



Vanguard Gallery

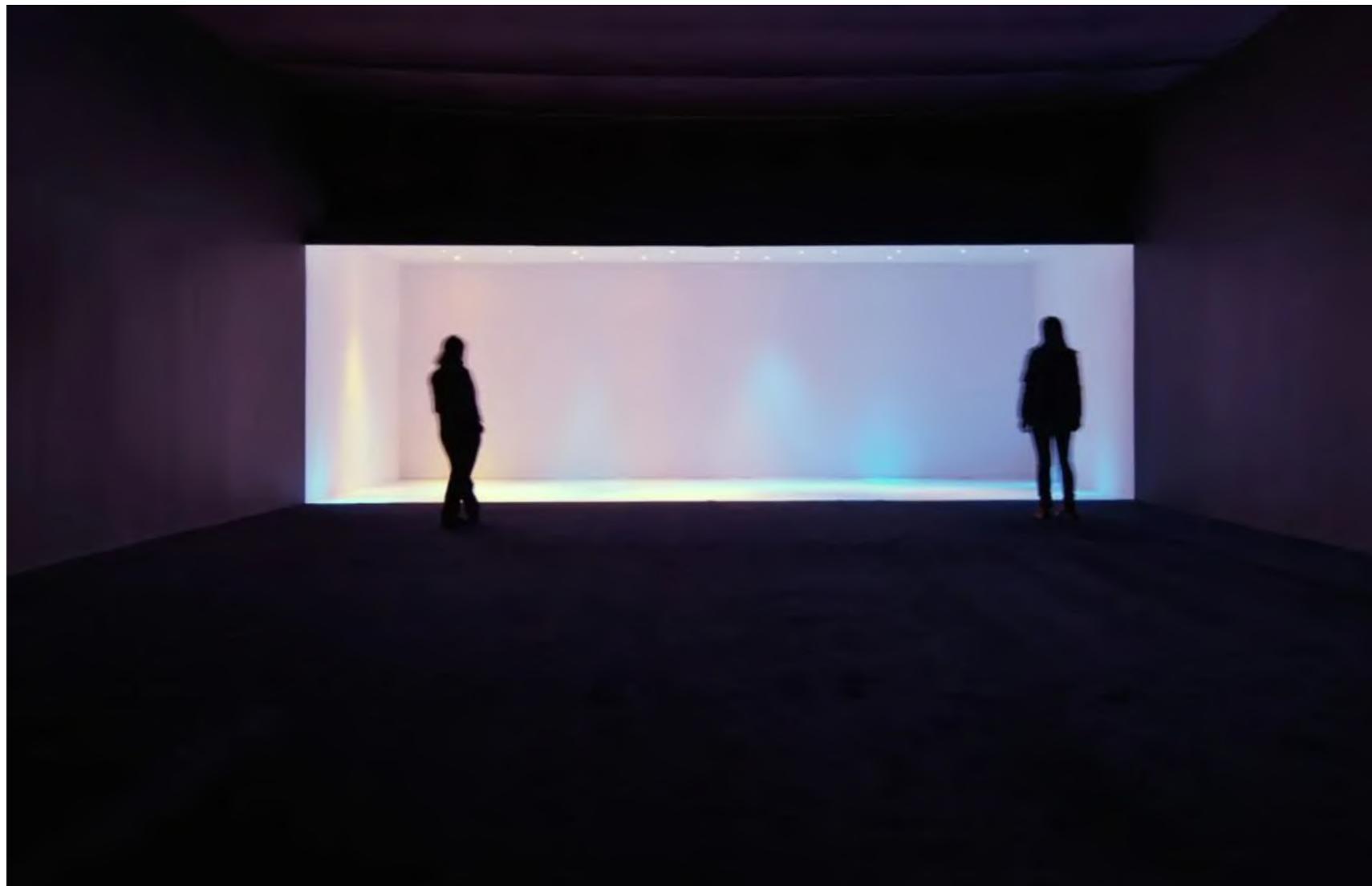
Vanguard
Gallery

Gabriel Lester

< B.1972 >

Gabriel Lester's works expand across various disciplines including music, cinema, installation, sculpture, architecture and performance. Many of his works evolve around the very nature of the media of our time, and transform the space and time through meticulously altering the media and narrative forms. Strongly influenced by cinema and mime, Gabriel Lester's works challenge the reality of perception and stimulate on collective imagination through constructing and creating theatrical illusions. Vanguard Gallery is pleased to review Lester's works in two posts. The current one aims to present the artist's works related to the theme of space and environment.





