

AA GALLERY.

speaking with god (& co.)

f.dallegret

Probably the most recognisable of François Dallegret's works currently on display in the AA Gallery are his intricate designs for imaginary mechanical objects. Produced in the style of engineering construction plans, his fantastical drawings are wholly believable in their flat and precise depiction of alternative realities — from rocket ships that resemble Chinese pavilions, to a series of luxury cars that manifest the automotive spirit of the astrological signs.

François Dallegret's studio (*Go Dallegret!* or *GOD & Co.* for short) have made architecture (the Drug gallery/laboratory); product design (the Kiik toy); sculpture (a machine that smokes a pack a day on your behalf); and a million other things from soap bars to a screenplay for a western. The work on display at the AA has been referred to as a 'cosmology of objects' and Fulcrum wholeheartedly recommends the exhibition as an entry point into the startling universe of M. Dallegret.

Fulcrum: You have said several times that in principle you are not political, let's say sometimes even seeming to be politically apathetic, and yet in every project there is a certain political element. For example, the first- and second-class passenger divisions within Space City Astronef 732 [an enormous rocket designed to travel a million miles, though which around its edges are tiny backward facing rockets that allow passengers to return to earth in the event they have second thoughts about going to the stars, 1963] or your large block quotes in Palais Metro [a hyper-capitalist mall development similar to, but predating, Cedric Price's Fun Palace, 1967] "revolution of the market" highlighting society's insatiable desire to consume. These elements, while often subtle are nonetheless powerful. To what extent are you really apolitical?

François Dallegret: When I say I am not political, I am referring to the traditional sense of the term: politicians, political parties, people who execute or are occupied with the duties of the state. When I speak of first-class, second-class, it is not political in this understanding of the term. It's the fact that we are a society that is highly compartmentalised. One might be outside society, or within it, or engaged to varying degrees. For me these types of *dissons* 'political ideas' are ways to generate the drawings and the forms in the drawings that supported these types of concept.

Fulcrum: It's ambiguous, your position towards, say, hyper-consumption. There's an implicit position that you critique, we see it equally in your drawing here — a project for a device where an artist is able to remotely control a gallery owner.

FD: It's not really about the controlling, it's the manner of the connection between the artist and the collector. It is to determine that the artist has some control over the collector. Normally it's the reverse, where the collector, in his world of collections, is generating the value and lineage of art.

Fulcrum: One could also see this as an anti-consumption statement. It moves against the total power of the consumer we see in your Palais Metro project.

FD: Palais Metro is slightly on the funny side — it's an exaggeration of the concept. In fact, I will tell you, I am not really serious [pulls face].

Fulcrum: That's clear. There is a French expression *pincer sans rire* ['pinch without laughing', or to poke fun with a straight face] which I find coming to me often when I look at your work.

FD: Oh yeah, I love to pinch. But I'm not laughing.

Fulcrum: I want to ask you about the poster for the toy you designed called *Kiik*. Where the two magnetic poles of the toy should be instead it is Europe and America that are polarised.

FD: This was the theme for the 1968 Aspen conference where I met

Archigram and Reyner Banham and many others. Reyner was the director of the conference, and that year Hans Hollein was there too... it was fun.

Fulcrum: In the modern post-Internet world do you think this type of polarisation still exists between the two continents?

FD: At the time it was the theme because it dealt with the provenance of the conference members. That's all. It wasn't a general statement, then or now.

Fulcrum: I want to ask you about the Machine for Producing Literature, which is an intricate diagram for a long media machine.

FD: Try to visualise its movement and it becomes alive. It's a fantasy. It's something you can generate new ideas from all the time, even as a drawing — as the author creating the drawing, as the viewer experiencing the drawing.

Fulcrum: You're talking about the process of imagining it as real while you're looking at the drawing. Even me looking now, is a creative process?

FD: Yes, it's endless. The drawing itself can be extended into endless time and space.

Fulcrum: What's interesting for me is the question of 'where the project is?' Someone asked earlier, 'have you realised any of these machines', and in fact that exposes that the person did not recognise that each drawing is a final project.

FD: The drawing might seem like an engineering drawing for a project, because it seems so real it could be made. But the drawing is the project. So I'm not interested in manufacturing it, because it is already real.

Fulcrum: Is something lost with modern technology like ipads and ipods?

FD: Yes, they are only screens, and you can't see the mechanisms. When you look at my drawings, you have to imagine how such a thing might work. It doesn't matter, whether it exists or not, or whether it would really work or not. I'm not interested in having it manufactured.

Fulcrum: So there's an endless potential to the drawing. Do you have an iphone?

FD: I have one, but I don't know how to use it. You have to, everyone has one today.

Fulcrum: In the 60s you left Paris and went to New York. Was your work received differently there?

FD: Oh yes, as I said, like day and night. I exhibited in New York, I met a lot of people. I lived in the Chelsea Hotel, it was the time of pop art, it was incredible. I met Andy Warhol for the first time in the corridor, he came up and said 'oh, François. I love you!' and I said 'well, I guess I love you too.'

Fulcrum: You also knew Yves Klein?
FD: Yeah, before in Paris. I helped him to pick up girls. We went to a bar, and I would do the talking. It was a type of artwork.

Fulcrum: How do you mean?

FD: Well, they were the tools of a piece of art... Large brushes. But I'm not telling you everything, anyway.

Fulcrum: My generation tends to idolise the 60s as golden years, was it really that great?

FD: Well, I suppose. For me it was just like all periods. But one can say it was sort of golden. The things I did I couldn't do today, and I wouldn't want to do them today. Of course some things are even easier now. It took me 7 days between Le Havre and New York by ship back then, and I was sick all the way.

Fulcrum: What class did you travel?

FD: Regular class, I am a regular man after all. But it wouldn't have mattered what class I travelled, I would have been sick all the same. Do you see what I am saying?

Fulcrum: Final question, one for GOD. What is the meaning of life?

FD: Hmm. That's a good question. I like you for asking it. But I would have to think for some time. [after a pause, shows his iphone] I send you a mail about it.

François Dallegret is a Montréal-based French designer and visionary. Interview by Jack Self & Shumi Bose.

ANATOMY OF A DWELLING

With very little exaggeration, this baroque ensemble of domestic gadgetry epitomizes the intestinal complexity of gracious living—in other words, this is the junk that keeps the pad swinging. The house itself has been omitted from the drawing, but if mechanical services continue to accumulate at this rate it may be possible to omit the house in fact.

