

Curtain

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 **Curtain** *The Art Curator Grid Magazine*

Par Cristina Sanchez-Kozyreva

Laurent Montaron at the Third Edition of Gabes Cinema Fen, in Tunisia

Artist-Curator — June 23, 2021

Curating as A Way to Open Space for Imagination



Laurent Montaron

Independent curator

Saulchery and Paris, France

Biography:

Laurent Montaron (1972, Verneuil d'Avre et d'Iton, France) lives and works in Paris and Saulchery. His work has been exhibited in significant international exhibitions such as : the 19th Biennale of Sydney; the 55th Venice Biennale; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Centre Pompidou, Paris and *Performa 11*, New York. Recent key solo exhibitions include: *REPLICA*, Center of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israël in 2018; *Dioramas*, Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris, France in 2016-17; *EPPUR SI MUOVE*, MUDAM, Luxembourg, Luxembourg in 2015, *Everything Is Accidental*, Mercer Union, Toronto, Canada ; *Le origini del film*, Palazzo Grassi | Francois Pinault Foundation, Venice, Italy ; *Everything we see could be something else*, Monitor, Rome, Italy, all in 2014; *PACE*, Kunsthau Baselland, Basel, Switzerland in 2010; Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne; FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims, France in 2009 and *Kunstvere* in Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany in 2008.

Artist, curator, and educator, Laurent Montaron

I have a theory about my first art memories. When I was 12 or 13, as I was entering teenagehood, very naturally, I went from playing with small soldiers and Playmobil toys, to art. Playing took a large place in my mind—a place of imagination. But at this age you lose the ability for playing, yet it can be replaced by art making, which is something you could do as an adult. Me, I started drawing.

The connection between making art and curating is more about what I can explore conceptually through curating. For *El Kazma, in Gabes*, it was the idea of immateriality, which is present in my work, but perhaps it's not something that I want to do more of myself. But then, I can explore it through curating the works of others, through a group of works. It's a way for me to relax the imagination and explore different directions.

Like everything else I do, curating *El Kazma* on Gabes's Corniche came quite naturally. It's almost a political point of view to only invite people you have already met. It doesn't start from a theme, and then you choose works. Instead, you meet people and consider their works as a whole. By connecting these artists to each other you create narratives that make the exhibition. I met Fatma Kilani, collector, founder of the non-profit contemporary art organisation *La Boîte in Tunis*, and one of the organisers of *Gabes Cinema Fen*, through a friend of mine, artist *Ismail Bahri*. We talked about a programme I had in mind and the relationship between the works, based on idea associations and human connections. That's how it happened.

Cinema is not the only way to make films. There is another history of film that isn't cinema, and I am more into that. I began doing super8 films first, and quite quickly I had the opportunity to use a video camera, around 1991-92. This was the early stages of video technology and the quality was quite bad. I did some videos until 2000. Thing is, it took about 25 years to have the same quality with a camera as we had with 16mm. So I was always wondering why do we even use it? Art videos grew with this technology, and it was as bad as the technology. Video was also a consumer thing, they wanted to sell to everyone the opportunity to film what's going on in their lives. So I quickly choose to go into film. I prefer to describe my work as film rather than video, I think it has to do with my generation.

Also about the difference between film and video, I am thinking of Philippe Alain Michaud and the ideas he develops in his book, "Sur Le Film". The mother history of film is that you have film first, then experimental film, then cinema. Cinema is its own category, a commercial way to build films (all made with similar structure and format to fit this category). You can compare it to writing, like the difference between writing novels, poems, writing to someone etc. Art video is like the cheap category of art, the opposite of well made, you make it easily and I don't think it should be as easy. [Also, Michaud gave a talk during *Gabes Cinema Fen*]



Artist [Nawal El Mediri](#), artist and curator [Laurent Montaron](#), artist [Anaëlle Vanel](#), Gabes Cinema Fen, June 2021.

