



## Annette Lemieux: a conversation with Mario Pérez

by Raymar Rondón | Published 9 agosto, 2021



Annette Lemieux with her dog Frankie. Photography provided by Jerry Russo

**MARIO PÉREZ:** Curators are supposed to elaborate a kind of narrative discourse on the works shown at an exhibition but, did it happen that your work was included in any exhibition and you thought the curatorship had nothing to do with the image you made?

**ANNETTE LEMIEUX:** If I am understanding your question correctly – a very long time ago a curator wanted to include my work in an exhibition that was about abstraction. I refused to be part of the exhibition, as my work wasn't abstract in my mind. the relationship ended badly.

**MP:** As an artist whose career is frequently related to conceptualism, and as a writer, you are concerned with language, which consists of the use of signs and symbols in a structured way, what's the structure of a work by Annette Lemieux?

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**AL:** By using signs and symbols that are familiar, one could begin a dialogue with the viewer. the structure of the work – minimalism was a big influence. and the grid.

**MP:** Many of your images are in black and white, why do you prefer to almost or completely eliminate colors?

**AL:** It's somewhat an aesthetic choice. but black and white offer a distance.

**MP:** In your production, some visual statements about politic issues can be found, it happens for example with Left Right Left Right, how do you think the concepts of good and ethic are related to beauty?

**AL:** If one painted good and ethic in an ugly way it wouldn't communicate.



**Left Right Left Right, 1995**

30 photolithographs on museum board, wood poles, screws

Dimensions variable

Photograph: Courtesy of the artist's studio

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**MP:** Does your experience as a teacher at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts of Harvard have any influence in your artistic career? If so, how can we see it in your works?

**AL:** The students have a freedom that can get lost in your own practice. the students remind me of that freedom.

**MP:** What is your perception about the following terms: Unexpressionism, neo-conceptualism, post-conceptualism, post-modern art?

**AL:** These were/are movements that were connected to my generation of artist. we are the descendants of the artist John Baldessari. some of us were taught by Baldessari's students – the artists Jack Goldstein and David Dalle.

**MP:** You have said in the past “The work has been politically engaged, It ´s humanistic. It ´s about me and the world”, then you continued “But maybe it ´s about us and the world. Because we all have similar experiences”, what do you mean with the expression world, are you referring to the world as the environment we live surrounded by, the social context or do you see it differently?

**AL:** I am thinking the world being everything that is outside of ourselves.

**MP:** What does your body of work tell about space and landscape?

**AL:** I think my works are influenced by the contemporary landscape.

**MP:** You referred to your own work in an interview from 2005 as “autobiographical, but without telling a story”, what does your production tell about you as a person?

How do you decide which autobiographical aspects of your life to include or exclude from your works during the process of making them?

**AL:** I don't really include or exclude autobiographical aspects in my works. that is not how it happens. when looking at past works, when I have a distance, that is when I realize that some of the works are autobiographical.

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**MP:** You also have said before that appearance and style only speak about the surface and that you are not interested on an art that is retinal above all, please tell me about it.

**AL:** I believe I stated that I wasn't interested in work that is purely *retinal*. my work has to be about something beyond an aesthetic experience.

**MP:** According to the ninth edition of the New Pocket Oxford Dictionary, the word choose is defined as to "1 pick out as being the best of the available alternatives. 2 decide a course of action" (p. 151) Which parameters do you use as a guide to choose an idea when making an artwork?

**AL:** When an idea sticks with me, when it won't leave me, I must make it.

**MP:** You choose the images and materials you work with, curators choose your works to be included in a solo or collective show, collectors choose what to buy, etc. but, have you been in a situation in which you didn't have any choice as an artist?

**AL:** A long time ago a gallerist created a one person exhibition of my works that were in private collections. I didn't want the exhibition to happen, but it was out of my control.

**MP:** Critics, art historians, curators, etc. have employed labels to explain art history in terms of opposites, for example the figure of Picasso as a visceral artist, in contraposition to Marcel Duchamp as more rational; abstract expressionism as opposite to minimal and conceptual art; then we have inherited that structure of thinking, it looks as an obvious fact when neo-expressionism is described as opposite to neo-geo and neo-conceptualism. As a teacher, how do you deal with that situation?

**AL:** IF A STUDENT THROUGH THEIR WORK FOOTNOTES A MOVEMENT OR AN ARTIST I WILL SHOW THEM THAT WORK, WHEN THAT WORK WAS DONE, WHAT CAME BEFORE IT, WHAT IT WAS REACTING TO.

**MP:** To continue with that question, the art influenced by Picasso and expressionism is described as if it privileged the object in terms of its execution and visual qualities, but contrary, the artists who are influenced by Marcel Duchamp are described as if they gave more importance to ideas; how does this opposition help us to say anything about your art?

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**AL:** Ideas are important but I need the work to be visceral as well. it needs to be seductive to hold me and the viewer.

**MP:** As an artist who deals with meaning, during all of these years, what are the most common misunderstandings about your work?

**AL:** That it is nostalgic.

**MP:** How does it feel to be frequently misunderstood?

**AL:** I try to ignore it now.

**MP:** An artist is constantly exposed to the interaction with the audience, so you are in contact with opinions, how interested are you in that kind of dialogue?

