

Some sensitive relationships with air in the Alps, Louisiana and Fukushima Daiichi...

Yves Monnier

«As an artist, I see myself as a passe-muraille.

I'm constantly moving back and forth between individual, collective and environmental histories.
I open breaches, passages, which allow me to bring the different scales of human and non-human memory into dialogue.»

It was during a conference presenting my artistic practice, given during «Les Journées des Humanités Environnementales» in 2019 at the Magasin Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Grenoble, that a team of scientists noticed my stencil works. Following this meeting, Olivier Labussière, geographer and researcher at the CNRS Pacte laboratory, proposed a partnership, and the STRATES project was born in 2020. A group of researchers, comprising Olivier Labussière (Geographer), Laure Brayer (Architect) and Marc Higgin (Anthropologist), have been working alongside me for the duration of the project from 2020 to 2024, and together we are exploring and mapping the contemporary geological strata of the Grenoble Basin.

To better understand the process, the first step was to place a stencil in the landscape, consisting of a 1m² Fermacell sheet bearing the digital image of a handprint printed on a vinyl sticker. For this image, I chose to reactivate and update the ancestral practice of the negative hand by digitizing it.

The three starting sites were simply chosen near 3 atmospheric stations in the Grenoble region: Catane, École des Frênes and Saint Martin d'Hères (see image opposite).



View of an In Situ artworks from the «STRATES» series, 2022

For four weeks, together with the scientists, we studied each stencil on site. The scientific analysis based on our on-board sensors - our eyes, ears, noses (etc) was complemented by a visual survey using film. Video sequences were taken to capture the duration of the image formation, and wider shots, changing scale, were also taken to reflect the interaction of the work with the environment.

View of one of the works in the «STRATES» series (100x100cm), 2022

“STRATES”

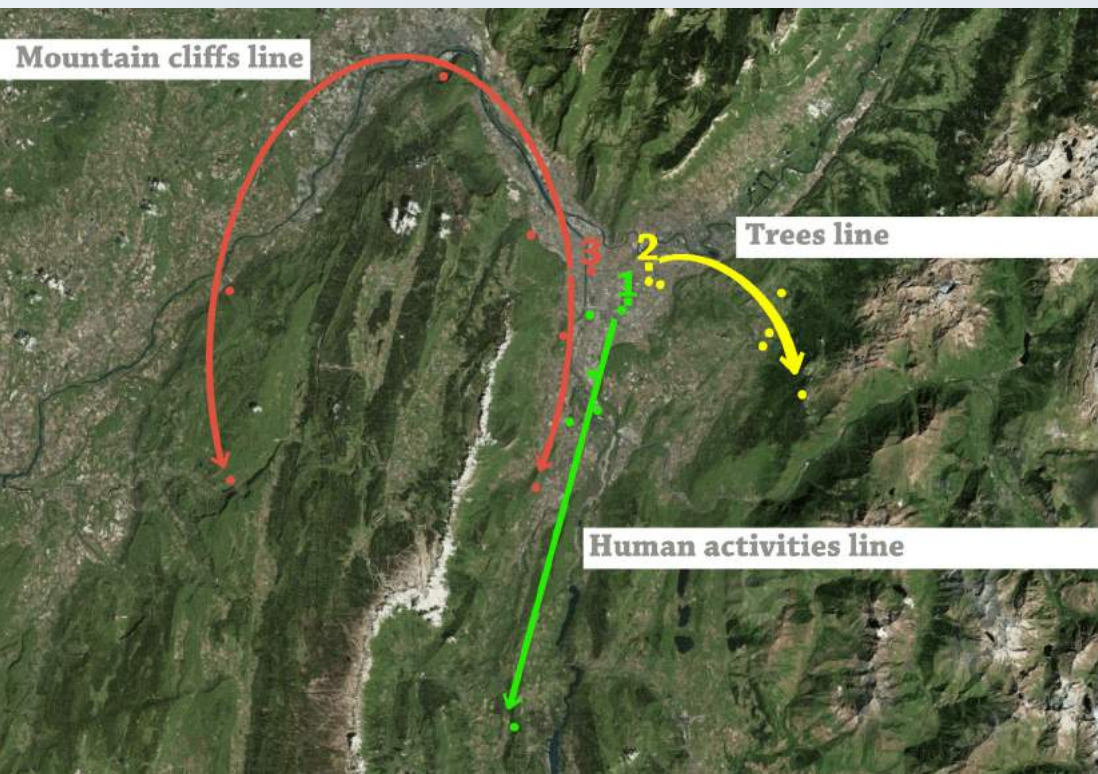
What kind of sensitive relationship with air can exist in the Grenoble metropolis-mountain area?

