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TURLAN

Stop and Reflect

by F. Ford Leland

All artwork: Marc Turlan

A re-mixing, re-matching artist of Parisian origins, **Marc Turlan** is known for his graphic sculptures that incorporate various everyday materials. One sunny afternoon on the cusp of the French summer, F. Ford Leland met him to share an espresso while talking shop about chopping up magazines and riddling portraits with chains and screws.

Marc, I'm excited to learn about you and your work. To begin with, could you explain a little what you do? Are you more of a photographer or a sculptor?

That's a good question. First and foremost, I define myself as a sculptor, as it's rare for me to produce flat imagery. I do, however, use photos in a lot of my work. When I work with something like a magazine filled with images, it becomes a sculpture in the end. It's the object itself that interests me, more than the images therein. I use the images to produce three-dimensional pieces that then get displayed in a photo gallery, which can be quite confusing.

So would you describe it as a 'found object' sculpture?

Yes, I love the idea of found objects. I use the most basic materials, things that exist already. This is why a magazine makes an excellent base. I love its content images, but also the object itself because it's ripe for the addition of more materials like chains or a mosaic of mirrors. I also love the idea of re-fabrication or re-utilisation; of re-making something. Often when I see photos, it's like seeing work that's only half-finished. I don't mean to sound presumptuous; it's just that I see a sculpture in there waiting to be created.

Do you visualise mentally what it will look like before you start working?

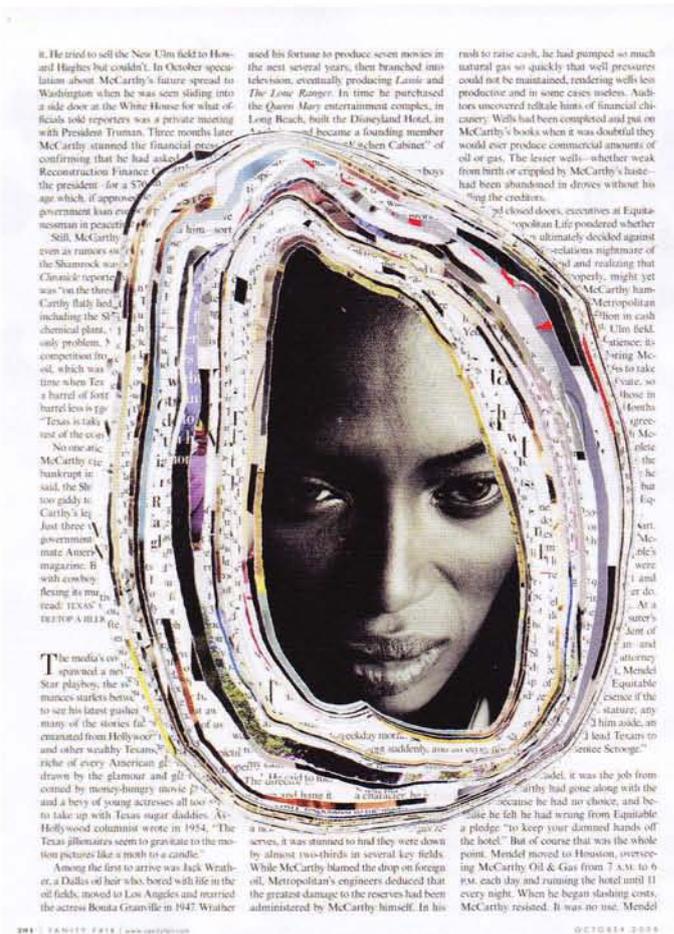
No, the way I achieve my finished work is by following my intuition rather than trying to envision something ahead of time. I feel I'm more of a modern-day portrait artist, meaning I try to capture a vision of today. Portraiture is something very traditional I have a great respect for and, to me, magazines are like the modern-day version of the familial oil paintings we might find hanging in a castle of the 15th century. However, in contrast, magazines are disposable, which reflects the values of our current era. My intervention is to re-work these symbolic objects into a proposed series of portraits about my epoch.

How did you find yourself in this position as a full-time artist?