How to Act (1999, 2014)

Between fifty and one hundred halogen lights, light filters, mdf, wooden beams, MIDI controller, audio sequence program

"How to Act" is a precise and methodical installation of colored lights, edited onto a selection of sounds, music, and melodies. The departure point for the project is the premise that the light generated by a projected film or TV-program (not the images themselves), combined with a soundtrack and related noises will create a suggestive film experience for the spectator—a mental moving picture, as it were.

“ Gabriel Lester has embraced his history in the performing arts and reconceptualized the role of the artist as “scenographer.” The role of a scenographer, vis-á-vis the artist, is to manipulate the performance environment, which he or she approaches holistically; the physical construction of an environment is likewise considered of equal importance to the construction and reception of meaning. In scenographic, or experiential artworks, the audience is integral to the activation, reception, and the completion of the artwork. As a scenographer, Lester conceives of his works as temporal, cinematic experiences. Although they always have a strong aesthetic component, he is never just creating an artwork but is instead conferring with his audience about a narrative experience. ”

—Lee Ambrozy

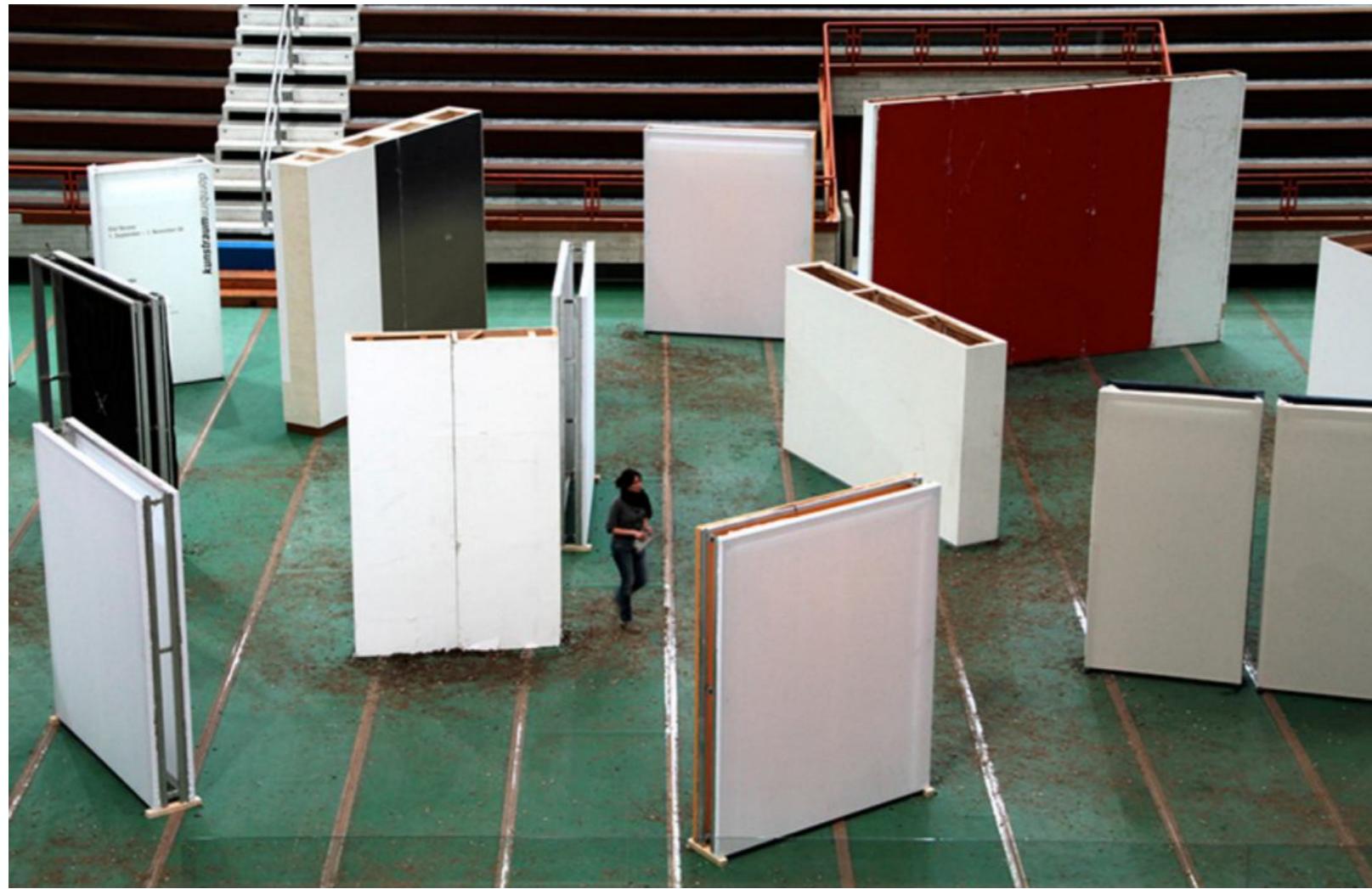




Transition

EPS foam, Polyurea coating, spray concrete, paint, 2012

"Transition" borrows its title from a cinema term, indicating a technique of film editing by which scenes or shots are connected. In general, transitions are used to express tone or mood, suggest the passage of time, juxtapose two or more scenes, or separate parts of the narrative. Passing through this tunnel sculpture also proposes a theatrical act, where one either leaves from, or appears on, stage.



Cousins (2013)

Forty-three walls and panels on loan from various European museums and institutes

Lithuanian and Cyprus Pavilions of the 55th Venice Biennale