2020 - 2024



From left to right: Marc Higgin, Laure Brayer, Olivier Labussière and me, FHA Fontainebleau, FRANCE, 2023

Next, we began to compare our perceptions with the results of atmospheric stations to find the specific particles that had settled on the base of the stencil. The first 3 stencils enabled us to define types - I'd even say families - of particles, but not to identify their exact source. With the team, we went in search of the potential origins of each participant in the family, exploring the area through three thematic axes we had selected. Next, I placed new stencils in each of the identified locations, using the same method as the initial stencil, but with an image of the new sites themselves. We were able to materialize 6 sites for each line.



As you can see above, the first line is that of human activities (human activities + agricultural practices + heating methods + means of transport + major metropolitan worksites) // A demolition site for an urban bridge in the center



View of one of the works in the «STRATES» series (75x100cm), 2023

of Grenoble, a motorway interchange at Rondeau, an industrial reservoir on the petrochemical platform at Pont-de-Claix, a construction waste quarry on the banks of the Drac, a drinking water catchment site where agricultural practices are carried out at Eaux de Rochefort and a huge motorway viaduct at Col de Fau in Monestier de Clermont.



What we call the second line is that of trees as participants in the atmosphere (through their pollens, leaves, etc) // such as a Cedar, a Willow tree, a Lime tree, an Ash tree, a Beech tree and a Spruce tree, which are 6 species endemic to Belledonne mountain that we went to find on the slopes from Saint Martin d'Hères to Bachaboulou, located in the Chamrousse ski resort at 1450m.



View of one of the works in the «STRATES» series (75x100cm), 2023



And finally, the third line, which is a little different from the others: cliffs as a device for observing the contemporary geological layer. In this line, we compare representations of mountain cliffs from Jean Achard in 1844 (Le Vercors, Musée de Grenoble, below) to the contemporary appearance of mountain cliffs today.



Joëlle Vaissière, Curator of the 19th Century Collections, Musée de Grenoble, 2022

We also found some old photographs taken by Raymond de Bérenger, in the 1850s!

To carry out our contemporary observations, we worked with a drone pilot, Chloé Devanne-Langlais, who is also an artist. Together, we depicted the cliffs of the Vercors using digital images. I

then used them to create my works, which take the form of large reactive strips, again on Fermacell sheets...



Example of a cliff portrait created with artist and drone pilot Chloé Devanne-Langlais (75x100cm), 2023

The idea of this project is, to quote the American professor Donna Haraway, to «become with what happens to us». Through this Arts-Sciences research, we're trying to sharpen our gaze on the landscape that makes up the stratum of the Anthropocene era, to unfold our experience of the world, to better apprehend its becoming, to make ourselves sensitive to it. For us, this could only be a collective and welcoming challenge. That's why each stencil unveiling is an opportunity to meet local residents. We invite them to participate and discuss their own relationship with air. And in so doing, we



connect with the specificities of the environment, but also with the people who live it.

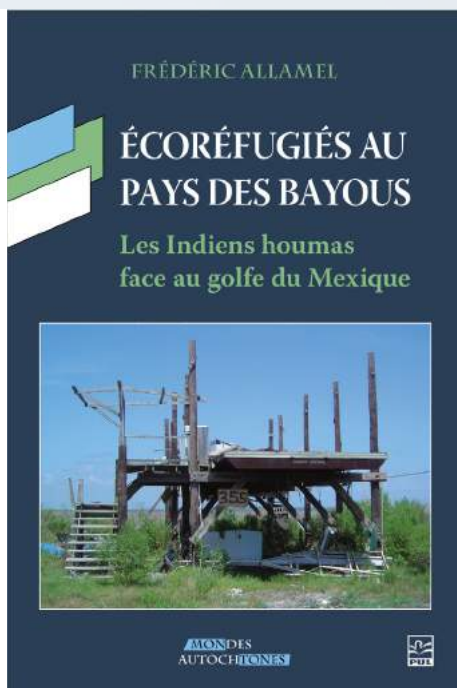
In March 2018, I was invited to take part in an arts-sciences research project by Jennifer Buyck. At the time, she was an architect and urban planner at IUGA. Today, she still works as an architect and urban planner, but at Eiffel University in Paris.