I started my journey studying the classical technique of Roman mosaic construction. When I was young, I really appreciated the discipline and rigour of the trade. However, after working in the mosaics industry for a while, I stopped enjoying it. One day, opportunity came knocking on my door. I was chosen to work on a project for a visual artist where I was given the liberty to be more expressive. It inspired me to make many things; little projects and embroidered pieces. I discovered new forms of expression and that I apparently had a lot to say. From there it all went very quickly: I was able to display some of my early work in a gallery space at the famous 1920s modernist house Villa Noailles during the 22nd International Festival of Fashion and Photography in Hyères, France. At the festival, Anne de Villepoix, a well-regarded owner and curator of a Parisian gallery, spotted my work and invited me to create a new series for her space the following year. The rest is history.

Would you say that's when the wind blew you into your newfound career?

Yes and no. Like I said, life handed me an opportu-



Above and opposite: Torn Mag, magazine, 2008, courtesy of the artist, private collection

nity, but I had to make the decisive choice to pursue it. I believe you're given a single moment in life in which you are to choose to become an artist or not. It was definitely a pivotal moment when I decided to fully commit myself to my work. In doing so, I abandoned economic stability, but I just couldn't imagine to do art part time only.

In your work you often use stars, text and chains or you focus on eyes. What's the significance in this? Duchamp said, "C'est le regardeur qui fait l'œuvre: It's the viewer who creates the work." He was one of the original 'found object' sculptors and his philosophy resonates greatly with my own in that we both see special significance in the gaze. I'm fascinated with the invisible communication passing through our eyes and I love for my work to make people think about this. Photographers have to focus on the details of a shot that will allow their work to be understood. It's essential that a model's eyes captivate us. That I was exploring in my work for Villa Noailles. I covered portraits found in magazines with resin masks. By leaving only one eye exposed, I forced my audience to become aware of that one detail and inherently posed the question, "Who's watching who?" Ever since, I've been re-centring and re-working the idea of reflecting the gaze. Certain people may find it violent or disturbing. Of course I love hearing what other people see,

but violence isn't my intention.

What's your intention then?

Artistic expression. When I started to add gold chains to the eyes, I first had just one chain coming out. I later found myself adding more and more until the people in the magazines were crying golden tears. In another exposition I created busts in plaster – think copies of Greek statues with another optometric focus. I placed large stones and crystals protruding from the eye sockets. I can see how this might be perceived as violent; it procures uncomfortable feelings. However, the symbolism was about exploring representations of the information passing through our vision.

So your very first exposition showcased the resin masks?

Yes. It actually was a double collection as I was given two rooms in this magnificent location. In one I displayed the magazines, in the other a set of work using a similar concept: a collection of 30 books from one of my favourite authors, the late English playwright Sarah Kane. In this case, the resin masks covered literature by exposing one small sentence of text. This way I explored much the same idea of optometric information.

You already used the same elements you continue to use today...

Exactly. I'm still saying the same thing in my work as in the beginning. Even though it's a constant exploration and evolution, being repetitive is a very human process. In fact, I discussed this recently with a friend who works in fashion. Just like me, he's obsessed with a certain concept that he continues to explore. That's what makes his work strong, and it's this force that sustains my work, too. It's something we want to say or hold on to, and we must do so. To be able to watch everyone communicate the messages they hold dear is one of the most beautiful things about humanity.

Does the way you express this message change?

It definitely does. Some see a real evolution in my work, but all I can do is say, "Ah yes? Okay." It's just logical; it's a continuation. Of course there are new methods, but I'm saying pretty much the same thing and think I'll continue saying it (laughs)!