"Cousins" consists of 42 walls and wall panels, donated or provided on loan from various art museums and institutions from around the European Union. The walls were installed on the main pitch of an indoor sports arena in Venice. The visitors observing the work become actors intrinsic to its actualization. Arranged as both maze and stage—people interact with one another and the artwork. The work mimics the modality of film but consists instead of edits within space, deliberately creating a *mise-en-scène*, to guide the observer's sight, and make visible unexpected views.



***Melancholia in Arcadia* (2011)**
Lace curtains, textile hardener

The work was dedicated to memorizing a dear friend who passed away. The title of the work is identical to a series of photographs Huseyin shot in Odessa, showing curtains blowing in the wind. These images inspired an installation of stiffened lace curtains, frozen in time and space.



Anyang Scope (2007)

Steel, wood, mirror, plexiglass, paint



Anyang Scope (2007)

Steel, wood, mirror, plexiglass, paint

Two permanent periscope sculptures were installed on a promenade in Anyang, a satellite city of Seoul, South Korea. The periscopes, which also function as public furniture, frame views of the surrounding city. Directing the gaze of the viewer toward a number of local scenes, the perioscopes create a sense of cinematic drama, as the city's activity transforms, appears in, and disappears from each frame.

The second element in Lester's lexicon is meticulous design, including that of architectural and material aspects. Similar to Dutch design, Lester's aesthetic sensibilities are always pragmatically simple, unembellished, and, in a sense, are striving for universality.





Sifang Museum, Nanjing, China

***Big Bang Pang* (2013)**

Translucent polyester panels, wood,
lights

A site-specific installation at the Sifang Art Museum in Nanjing, China, "Big Bang Pang" is made of the same materials as the cladding of the outside of the museum. The installation utilizes forced perspective suggesting a depth of volume larger than its distance in space.



Exhibited at CAFA Biennale, Beijing, China

Sleepwalk (2014)
Wood, metal, paint

A site-specific installation at the Sifang Art Museum in Nanjing, China, "Big Bang Pang" is made of the same materials as the cladding of the outside of the museum. The installation utilizes forced perspective suggesting a depth of volume larger than its distance in space.

