

# Interview

Bernadette Wegenstein

## 1. What is an object in your opinion?

For me, an object is an extension of the subject. A sort of coordinated coming together and subordination. For me, everything is a prothesis on which we have become dependent. I believe that our dependency on objects has made us just as superpowered as it has made us handicapped. For example, we presently don't know what to do without a roof, a bed, chairs, tables, drinking glasses, microwaves, etc.

## 1.bis. And when did you first discover something like an "object"?



*Florence reaching for her bottle*

My first object was probably a bottle, since my mother did not breastfeed me. It wasn't very common to breastfeed in the 70s, and her doctor advised her not to. A bottle certainly is not the same as a breast, but it has other advantages: it permitted me to eat while walking around outside as soon as I was big enough and thus allowed me to avoid eating meals at the dinner table, which didn't always end well for me. I insisted on having a bottle until I was eight, with porridge in it. I'd go out to catch crickets with one hand and hold my bottle in the other. I always loved to do two things at once.

**2. You like to repurpose common objects and displace them from their origins such as family, religion into other realms. For instance, the *Menorah* or the *Balloons*. Can you tell us about these processes?**

Displacing codes is a liberty that I take that better allows me to talk about what we really are. These balls are ambiguous objects since they're both playful objects and therapeutic, allowing me to propose new and surprising uses which, thanks to their bouncy nature, bring out the buried child in all of us, sometimes even the foolishness that's sleeping in us. I then mix these effects with the effects of experiencing a sudden and random coexistence with a stranger.



Adada, 'Regressive' sitting collective

**3. In your work we see a lot of "functional ambiguity" of objects. What is ambiguity for you and why is it important?**

For me, the physiological experiences that my work induces suffice in themselves to shift our behavior in order to reveal our limits and frustrations that are the condition of our habits of politeness. It's perhaps through this that what some have called my "contagious freedom" is expressed.

Essentially, I have a profound need to express my behavioral analyses, or even critiques, with objects. That's what I like to call my "soft critique of functionalism."

**4. What is light for you? A lot of your installations are made with lamps and special lights. For instance, *Satellite's dream*. Can you talk about this a bit?**

I'm fascinated by the variable psychological effects that light can have on individuals. In addition, the presence of a lamp that is turned off is still a pretext for open-ended formal interpretation. Therefore, I propose unclear, deformed, strange, and sometimes bothersome shapes and forms; it's as if that could rebalance the narrative of taste that's developed during our civilization's period of economic crisis. I put disorder in the middle of a context that is supposed to be well-organized, because this image seems more legitimate to me.

**4. bis. You love nature and flowers I think. What do flowers represent for you? *Sonnellino* is a bouquet of roses created by Louis de Funes. How did you come to doing this?**

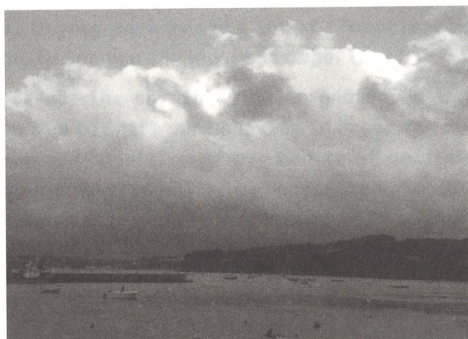
Yes, I love flowers and nature. I have a contemplative nature and I grew up in the countryside, where seasonal flowers with strong fragrances appeared, and this marked my childhood. The series *Professor Tournesol*, *Professor Anthurium*, and *Professor de Funès* is a limited series of multiples, dedicated to the decline of nature. Flowing mud invades the surface of a bouquet while a synthesis of all of the flowers' colors flow in a puddle. The materials are inversed. I show dead nature literally and figuratively. It's a game, but also an observation, a warning, a dramatic story driven by the effects of capillarity.

4. **ter.** You also like gardens and garden architecture/sculptures (*Professor Tournesol*, etc.). How did you come to make these? Do you have any artistic ideals or artists whose work you follow for these types of installations?