At the crossroads of urban studies, environmental anthropology, literary analysis and artistic experimentation, the research project «Still on the Map! » took as its framework the study of the Mississippi Delta, fifteen years after Hurricane Katrina, and some five years after the commissioning of a major new infrastructure to protect against the risk of a 100-year flood: Morganza to the Gulf (MTG) is a 158km Hurricane and Storm Damage Risk Reduction (HSDRR) project...

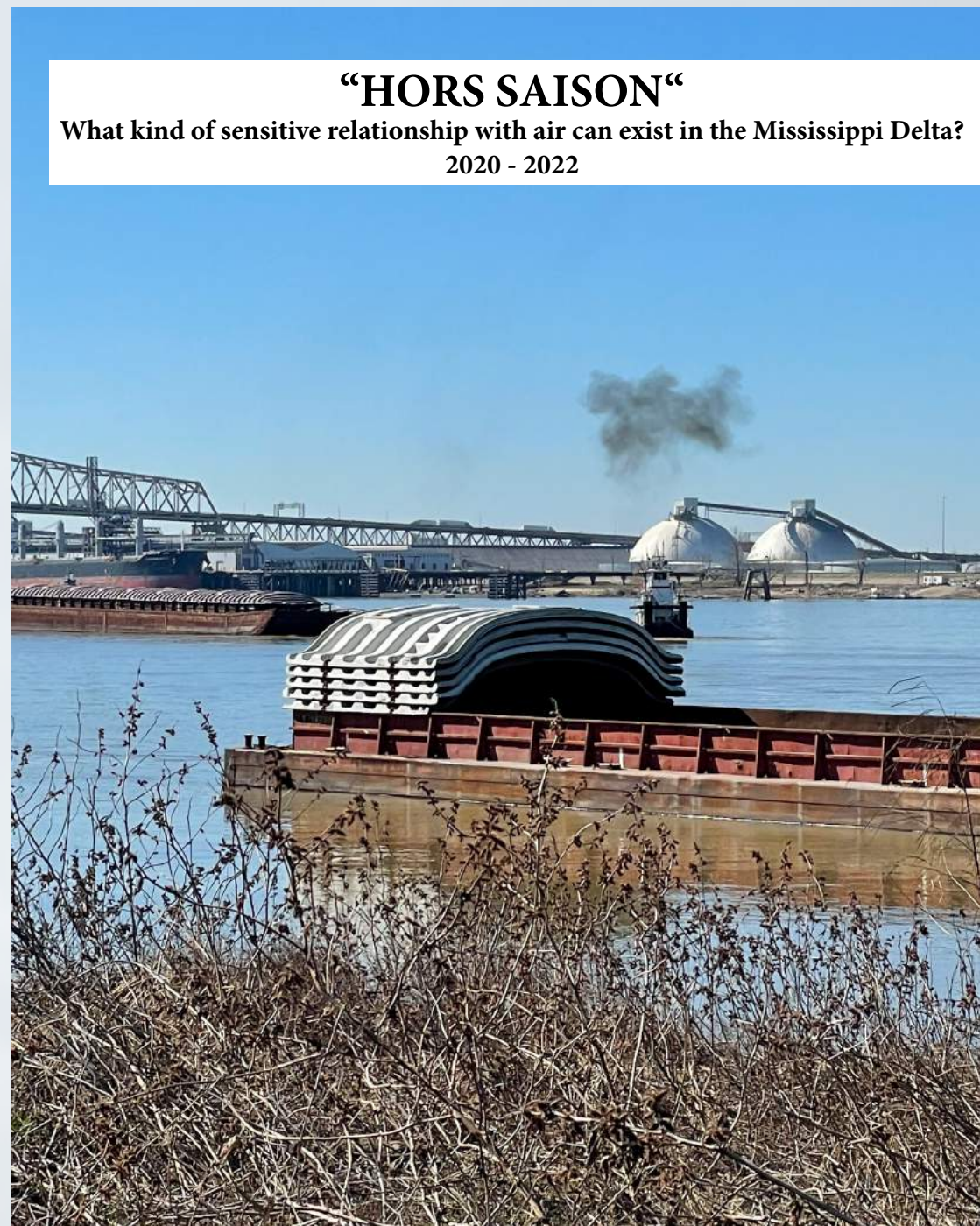
The research trip was scheduled from January 29 to February 19, 2022 between New Orleans, the Achafalaya Basin, Lafayette, Morgan City, Cypremort Point, Houma, Venice and Baton Rouge in Louisiana, USA.