Pots Trauma (2018)

High precision photosensitive resin
3D printing, spray

"Pots Trauma" consists of five tumbled over houseplants, that nevertheless seem to have grown towards the sunlight. The composition refers to the phenomenon of 'tropism', in which an organism evolves according to the circumstances in which it must survive.

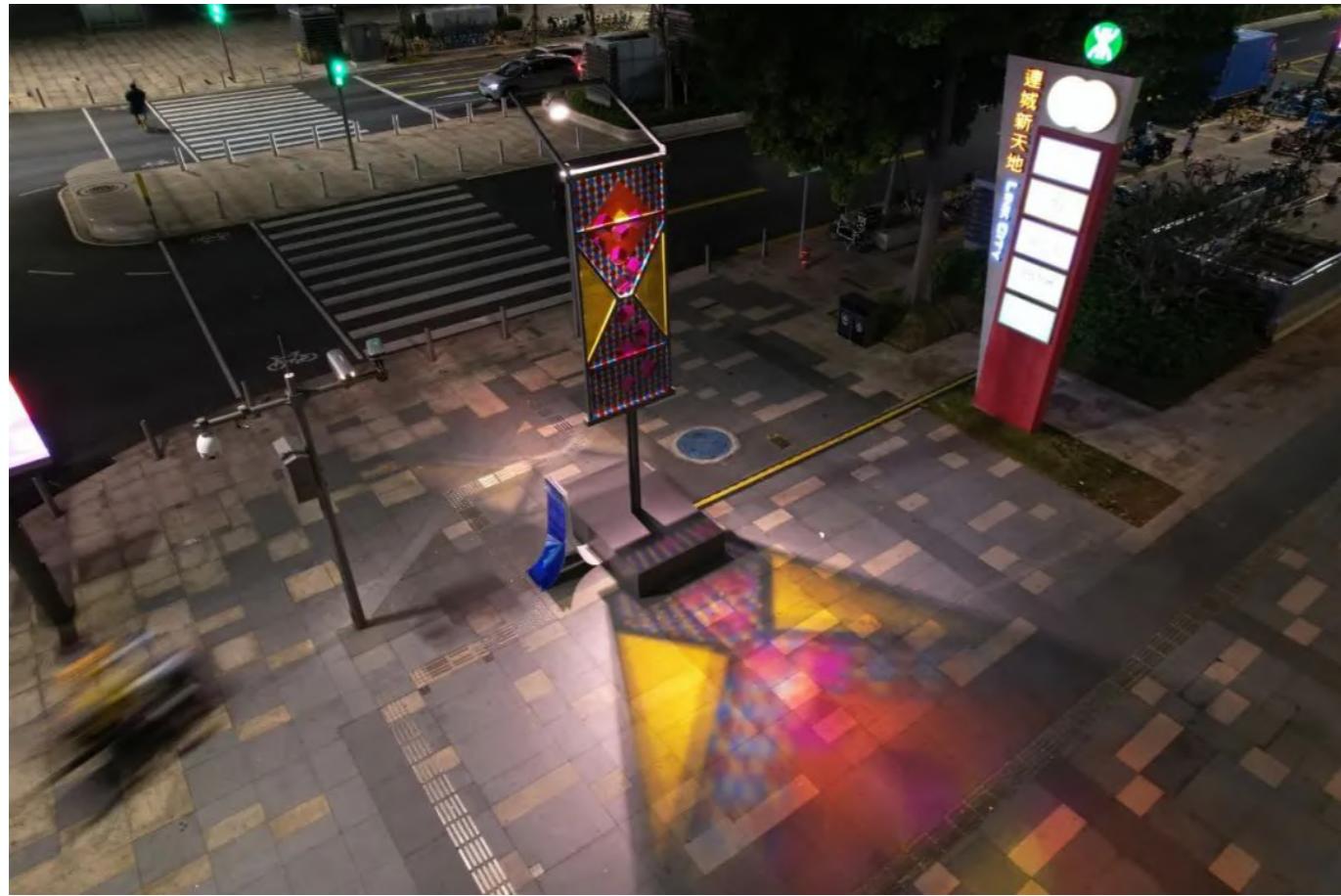




The Peel (2022)

Wood, paint

A site-specific installation at the Sifang Art Museum in Nanjing, China, "Big Bang Pang" is made of the same materials as the cladding of the outside of the museum. The installation utilizes forced perspective suggesting a depth of volume larger than its distance in space.