The Irmavep Club. I became friends with Laurent Giangola when he bought the house of a famous 1920s artist, Musidora, next to my parents' place. She was a provocative actress who interpreted Irma Vep in, *Les Vampires*, by Louis Feuillade, a French silent crime serial film. In her garden she had built a theatre, orientally inspired, and in it, we decided to make an art centre. We had exhibitions there for more than ten years, from 2007 to 2017. We had one solo show per year, and various groups shows. We wanted to mix the French and international scene, and mix generations, young artists with older ones, perhaps forgotten ones. So it all just started from us having conversations.

Taking the time. We also did exhibitions in museums and galleries. One of them was for [Artissima](#) who invited many different art centres for a parallel programme to the fair. We did something in the Archivio di Stato di Torino—the Turin state archives—which has a fantastic architecture. We met a guy there who became the guide of the exhibition. People had to wait, it was the complete opposite of what a fair is like. We only had four artists in the building, including one film by Daniel Gustav Kramer, who is also showing here in Gabes, and different other sculpture works, and one performance. But you had to wait for the guide, people were crazy because you had to wait for 30 min. They really enjoyed it though when they went on the tour, it lasted more than an hour and the guide talked about stories he completely invented. It was all about imagination and narration, a totally different point of view on art, different from focusing on objects, more like something that supported imagination, creating a space for stories in people's mind.



Film / Contemporary Art. I don't want to use clichés but let's say that there are a lot of bad things in contemporary art, however one good thing is that most of the artists are very open. They are interested in many different fields, lecture, poetry, experimental music, jazz, I don't know, but it's quite large. And they are all interested in cinema. But I don't feel as if it's the case in other fields, I don't think that in cinema they are really open to contemporary artists who use film. Their first question would be: Did you think of doing a feature film? But those artists actually do films. For example, Anaëlle Vanel did her film, *The Beginnings*, in Super 8mm as people did them more than fifty years ago—from A to Z, filming, developing, everything. As you see the work, you experience film as a medium, not just diving into the story, but you are facing the film. It has the idea of narrative, but you have also the experience of the materiality of film. Same for, *Cine-scope*, by Alexander Gutke, it's a white film, just with stripes crossing over the screen and dirt on the film, but at some point you are going forward into / inside it.

galerie

ANNE - SARAH BÉNICHOU

I read the same books all the time. I am a complete amateur but I read more philosophy and poetry than novels. Books by Marshall McLuhan for example, he's really important for me. He was really into theory but he's also an artist, he's mixing different approaches, he talks about global village and things like this.

For fun I build houses and I do drumming. I like to build things from scratch. It's also something you could feel in my work, because I like this idea to be connected to the world through an experience. One thing in modern times is that you are disconnected from the tools you are using. For instance, you don't know how the motor of your car works but you are using it everyday. I think it's as important to understand how a tree is growing or how to build a room.

I like music a lot, live music especially. I like contemporary music, minimal music, for example György Ligeti. I like jazz. But there is much more, my taste is quite eclectic.



El Kazma, curated by Laurent Montaron, La Corniche, Gabes, Tunisia, June 2021.

At *El Kazma*, the containers are already there for each year's edition. I thought that with all this repetition of containers there could be a way to have a reading or a story, but one that could read from whatever container you start from. Also at the Agora in town, where many of the festival films are projected, we are showing pieces made in 16mm. These are close to cinema, and make people think about art video and film, comparing each practice. For example we are showing *Daria Martin's* film, *Sensorium Tests*, which is typical of the 16mm film English scene. It's a narrative of 15 min, that looks like it was made in the 1970s, but it's looped, so you go in whenever you want, that's a different approach from cinema. I don't know how those people from the 'church of cinema' understand it, I think it's interesting that it's really close to their field, yet very far.

It's true that I create atmospheres in my work, and perhaps also in my curatorial work. And I feel that the films that are shown in the containers, near the ocean, many of them are contemplative. What I like is that it works with anyone. There are no specific category of viewers. These films have different layers of reading, you could just experience them without any knowledge or interpretation.

If I wasn't curating, perhaps I would write but writing is challenging for me. I like the way thinking is made through curation, it's wavy and soft, and involves talks.

Gabes Cinema Fen will be online from July 2d, 2021

Cristina Sanchez-Kozyreva

Art critic and writer.