

CARTE BLANCHE FOR OLIVIER ROLLER

27 March – 26 July 2015

GALERIE DES GOBELINS

SALON CARRÉ

42, avenue des Gobelins
75013 PARIS

Alongside the exhibition « HEARTS AND CRAFTS : Skills and traditions of the Mobilier national workshops », the Mobilier national (National Furniture Collection) gives 'Carte Blanche' to the photographer Olivier Roller, presented in the Salon Carré.

How can tapestry be reinvented? Is it possible that this art form, so long associated with the ruling powers, could stir today's viewers? That was the challenge of this new Carte Blanche project.

FROM SKILLED CRAFTSMANSHIP TO CONNOTATIONS OF POWER

This Carte Blanche goes beyond a mere photographic project. Instead Olivier Roller had the idea of **an art installation that used photographic images to highlight this traditional skill**. The images were taken from tapestries belonging to the National Furniture Collection and other institutions. The installation, **The State of the World – Tapestry as an Allegory of Power**, is made up of suspended, wave-like shapes with photographs printed on their flexible surfaces. **The viewer sees a huge discontinuous thread like those used in Gobelins tapestries.**

In this exhibition the artist is constantly exploring and reinterpreting his subject. He sees tapestry as an allegory of power, a constituent part of the edifice linked to its architecture and to the role of those who use it. In Plato's Republic, the philosopher uses weaving as a metaphor for the art of politics. For Olivier Roller, the art of politics lies in intertwining differences to produce a coherent whole but made from separate elements.



*Self-portrait with François Hollande, Self-Portrait Series – Figures of Power
© Olivier Roller*

THREAD AND PHOTOGRAPHY: WEAVING IMAGES AND IDEAS

This thread that was at the origin of his project, led Olivier Roller into France's official residences (the Elysée Palace, Hôtel de Matignon, embassies and the Mobilier national's archives) in search of **woven faces**. For many years the photographer has been concentrating on faces. He started with sculptures of ancient emperors followed by influential people of today. He sets them against historical ideas of power. Whoever he photographs, he finds their soul in their wrinkles, facial hair and the pores of their skin. He looks for the visible marks produced by weighty responsibilities. Now, with tapestry, he looks for the essence of his subject in wool or silk thread. In particular he looked at the way the weaver's hand copied from life. **By photographing these threads in close-up, he highlights this symbolism: the continuous or intermittent thread of life, producing popular stories and folk tales.** Thread has been the stuff of myths since Penelope and Ulysses. It is this double



The State of the World – Tapestry as an Allegory of Power, details © Olivier Roller

dimension, its tracing of time and its image patterns, that interests the photographer.

The installation shows images of faces printed on flexible surfaces, lit from behind thanks to technical innovation. All these image panels are exhibited in the Salon Carré of the Gobelins Gallery. The faces seem to float in the space, looking at us as much as we are looking at them, the viewer who walks around them imagining dialogues between the different faces.

The exhibition « Minds and Hands: Skills and traditions of the Mobilier national workshops » offers a look behind the scenes of an institution that serves the power of the state, and the skilled men and women who work there. By approaching the subject from the role of the weaver, **Olivier Roller's Carte Blanche seeks to show the ambivalence of power, between attractive force and human frailty.**



The State of the World – Tapestry as an Allegory of Power © Olivier Roller

CARTE BLANCHE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR :

Marc Bayard, Cultural and scientific development advisor at the Mobilier national

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BIOGRAPHY OF OLIVIER ROLLER

The first portrait Olivier Roller made was of his grandfather. This tightly framed face, devoid of any artifice, captured the only figure of paternal authority he knew at that time. It was the first time he had gone beyond the clichés of portrait making: smile, stand up straight, look nice!

He was then a student of law and political science but abandoned his studies to concentrate on portrait photography. Since 2009 he has been making a photographic mural that seeks to depict power and influence at the beginning of the 21st century through the individuals who feature in it. The portraits are a mixture of bankers, advertising leaders, intellectuals, diplomats and even Roman emperors.

These photographs show today's powerful people, the emperors of our time, compared to historical figures of power: Roman emperors, medieval rulers and royalty. It's about the stuff we're made of: from faces full of wrinkles to the broken marble statues of emperors.

For the National Furniture Collection's Carte Blanche show, Olivier Roller was interested in a third kind of material: the thread that makes up the Gobelins tapestries. Here again the photographer continued to explore material, which in these days of mass communications is constantly retouched to make it smooth and silent. For him, tapestry is an allegory of power.

EXHIBITIONS :

In 2015, Musée Réattu à Arles, *Oser la photographie : 50 ans d'une collection d'avant-garde*, 4 juillet 2015 - 3 janvier 2016. Exhibition associated at Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles.

In 2014, Musée Cognacq-Jay (Paris) : Carte blanche à Christian Lacroix ; la Créée (Rennes) ; Spazionuovo (Rome) : Figures romaines.

In 2013, Musée des Moulages (Lyon) : Figures du pouvoir I ; la Filature (Mulhouse) ; Abbaye de Montmajour (Arles), commissariat Christian Lacroix ; Musée de l'Arles antique : Rodin, la lumière de l'antique (The light of antiquity).

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