A Leap in Time (2022)
Stained glass, metal, light

"A Leap in Time" proposes two individual stained glass window sculptures that project a carpet of color and image onto the pavement. The two windows of a Leap in Time both contain the representation of an hourglass. Inside sand drops through a small hole in the middle. The time that it takes to drop from above to below, is the time the hourglass measures. An hourglass thus is typically an object or symbol that contains a precise span or a certain duration of time. When turned upside-down, that same time is repeated. The two windows of "A Leap in Time" propose both perspectives: the upward moving time and a downward moving time. Additionally, its visual design also proposes a time portal. As part of the representation of the hourglass, is another dimension, or a door to another space and time. Here the hourglass becomes a definition of linear time and that of a parallel universe. The projection of the glass window onto the pavement depicts a colorful carpet representing reoccurring time and travel through time and through various dimensions.

A symptom of Lester's own musical training, aural appreciation is a significant component in some of his works. Here, sound is critical to "seeing" and experiencing.



Kaufhaus Incidentals
(2012)
a collection of silent movie
soundtracks

Exhibited at dOCUMENTA 13

Created for dOCUMENTA 13 in Kassel, "Kaufhaus Incidentals" takes the form of a sound installation that was placed in a shopping mall in Kassel. Lester selected a selection of silent film tracks from the Amsterdam Film Museum and the MoMA archives that are archived as "Reflections", which are often used in silent films to show actors meditating, plotting or daydreaming.





The Electrified Line (2014)

Bamboo, tulip tree, metal scaffolding, wood, paint, lights, wind chimes

"The Electric Line" reactivates the obsolete, former Oriental Express train track. Leading to a seaside ferry station, this urban terrace made of Chinese bamboo offers a view across the harbour. For this work, parts of the bamboo are cut to become wind chimes, providing the site with an instant, soothing soundtrack. At night The Electric Line lights up, pulsing with electricity, much like a sound-wave, and simultaneously illuminated the harbour.