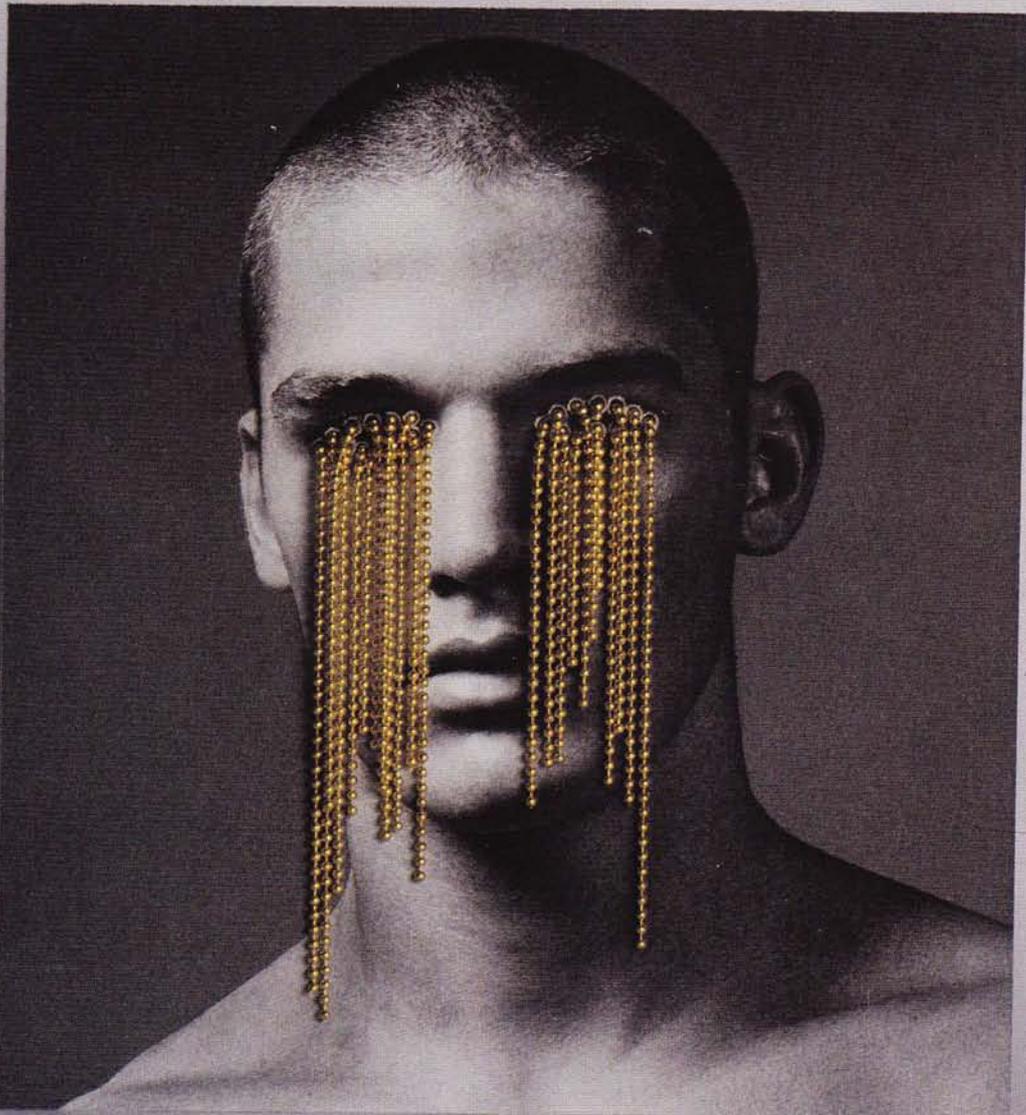
You also collaborate commercially to make advertisements. How does that work for you?

For example, when Nike asked me to make a piece for them, I was very reluctant at the beginning. However, they ensured my liberty and gave me the freedom to do whatever I wanted. I said, "Okay, I will make something. If you don't like it, it's no problem, but I reserve my right to creative freedom." They liked the result as it was and used it. It's important to note that I don't see any problem for an artist to collaborate commercially. I myself use commercial objects in my work, but I'm also vigilant in my commitment to art, not business. I don't advertise myself in this nature, but if the opportunity finds me, I'm open to trying it out. I've had proposed collaborations that simply didn't work out: Rather than compromise the integrity of the work, we called it off.

Your condition is that your work must remain authentic?