During this trip, with my colleague and friend Germain Meulemans, an anthropologist, we decided to meet some of the people interviewed by Frédéric Allamel for his book: «Eco-refugiés au pays des bayous. The Houma Indians in the Gulf of Mexico».

As an artist, it seemed to me an easier way to meet people in Louisiana, to get in touch with other artists.



View of the cover of Frédéric Allamel's book, 2020



View of one of the photographs in the «Hors Saison» series (52x70cm), 2022



From left to right: Ivy Billiot, Germain Meulemans, Roy Parfait, and me, Houma, USA, 2022

That's how I met Roy Parfait and Ivy Billiot. They are two famous sculptors from the Houma community: «Carvers». With Germain and two other colleagues, we were invited to discover their work in the place where they lived. Ivy lives with her brother in a working-class district of Houma. Roy lives in Dulac, with his sister. After Hurricane Ida, Roy's house was totally destroyed. Since then, he's been living in a mobile home right next door...



What struck me, when we talked to Roy about his house, was the way he projected himself to rebuild it. I mean, he was projecting himself into rebuilding his house while knowing that in a few years, 2, 5 or 20 (nobody knows) another hurricane will surely hit again!

View of a image of Roy Parfait's house, 2022

It was as if Roy lived indefinitely between two hurricanes. This encounter with Roy led me to investigate all manifestations of the air during my trip to Louisiana.

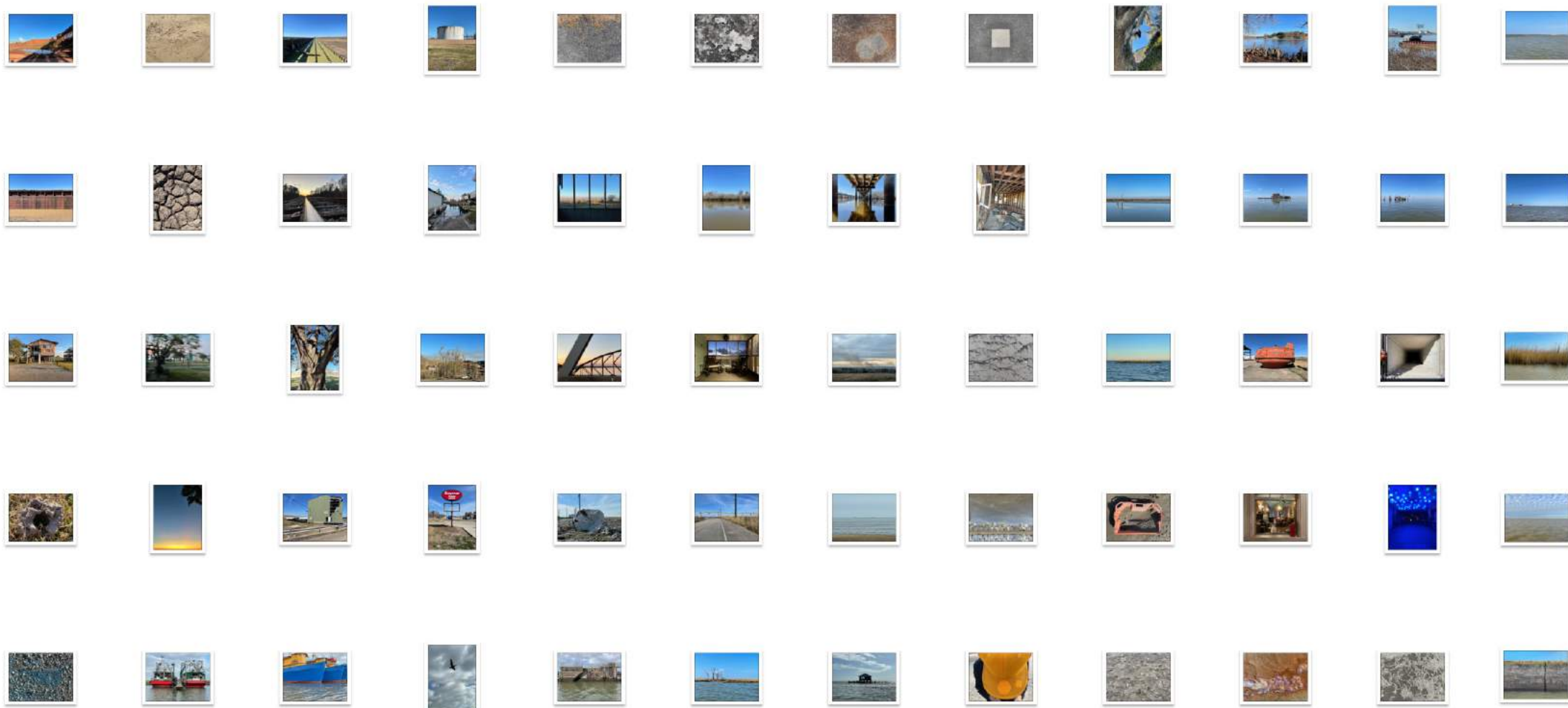
For me, photography is above all a masking process. You can focus on one part of reality with an image, and what you end up producing on a massive scale is the off-screen. Through a process of accumulation, it is then tempting to weave an imperfect, fragile web, a network, and thus to speak of what's «between».