Vayu-Vata (2013)
Wood, metal, strings

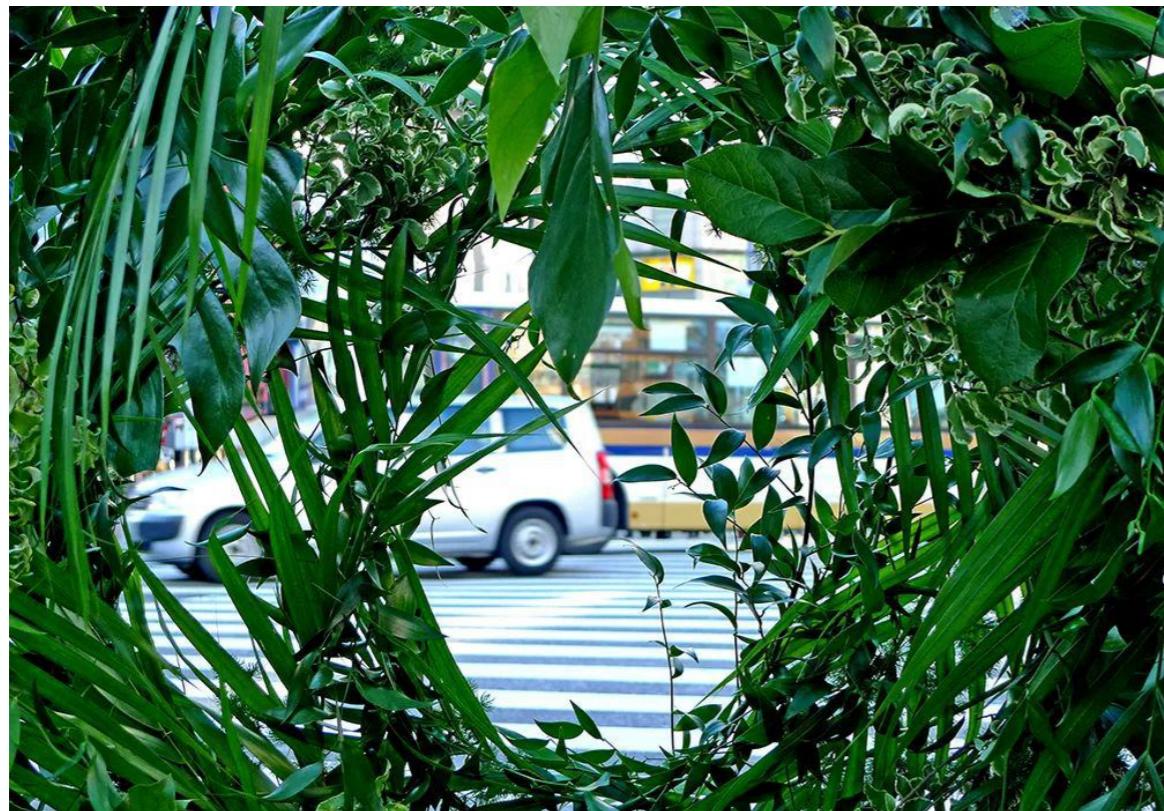
"Vayu-Vata" consists of four Aeolian harps, which borrow their name from two Indo-Iranian words that, when combined, can mean either wind & atmosphere, or space & time. The Vayu-Vata harps are played by the wind and provide a harmonic composition of sound.



The Secret Life of Cities
(2013)

HD video, surround sound, dual channel projection, seven C-prints

In "The Secret Life of Cities", the moving images, dominated by archetypal urban green, share a hidden perspective. In the foreground — almost tangible — leaves, branches, needles and blossoms from screens, in a hyperrealistic sharpness. The green functions like a screen, vegetation like a closed curtain. Sometimes as soft as a veil and translucent in a sensual way, other times almost impenetrable, like an all-concealing camouflage cloth. The image immediately evokes associations with the Dutch word 'schaamgroen' (ashamed green), a technical term from the 1970s, which urbanists and planners used to describe the greenery that served, in particular, to conceal undesirable landscape developments. Despite its tidy dullness, this semi-public greenery, thanks to its concealing ability, proved to form a huge attraction for urban deviants (think of junkies, loitering youth, flashers, and tramps), quickly lending a touch of menace to the seemingly innocuous term.



Espace (2013)

Inkjet print, 120 × 180 cm



Hiding in Plain Sight (2013)

Inkjet print, 60 × 40 cm

My work always comes down to the idea of composition. I started composing music at a very young age, then I started writing and finally I studied cinema at film school. Even when I make work now, I always return to this process of sequencing things, editing things and creating narrative compositions.

The area between where we understand what's going on and something that is beyond our understanding is where I like to work. When something is at once magic and recognizable, the spectator becomes aware of his or her cognitive codes and conditions.



Samsara (2018)
Video, 11'10"

"Samsara" continues Gabriel Lester's longstanding fascination with the concepts of cyclical time, destiny and faith. A stuntman finds himself realising he has lived his life endless of times before. Meanwhile, on another plane of existence, in what could either be a parallel world or two of the stuntman's incarnations, a crow and a bus driver travel through an endless night. They exist in an intermediate state between death and resurrection, and appear like a black hole, absorbing both time and space. Samsara's main arena is a so-called 'Wall of Death', a large wooden cylinder whereupon cars and motorcycles defy the laws of gravity by driving vertically along a steep wall. Through this visual metaphor the notion of eternal recurrence is envisioned.



The Last Smoking Flight

RED to HD video, 23'44", 2008
RED to 16mm, 09'32", 2010

A triptych in sequence composed of clouds, an airplane interior, and smoke. The film depicts a group of passengers in a small airplane, trapped in both time and space, on the way from nowhere and on the way to nowhere. This work is both a tribute and a lament to a highly potent and versatile symbolism of smoke and smoking in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while simultaneously also a meditation on the ephemeral: the way life and ideas eventually pass and fade away. The passengers are seen wrapped up in thought, lost as much in their imagination as the airplane is in time and space.



