

Raphael Monticelli

Presentation text for the Max Charvolen exhibition, 8th Festival du Peu, Un peu d'infini, Bonson, July 2010

The series of original drawings exhibited is a digital achievement: the particular arrangements shown are the result of a computer program developed in 1989 by Loïc Pottier, researcher at INRIA, at the request of Max Charvolen.

The arranged elements, always the same in this series, were "noted" in 2003 on the ruins of the small temple named the Treasury of the Massaliots on the ancient site of Delphi, nearly 200 kilometers from Athens. Delphi was considered as the religious and political center of the ancient world for nearly a thousand years, until the advent of the Christian era: ancient cities constructed buildings there to store their gifts. The Marseillais built theirs in the 6th century BC.

The first originality of Max Charvolen's approach is that what he shows as a work is the result of the real covering of a real volume (here the Treasury of the Massaliots) and of the physical flattening and spreading out of this covering, with the colors used mostly to differentiate the various planes that make up the volume. Its second originality is that, at the end of the first flattening, which was carried out physically on the real site in 1/1 format, he used computer science to study other possible virtual flattenings. This second aspect of his approach produces the digital drawings.

To get an idea of the number of possible flattenings of an architecture (or of any other volume), just multiply the number of elements between each other. For a cube, multiply $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6$. For a volume with 10 elements,

$1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 \times 8 \times 9 \times 10$. For a volume of 100 $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4$ elements ... up to 100.

The Treasury of the Massaliots is made up of more than fifty elements. The number of possible flattenings is not infinite and is measurable, but is beyond our imagination and our ability to count.

Whatever the realization resulting from numerical calculation, this is very exactly the flattening of a particular volume: the two-dimensional representation of a three-dimensional object. And as in the case with a cube, it is theoretically possible to reassemble the flattened elements to reconstitute the volume of the Treasury of the Massaliots.

When carrying out his digital layouts, Max Charvolen poses the same problems as all painters and draftsmen have since prehistoric times: how to represent, in the two dimensions of painting or drawing, objects that in reality are three

dimensional. He does this with similar environments and objects: how will objects and colors unfold on a medium and the spaces we inhabit? How can we present / represent, on a support, the objects, furniture or buildings in and with which we live?

The answer we know best, that of Western painting since the Renaissance, is to give an illusion of volume in two dimensions. The most practical and useful examples of this on a daily basis are industrial design, architecture or geography, drawing up plans, using perspective and specifying dimensions. Since the end of the 1970s, Max Charvolen has chosen to work on two-dimensional representations that eliminate all illusions, using the materials and techniques of a painter and not those of an architect, photographer or industrial design, thereby revealing unexpected areas of sensitivity to our spaces and our objects.

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