*The Garden of the communal space for exchanging 'techno-playful' knowledge, under-construction*

Nature revives me immensely. Nature was central to my entire childhood and it often comes back to me, not just as a source of inspiration but as a vital need. So, I do everything possible to be close to it. Urban life, asphalt and pollution no longer suit me. And this is a global and social phenomenon. So, I talk about it via objects. I don't have any precise references that I use, I invent my own playing fields and I share them.



*Douarnenez Bay, living space*

5. **You are fascinated by the placebo effect? Why? Do you think that one's beliefs or convictions have healing powers?**

Medical science has proven that the placebo effect has healing powers, but I play with other powers that I call "our hormonal factories." Merely seeing certain scenes, shapes, colors triggers the production of specific hormones. I have fun manipulating that; but in a very honest and positive manner. *Ventilator* is a silk curtain that gently and sensuously blows in the wind made by two fans. This evokes vacation and oxygenizing space. But that's actually false, the visual presence of the fans says it clearly. Nonetheless, our bodies still produce happiness hormones: the Pavlov Effect.

6. **In your work you like to create "pleasurable sensations" such as "relaxation". Why is that so? Do you have memories of the sensations of relaxing or being calm and relaxed in your childhood you want to recreate? Or from other periods in your life?**

Our civilization is suffering from a race against time. I'm a sponge, and I absorb this suffering. Therefore, my propositions are relative to this societal tension that is eating us from the inside out. The pressure of time. Making life into a countdown. It's atrocious. "Art is that which makes life more interesting than art". This quote from Robert Filliou is perhaps what best translates what artists make for themselves and for others. We're slaves to ourselves and to society. For some time now, I walk barefoot in the forest. But I also live on the seaside. It's very powerful.

7. **You like your interlocutors to relax or take a break by engaging with the objects you create. Why do you think a break and relaxation is so important? Is it something cultural for you? For instance, is it part of being from a Latin country?**

Naps, the horizontal break allows you to catch your breath, slow down, and reconnect with yourself; that's why it's very important. Without it, your motor will get carried away, and you'll no longer be able to steer it. We put up with ourselves, I'm a specialist of that! Yes, it's cultural, but mostly climatic. When you live in a hot country, you're forced to slow down. Or, you live with AC to stay cool and active.

**8. You say you want to awaken the dormant child in your viewers/interlocutors. Why is that? Who is that dormant child in your opinion?**

The dormant child in us is a sort leftover that we all more or less keep. When an adult lets loose, he or she often becomes very childish. He/she accepts appearing very joyous or even idiotic. I like that a lot. So, I provoke this state with installation; I trap it with hidden effects, like the balls in *Adada*. The adult sits down, feels that it bounces, starts to play, and starts to share his or her joyous state with strangers. It's very simple and inexorable. I allow the adult to let loose when he/she was thinking that they were consuming art or design. The adult is the sculpture, the nail of the installation. In general, visitors are very happy to be able to touch, sit down, and have fun. Sometimes, they don't dare to do it because it's usually so forbidden. However, I kind of sacrifice the pieces I make because afterwards they're sometimes very used and damaged. It's the price you pay. But I'm making them more and more resistant.

**9. You described humans as a "chemical factory"? Can you expand on that and how it relates to your objects?**

Our emotions function with the release of specific hormones. Certain elements provoke these releases. I sometimes manipulate these elements, but always with good intentions.



Florence, Lili, and Sophie dressed up as Dalmatians.

**10. You are fascinated with sleep and hypnosis as we see in such works as *mudac Tac Tic* and also your latest *Maxidreams*. What is it that fascinates you about sleep?**

Laying down, sleeping, and then dreaming brings you closer to less controlled, and therefore freer visions. That's what I encourage people to experience; when your conscience is no longer holding you back, you play around with various aspects of daily life by getting rid of the pressures or by making them even bigger as in a nightmare. These visions reveal a lot about your desires.

The hypnotic state of half-sleep provoked in *Tac Tic* allows you to remember what you saw on the screen for a longer time.

My latest project *Maxidreams* is the creation of an international community of dreamers that proposes constructing beds in nature under tree canopies and creating a network of participants. This project combines science, psychology, art, nature... the brain fascinates me.

(Editor's note: see *Maxidreams* page 149)



*Maxidreams*, the first bed installed in Gabriac forest, in the Cévennes.