The Big One (2011)

R3D files transferred to HD video ,
12'36"

The film follows the logic of a narrative drama, but without proposing an explicit plot or distinctly identified characters. The movie depicts the grand spectacle of a lottery drawing, in which a group of people partakes in a ritual meant to tempt fate. The mysterious characters proceed through the various stages of the ceremony, as both spectators and participants observe and imagine destiny unfolding. Underscoring both the human desire for change, fortune and (cosmic) justice, as well as the gaze inward and a degree of self-realization, the characters in the film seem to undergo an inner search, looking for what they imagine would happen should life take a sudden turn.



Seen (2006)

6-channel video-loop

The projected scenes of "Seen" are six interior environments where groups of people observe something that is out of sight, hidden behind a wall. This juxtaposition—created by watching a projected environment inhabited by people who, in turn, appear to be watching something out of view—provokes the sensation of the observer being observed, and consequently a heightened awareness of one's active and inverted role as spectator—as though watching an image that is quite literally looking back at you.



All Wrong (2005)
Video, 18'26"



All Right (2006)
Video, 15'07"

“All Wrong” and “All Right” each tell the story of a man struck by destiny as it proposes and imposes itself. Through a journey of time, ideas and encounters, the leading character eventually “concludes” if he has been either all right or all wrong. Since both films are comprised of so-called found footage, each scene and segment of the film is not only a part of the narrative, but refers to another narrative: namely the one it has been taken from. In such way the films depict the notion and construction of narratives on several levels, proposing a composition by proxy.

"All Right" and "All Wrong" try to raise the question of how can one make a film without a cameraman, without a crew and yet have everything a film has. It's a form of open source, but it's much more about attitude than any media fascination. It's this attitude that led to the sampling of music: it wasn't some conceptual desire to bring together a variety of musicians and create something new, it was about the attitude of taking something and adulterating it for your own purposes.

Equally in "A Man of Action", it's about a pantomime, about the illusion of the possibility of doing a pantomime of a magic trick. How can you produce a rabbit out of a hat if you have neither a rabbit nor a hat?



***A Man of Action* (1999)**
Super 8 mm Film to HD Video

"A Man of Action" features a figure on top of a mountain moving in ways that are at first hard to define. The artist has in fact depicted a man performing a mime of a pulling a rabbit out of a hat, and the work seeks to demonstrate the frustrated impossibility of miming a magic act when deprived of the props on which it depends.



Choreography (2000)
DVCAV video, 17'24"

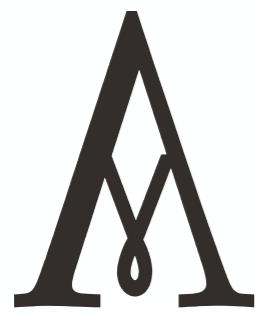
"Choreography" is a three-channel video installation, whose erratically twisting and turning images were recorded by a welding robot as camera-arm, which creates a similar impression of a gaze both machinic and subjective.

Gabriel Lester

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Gabriel Lester was born in 1972 in Amsterdam, where he currently works and lives. Lester's recent solo exhibitions include: "Light Years", Machinery of Me, Arnhem, Netherlands (2020); "Shake A Face", Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2018). "The Return of Lester's Loops", Groninger Museum, Groningen, The Netherlands (2017) ; "If you happen to be", Ryan Lee Gallery, New York, USA (2017).

Lester has been selected to participate in international events such as 13th dOCUMENTA Kassel (2012), the 52nd and 55th Venice Biennial (2007, 2013), the 29th Sao Paulo Biennal (2010), and other international biennales in Busan, Moscow, Istanbul, etc.



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www.vanguardgallery.com
[vanguardg](#)
Vanguard Gallery
Vanguard Gallery
info@vanguardgallery.net
+86 21 52522551/62993523