**AL:** Dialogue is healthy for the work and future works. through dialogue things are defined somewhat. food for thought.

**MP:** Let ´s speak about stereotypes, the artists who are influenced by conceptualism are often described as rational, cold, etc. is that your case?

**AL:** I don't think my work to be cold. its production can be visceral. I know that my paintings that tend to be hard edge are considered cold by some. they prefer something more expressive, or painterly.

**MP:** What are the main aesthetic decisions you have made during your career?

**AL:** The figure in my works are represented through photography or silkscreened works. objects are represented by themselves. I never wanted to paint a figure or an object. I rather have the object represent itself. I didn't want my hand getting in the way.

**MP:** What is your idea of beauty?

**AL:** When the material of a thing doesn't get in the way of the idea. that the thing is as convincing as things found in the world.

**MP:** Is there such a thing as ugliness in your work?



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**AL:** I have destroyed work that I thought to be ugly – if the work doesn't measure up to what I wanted to see.

**MP:** Some of your pictures like *Black Mass* and those series of untitled Works from 1994, include photograph partially hidden by black figures like rectangles, what do those figures hide and what does their presence show to the viewer?

**AL:** For the work *Black Mass* the black rectangles are hiding a political figure. the voices of the persons holding the protest placards are not being heard. for the series in 1994 titled *ensor*, the black rectangles are censoring another political figure.

**MP:** In another occasions, you repeat an image in positive and negative on the same format as we can see it in the fifth panel of *Censor* (1994), there you employed stills from the *Great Dictator*, and the other diptych entitled *Fumée*, how does this opposition work for you?

**AL:** The negative image in *fumee* was influenCed by man ray's use of the negative image. *Fumee* is the same pose that Man Ray used to photograph Lee Miller.

**MP:** The art from the US has some kind of tradition based on erasing images in order to generate new visual situations, Rauschenberg erased a drawing by de Kooning, Warhol had to cover with silver paint the banner for his exhibition *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, John Baldessari covered the faces of human figures in his photographs using colored circles, what is your input in this tradition of partially hide the images?

**MP:** To make the found images something other.

**MP:** Mies Van Der Rohe said "less is more," how can this quotation be applied to your body of work and to your creative process?

**AL:** Include only what is necessary.

**MP:** In the work entitled *Search*, there are some found helmets with rubber wheels and headlamps attached on each one of them, they are placed on the floor of a dark room, what can you tell me about including darkness as a part of this installation?

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**Stolen Faces, 1991**

Lithographs

Triptych, 10 ¼ x 22 inches (left and right), 30 ¼ x 44 inches (center)

Photograph: Courtesy of the artist's studio



**Search, 1994**

Found helmets, rubber wheels, steel wire, brass collars, battery-operated headlamps

18 parts, 288 x 140 inches overall

Collection of the Ferretti-Mazzoli Family, Modena, Italy

Photograph: courtesy of the artist's studio.

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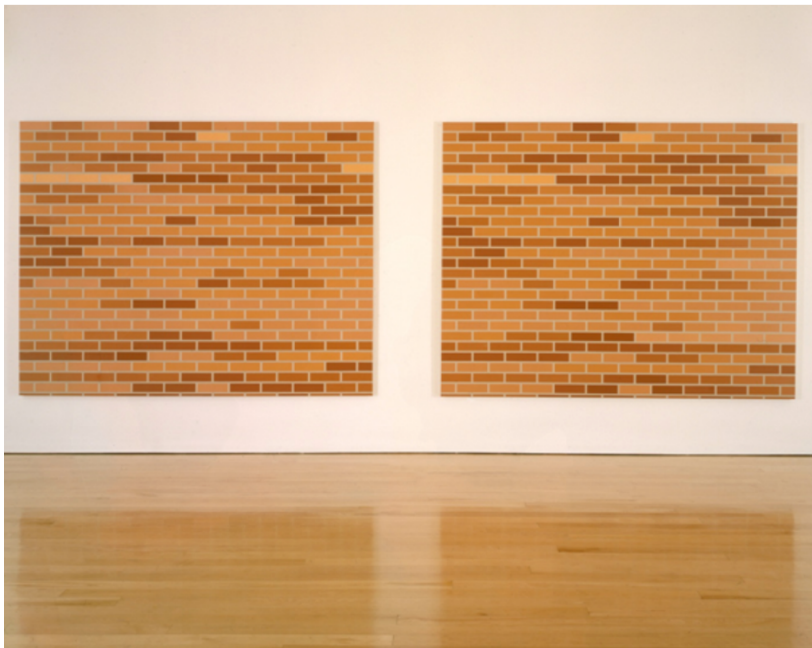
**AL:** The 18 helmets with headlamps are looking into the darkness looking for an answer, for something, for someone. It would not make any sense to put this installation in a lit room where all is seen and exposed.

**MP:** The titles of your pieces play a prominent role, do you have any procedure to elaborate them?

**AL:** Early on the titles were the ideas that created the works. now it seems that the titles come after the visual idea.

**MP:** If you would put a title to this conversation, what would it be?

**AL:** Don't know!



**Double Obstacle, 1995**

Oil on canvas

Dptych, each 72 x 93 inches; 72 x 195 inches overall

Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy

Photograph: Courtesy of the artist's studio