

From Rio to Paris, JR's interactive art, between action and exchange

by Tatyana Franck



JR *Women are Heroes* Paris/ © Martine Franck (Magnum)

If you happen to find yourself waiting for a train at the Gare de Lyon, until November 2, you will be able to admire one along the quay on the Ile Saint-Louis. Side by side, on the Louis-Philippe Bridge, gigantic black eyes scrutinize. Directly in front of Notre-Dame, the elongated, anamorphic body of an African women stretches.

Is JR a revolutionary? Yes, a velvet revolution, or perhaps paper. This train, those eyes and that body are photographs 5 meters high each (which comes to 3 stories of scaffolding, we speak from experience...) along several kilometers within the city: an open air exhibit, an artistic hold-up.

In fact, even if journalists are startled out of their sleep, the show on the Ile Saint Louis is not an introduction but the fireworks, the grand finale of a project several years in the making entitled "Women are heroes," lead, trumpets blaring, by a 26 year old artist. This artist photographed the adventures of less "ordinary" than "extraordinary" in many countries rife with civil war or just coming out of internal conflict (Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Brazil...).

JR's actions aim to elicit an edgier view, different from that portrayed by the media. Informed by the radio, once all the journalists have rushed off to some new center of news, JR, a different type of reporter, begins a quest for first-hand accounts and images in the areas that are no longer of interest to the radio reporters or journalists. He goes where ever there is a story and where there is History, but in which there is no place to commemorate it, where the inhabitants survive and cohabitate with the combatants. After death's passage, he goes to immortalize life's smile and to pay homage to those who survived the wave of hatred, violence, war, those who lived to continue the everyday struggle of life.

The first phase of this interactive art-form adopted by JR must come into contact with the everyday life of the local population with whom he shares his positive energy (creativity, conviviality, pride) as well as his negative emotions (stress, work, fatigue). It is these relationships that nurture the projects.

It is in this way that, in the oldest favela in Rio, caught between two avenging rival groups, the first phase was to take portrait photos of the women who had survived the assassination of a son, husband or brother. Emotive and unique, these portraits focused on the eyes. As Paul Claudel once said "some eyes were meant to receive light, while others were meant to emit it." The eyes in JR's portraits radiate light even though they have passed through the darkness. Among the stories he collected (such as Rosiette's, which was on display when the exhibit opened in Paris, and who was able to look herself in the eye along the quay on the Ile Saint-Louis), the first were always those told by women (the mother, best friend and grandmother of one of the victims) who were related to or involved with the young Brazilians killed while the police turned the other cheek.



Favela "Morro da Providencia", Rio de Janeiro. 28 millimètres projet : Women / © JR

The second phase of this interactive art-form adopted by JR is the absolute size of his exhibits. At this point, JR's originality is thanks to, among other things, the fact that he must work with countless volunteers and benevolent groups who, if you can imagine, have to glue printed paper measuring 5 x 1 meters over walls spanning 7 kilometers! Twelve days of gluing along with some sixty volunteers were necessary to complete the Parisian project.

Previously, in Kenya, HR was able to use the entirety of the exterior facades (all of them, including roofs!) of the cars of a local train which traversed the country from one end to the other and which made its way through Nairobi. Covered as such, this train, the symbol of the country, made the artist's immense vinyl photos (which could be seen on Google Earth) travel the country over – before they were removed and reused as sealants for the roofs of local inhabitants.



28 Millimeter project : Women in Kibera shanty town - Kenya. January 2009/ © JR

The images travel but not necessarily with the correct message. This is why JR takes the time to set up the expositions through which he explains the entire process.

This is exactly how the exhibit *Women are Heroes*, which is being displayed in Ile Saint-Louis (where the story of the lives of the photographed women is available through an audioguide by dialing 028 55 200 89) is portrayed. The exhibit extends to the Pavillon de l' Arsenal where the artist has brought the oldest wooden house in the favela being shown as a historic monument (a way to appreciate the rustic architecture made from a few sheets of corrugated metal).

While we wait for the self entitled film's release on the big screen in 2010, this exhibit-phenomenon is the perfect occasion to discover and to confront the tales from these women, "who are heroes".

We would like to point out that JR's projects, the objective of which is neither political nor commercial – the Paris exhibit was not only free but also run by volunteers without any grants or other state assistance!!! – are always financed by himself (through the sale of photographs,

books, lithography).

JR does not consider himself as an involved artist for hire. He who says “it is through action that one demonstrates interest in the work” is an “involved artist.” His goal is to make those whom the media has forgotten visible once again, to allow other anonymous people to share in their stories and to use such for his artist expression.

For more information please visit : www.womenareheroes-paris.net
(<http://www.womenareheroes-paris.net>)

Ile Saint-Louis Exposition (October 3 until November 2) open everyday 24 hours a day

The display sites may be found :

Pont Louis-Philippe, with the current

Pont Marie, with the current

Quai de Bourbon, from n°1 to n°55

All along the Quay d’Orléans

Quay d’Anjou, from n°3 until the end

Hôtel de Lausun, 17 Quay d’Anjou

1/5, Quay des Célestins (Maison des Quais), façade facing the Seine.

Exposition Pavillon de l’Arsenal (October 3 to 23, 2009) :

21, boulevard Morland – 75004 Paris

Métro Sully-Morland or Bastille (metro lines 1-5-7-8) and Autobus 87, 86, 67

Open from Tuesday until Saturday, from 10h30 to 18h30 and Sunday from 11h until 19h

Free admittance

<http://artyparade.com/en/news/9>