

— VALÉRIE AURIEL

Mystérieux MR. BRAINWASH

// *The Mysterious Mr. Brainwash*

Mr. Brainwash au vernissage de son exposition à la Galerie rive gauche Marcel Strouk à Paris. // *Mr. Brainwash at the opening of the exhibition at the Galerie rive gauche Marcel Strouk à Paris.*

Certains disent que c'est un imposteur, un personnage imaginé par le célèbre street artiste Banksy pour se moquer du monde de l'art vétrolé par l'argent. D'autres lui reprochent de copier, d'employer une armée d'assistants et de ne rien produire lui-même. Thierry Guetta, alias Mr. Brainwash, s'amuse des critiques. Cet artiste français, vivant à Los Angeles, détourne les images de la culture populaire avec provocation et bonne humeur. Il réplique à ses détracteurs qu'il est bien réel puisqu'il accorde des interviews, qu'il n'y a pas de règle en art, qu'il n'est donc pas interdit de copier. Et vraiment, où est le problème si d'autres mettent en forme ses idées ? Évidemment, cette sincérité fait grincer les dents. Peu importe, le succès est au rendez-vous depuis une dizaine d'années !

L'histoire de Mr. Brainwash prend sa source dans les années 2000. À l'époque, Thierry Guetta n'a pas encore trouvé son nom de scène. Il est un marchand de fripes de luxe passionné par la vidéo. Ayant découvert l'univers méconnu des artistes urbains grâce à son cousin, l'artiste Space Invader, il le filme avec admiration pendant plusieurs années. Quand il se décide enfin à monter un documentaire, celui-ci est si mauvais que Banksy lui suggère plutôt de faire de l'art. Thierry Guetta reçoit ce conseil comme un adoubement, il devient Mr. Brainwash. Il choisit ce surnom pour dénoncer le lavage de cerveau provoqué par les images et l'art en général. Pour sa première performance solo à l'été 2008, il ne fait pas les choses à moitié. Il investit un ancien studio de télévision à Hollywood. L'exposition *Life is beautiful* a pour figures de proue un robot de 6 mètres, une pyramide de

Artiste controversé, Mr. Brainwash détourne et amalgame les images de la pop culture dans un joyeux tapage. Kate Moss, Mickey Mouse, Einstein sont les héros de ses toiles à l'énergie positive. La vie est belle, telle est sa devise.

// Controversial artist Mr. Brainwash blends an amalgam of Pop culture images into joyous collages. Kate Moss, Mickey Mouse and Einstein are the heroes of his works, packed with positive energy. His motto: Life is beautiful.

// Some say he is an imposter, a character created by renowned street artist Banksy to mock an art world made rotten by money. Others accuse him of copying, of hiring an army of assistants and not actually producing anything himself. Thierry Guetta, alias Mr. Brainwash, find the critics amusing. This French artist, who lives in Los Angeles, distorts images of popular culture in provocation and good humour. He assures detractors he is very much a real person by giving interviews. He says there are no rules in art so there is no law against copying. And he asks why it should be a problem if others give shape to his ideas? Obviously, such complete honesty gets quite a few backs up. But it matters little; Mr Brainwash has a decade of success to his name now!

The story of how that came about begins in the 2000s. At the time, Thierry Guetta had not

yet found his stage name. He was running a vintage clothing store and was obsessed with filming things. After his cousin, the artist Space Invader, introduced him to the little-known world of urban artists, he spent several years filming them in admiration. When he finally decided to turn his work into a documentary, it was so bad that Banksy suggested he should try his hand at art instead. For Guetta, it was as if the advice was a knighthood and he became Mr. Brainwash. He picked the name to denounce how conditioned people are by images and art in general.

When he staged his first solo show in the summer of 2008, he didn't do things by halves. He took over an old television studio in Hollywood and the figureheads for the Life is Beautiful exhibition were a six-metre robot, a pyramid of 20,000 books and a life-size re-creation of Edward Hopper's Nighthawks.

The exhibition was such a huge success that rather than opening for the scheduled few days, was extended for two months and drew 50,000 visitors. In 2010, Mr. Brainwash repeated the feat in New York, taking over a warehouse that covered 1,500m² on several floors.

That same year, Banksy released Exit Through the Gift Shop, a documentary relating the tale of Mr. Brainwash using some of his rushes. The film, nominated for an Oscar, was the ultimate consecration for the artist! Since then, Mr. Brainwash has held numerous events around the world. June 2013 saw the first solo exhibition of his work in France, at the Marcel Strouk gallery in Paris. He showed the kind of works that have made him famous: an exploration of pop culture and acidic images.



Mr. Brainwash, Einstein, 2014, Technique mixte sur toile, 122 x 162 cm, courtesy Galerie rive gauche Marcel Strouk / Mixed media collage, 122 x 162 cm, courtesy Galerie rive gauche Marcel Strouk