Exactly. I never want to be dictated to. For example,





No title, paper and chains, 2012,
courtesy of Gallery Anne de Villepoix,
private collection



Anthropocentriques Collages,
paper and threads, 2012,
courtesy of Gallery Anne de Villepoix



Above: Torn Mag, magazine, 2008, courtesy of the artist
Opposite: Exo Star, wood and hairs, 2010, courtesy of Gallery Anne de Villepoix, private collection

the historic Parisian luxury hotel Royal Monceau requested a series of 200 sculptures as gifts for their VIP Christmas celebration. I used the opportunity to continue my previous work on literature and constructed 200 book masks using a similar system to the one I had used on the work of Sarah Kane. I explored 200 different poets, both French and English, fabricating the pieces in such a way that the books lay open and my resin cases left just one important sentence visible. It was commercial in that it was commissioned, but it was also more personal in that it was given to individuals straight away.

Where do you find your inspiration?

I don't do a lot of searching; it's the image or object that comes and finds me. With textual work, for example, while reading, all of a sudden I come across a sentence that speaks to me and sticks in my mind. Such an approach was evident for the sound collage in my recent exposition at the Grand Palais in Paris. Though difficult to execute, I adored the process of using the imagined voices of some of my favourite classic French authors and philosophers. I worked with a writer friend of mine to find snippets from their writings that rang true to me and then mixed them into dialogues with my own voice. We invented situations as if I'd been there having conversations with people like Barthes or Foucault. The whole thing was relatively short, lasting six minutes only, and was displayed with headphones alongside other works. Their texts were the starting point for everything, their words the foundation upon which the final product was constructed. This project is an expansion of my existing work, asking questions like: How could one sculpt text in the modern world? How can I take a small book of another creator's work and discover something new about it? How would one sculpt a flat image? That, I always explore in my work.

Is your work more about questions then?

It's indeed about questions I ask myself, and I hope to inspire others to ask as well. I think all artists work like this. You pose a question you don't give answers to, but propose a potential response. With the sound collage I spoke about desire, creation and fantasy. My question was about how they relate to each other in the creative process of writing. In another exposition I made everything out of text. Many people looked at the entire exposition as a whole and thought it was beautiful, others got down into the text and appreciated the words themselves. I love that it's perceived differently by everyone, that it poses different questions depending on who is looking.

Are you trying to create a dialogue with your audience?

When I'm pondering what I want to make next, I try to only imagine forms that speak to everyone. For example, I once created a whole series of stars with ponytails of hair spilling out of them. The star is a form that carries meaning for everyone. It has a high level of symbolism and that's something I love. I also love when someone sees the work and says, "Oh, I could totally make that myself." It's perhaps a bit critical of them to say so, but my response is always, "Yes, absolutely, you could." My work is not in any way about technique; rather,

the shapes I propose are such that even a small child can understand them. On a personal level, I'm not usually impressed by things that are trying to impress me. All of these new things that are completely perfect, laser-cut and who knows what tell me very little. I love imperfections, little dings and scratches. It's the faults that make the personal-ity. You can have an immense feeling of tenderness when you see a unique object by imagining how it's been made. When I see fabricated images that are photoshopped smooth and flat, it makes me want to screw something into them to shake it up a bit. Otherwise they just leave me cold.

You said there's one thing you keep saying in your work. Is it a specific message?

The recurrent theme is creativity – it doesn't matter what kind, whether sculpture, writing, desire or eroticism. It's modern to ask the question: What is eroticism today? Where do we find it? How could a sculptor re-work the art of a writer's text or the sound of a musician? I love to tackle questions like these.

So really what you're saying is you don't have a definitive message...

There are many forms my work takes, but there are no solid answers, just propositions. It's about loving my question more than the response. I want to create dialogues about our present-day world, which I find to be represented in the everyday objects I use in my work.

Thank you so much for sharing this insight into your world with me.

Of course.

Just one last question – how do you like your eggs?
Wow, didn't see that one coming (laughs)! I would have to say hard-boiled and classic.







Opposite: Manque II / Selfportrait, magazine
and resin, 2007, courtesy of the artist

