed in this "new" country. When I was asked to do a show in a commercial gallery during this time, in Boston, I decided to treat the patrons of that gallery as a community, and I did a series of drawings based on the names of the gallery's mailing list. I used all the first names within a single postal code, and paired them, creating thousands of unique combinations. Then I used about a thousand of these combinations to do a series of small "word" drawings; like "Robert+Jennifer" or "Lee+Boris." The series was called *The Small World Drawings*. The project we're showing here grew out of this particular project.



Allan McCollum.

Portrait : Olivier Huz.

— *The format of the drawings and the white inscription on a black background could evoke notices people send to announce a death. Is there a mortuary dimension in this project?*

No, not at all. I don't remember exactly why chose to use white type on black. If I had to link this project to something else, I guess I would think of things like annual yearbooks given to students when they're in school, where you can find all the student's names along with their pictures. Or old address books people save. I wanted to create a situation where one's life sort of flashed before one's eyes. A cacophony of all the people one has known – friends, enemies, lovers, happinesses and hurts. An

avalanche of extremely personal associations, but arising from an extremely public list of common assignments.

— *The names are ranked in a certain order, classified in terms of popularity.*

Yes, it's only the second time I am presenting this project, but the display is always in the same order. I took the list directly from a government source, the official 2000 census. Americans love rankings, statistics: how many are we, how many speak Spanish, Arabic, how many kids per home, how many men, women, etc.

When a person walks into the exhibition, he usually looks for his or her own name, his father's, those he knows... there is an emotional filter to the exhibition perception: you focus on certain names. This work is linked to another project, *The Shapes Project*, started in 2005, which is based on the idea of making a unique, one-of-a-kind shape for every human being on the planet. At the end of the day, my work is always about finding oneself through objects, shapes, or in this instance, through names.

— *Is it the first time you're doing multiples?*

Yes, depending on how you define that. People often think I do "multiples," but I just like working in large quantities, not what the art world traditionally calls "multiples" or "limited editions." This is the first time I've done a "signed-and-numbered" sort of project. We did six portfolios of prints, 7200 altogether, but it's still a limited edition, and I signed them all.

— *Is it possible to only buy a few ones?*

No. The first time I showed these was with the Barbara Krakow Gallery, in Boston. She wanted to sell them individually, but this wasn't possible. But we compromised, and so for that first year, and only for that first year, the publisher allowed people to "order" unique names, and I signed them. We called this supplemental project *Friends and Family!* People would ask us to make one for every member of their family. One family even asked me to make one for their dog. I did it, I didn't want to hurt their feelings. Years later, one of these families had a new baby, and asked for a new print. We did it, but it was the last time!

— *In every project of yours, the display is very important.*

I want visitors to experience the "situation" as much as possible. One way to do this is to install a large amount of objects, to create an intensity. Every object may be unique, but it produces a feeling of multitude.

This always requires a simultaneous double perspective, whether you focus on the individual or on the mass. The visit can get very emotional when you focus on certain names, but the mass feeling can also create a vertigo sensation; it can be scary.

A crowd can be scary, but it can also form a celebration. People say that when you die, lots of memories rush past you. I find this interesting, I feel it is more of a positive than a negative. All the people I love, all the people I hate, but most all of the people I've ever met can be found here. When I was young, I used to travel a lot, to go hitchhiking, try to see the world. Now I like to sit down and remember. Certain names here evoke particular people to me. By looking at a name, I remember it belongs to a waitress, who had brown, curly hair, or ...

— *Your work shows an attempt to use both avant-garde and popular culture to address the widest possible population. This is quite obvious in the project title Each and Every One of You. Where does that title come from?*

When I was a child, my uncle was an art teacher, and he had a television show. I didn't know him well, I mostly only saw him on family holidays. But when I would see him on TV, I would feel as if he was talking right to us, as if we were right in front of him. His show was called *Draw with me*, he believed that everyone could learn to draw. He would use this expression when talking to his audience: "Each and everyone of you can learn to be an artist!"

— *Television is an important element in your work. It can also be found in older works, such as Surrogates on Location or Perpetual Photos.*

I grew up in Los Angeles, where the television and movie industries are everywhere. My parents were involved in amateur theatre. My father had been a child actor, and sometimes did small parts in films, or worked as an "extra" in a movie, visible in the background of a scene. As a kid, I would often look for my father in the background, when watching TV. In Los Angeles people have a peculiar relationship to cinema and television. When you go to the cinema, you bump into people you know, many work in the film industry, and it's impolite to stand up and leave before the end

of the credits. I came to art through theatre and Fluxus. I liked the strategies of Brechtian *distanciation* you can find in the New Wave cinema, how it reminds the spectator of the social construction of the situation. My *Surrogates Paintings* and my *Plaster Surrogates* come from there. I wanted to show the visitors that they were walking in a museum or a gallery, and that they were looking at things on a wall. I wanted my *Surrogates* to be perceived like stage props. When my parents were in a play, and when I would go backstage at the end of a show, I would realize many objects weren't real. That's where the *Surrogates* intention comes from; I wanted to turn the gallery into a stage, a sort of imitation of a gallery. And that's when I realized the *Surrogates* looked like paintings you can glance at on TV, so I did the *Surrogates on Location* series. It is a bit like when I used to find my father on the screen.

— *There are a lot of pictures of your workshop showing your assistants at work in your catalogue. It looks like a small industry. How would you define this studio space and the production time.*

It can be nice to be surrounded by people. Again, I associate it with my childhood. It reminds me of family moments; for example, when we all would meet to decorate cookies. I think I try to recreate some of this type of atmosphere with my assistants. I grew up in a big family, always surrounded. I probably chose to be an artist to be a bit more alone! Before being an artist, I worked many jobs, in many restaurants, and in industrial kitchens. I liked working with others. A lot of people think factory workers are miserable slaves, but it isn't true, or at least certainly not always true. When you work in a factory or in a restaurant, you laugh, you joke, there is a real camaraderie. On the opposite side, the artist is supposed to be working alone and isolated. One of the reasons why I create objects in huge quantities is because I want the spectators who see my work to realize straight away it would have been impossible for me to make it all by myself.