This is what inspired the «Hors Saison» project: it consists of a poem (below) and a series of 60 digital photographs in 52x70cm format.

*“Right in the heart of winter
In between two mosquito outbreaks
In between two humid and stifling heatwaves
How can one speak about the density of the air?
The thickness of the mud inside the house?
The wind rising once more?
The nine months of BP Horizon?
The passing hurricane?
The noise of engines?
The bereavement to come?
What can one experience in between two storms?
What specific relationship to air can exist there ?”*



View of a part of the “Hors Saison” series at
The Clark and Laura Boyce Gallery, LSU, USA, 2023



View of a mosaic of 60 photographs from the «Hors Saison» series (52x70cm), 2022

In 2014, I discovered the story of Japanese farmer Masami Yoshizawa. He had refused to be expropriated and abandon his animals to starvation, or kill them, as his government demanded. He chose to stay and live in the forbidden zone created after the March 11, 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.



View of a part of the LVMY series at the Conciergerie, 2018

When I heard about Masami Yoshizawa's story, I was moved by his gesture and tried to get in touch with him. I wrote to Mr. Yoshizawa to ask if he would be willing to paint a portrait of each of his cows, based on a note I had sent him. My wish was to respond to his commitment with my own involvement in a work of memory.

With the help of his friend, Sayuri Arima, a Japanese photographer, Mr. Yoshizawa agreed. We agreed that he would send me 1 or 2 portraits a week for 9 to 10 years, so that I could produce (something I didn't know at the time...) the 355 portraits of «Mr. Yoshizawa's Cows».



“LES VACHES DE MONSIEUR YOSHIZAWA”

What kind of sensitive relationship with the air can exist
at Fukushima Daiichi?

2014 - en cours



Views of works from the series «Les Vaches de Monsieur Yoshizawa» at the Conciergerie (24x40cm), 2018



View of the lecture at the Magasin CNAC in Grenoble, FRANCE

With the help of crowdfunding, I was able to invite Masami and Sayuri, in 2018, to FRANCE for the project's first retrospective. A video about it is on [my website](#)... The first exhibition was held

at the Centre d'Art La

Conciergerie in Savoie, in partnership with MAGASIN, which is Grenoble's Centre National d'Art Contemporain.

We organized public events at MAGASIN in the form of conferences, and invited other artists for the occasion. After 3 years of written exchange, this was our first flesh-and-blood meeting, and I've already managed to produce around a hundred portraits of «Mr Yoshizawa's Cows». And to this day, half the profits from sales of original works and reproductions from the series are donated to the La Ferme de l'Espoir association.



From left to right: Sayuri Arima, Masami Yoshizawa and me, MAGASIN, Grenoble, FRANCE, 2018



Portrait of Masami Yoshizawa in front of the Magasin CNAC program in Grenoble, FRANCE, 2018