



For Philippe Parreno, a Big Honor and an Even Bigger Year

By Laura Van Straaten - September 3, 2015



Installation shots from the artist Philippe Parreno's huge exhibition "H {N}Y P N{Y} OSIS," which was on view this summer at the Park Avenue Armory in New York. By James Ewing.

The artist **Philippe Parreno** has never been to the Rainbow Room, where he'll be honored this year at **SculptureCenter's annual gala on Nov. 4**. In fact, it's not even clear whether he's heard of the landmarked Art Deco event space, which has at some point hosted almost every philanthropic endeavor in New York from its 65th floor vantage point — a world away from the nonprofit's gritty Long Island City location. Parreno Googles the Rainbow Room and asks, laughing, "Can I come in a T-shirt, or do I have to get a tie?"

It's tempting to call Parreno an enfant terrible of the art world, but maybe that's just because he seems so very French. The artist, who is represented in the collections of major museums throughout Europe and the States, was raised in Grenoble and has lived and worked in Paris since the early 1990s. But he was actually born in Algeria, in 1964. And, at least in a video interview via Skype from his book-filled apartment in the 11th Arrondissement, Parreno seems far more personable than terrible.

Parreno's work is another story; it demands a lot. His huge retrospective-cum-happening, "**H {N}Y P N{Y} OSIS**," at the Park Avenue Armory in New York City this summer, entailed 26 light installations with more than 2,000 light bulbs, two player pianos and dozens of collaborating musicians, filmmakers and performers. Parreno's Armory show, with its title's deliberately wiggly parenthetical shout-out to the city, did seem to cement his relationship with New York. The artist, who insists he does not read reviews (including the *Times's*, which called the exhibition "sometimes enjoyable, occasionally moving, often tedious"), felt his work "found a public" in New York thanks to the

Will Italians respond the same way? Next month, a number of elements from “H {N}Y P N{Y} OSIS” will be on view at HangarBicocca, the contemporary art space in Milan. The exhibition will be the first survey of Parreno’s work in Italy and is curated by Andrea Lissoni and titled “Hypothesis” (just similar enough to be confusing). Documenting both the New York and the Milan retrospectives is a fully illustrated book, to be published in December.

Also on the horizon is something entirely new: the artist was in Japan earlier this week to meet with a collector on a possible commission for which Parreno says he is exploring building a house that is “never at a point of completion.” He muses aloud how he may find inspiration in the record-breaking run — since 1957 — of two plays by the absurdist playwright Eugène Ionesco at the Théâtre de la Huchette in Paris. “The actors changed over time, and yet it’s the same play,” Parreno explains.

Before that project takes shape, Parreno is planning a return to Manhattan’s Chinatown this winter to shoot a sequel to his film “Invisibleboy,” 2010, which portrays a Chinese boy who is in the United States illegally, and the imaginary monsters that personify the boy’s fears. He hopes the new film will be the cornerstone of a planned exhibit early next spring at Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York.



Left: Philippe Parreno. By Andrea Rossetti. Right: Installation shot of exhibition “H {N}Y P N{Y} OSIS”. By James Ewing.

“Philippe, through his collaborative nature, speaks to a certain level of generosity,” says **Mary Ceruti, the chief curator of SculptureCenter**, in explaining the choice of Parreno as this year’s honoree. Parreno demurs at first when asked whether his career-long emphasis on collaboration does in fact come from a deeply personal source — or, instead, from a more intellectual one (say, as a stance against solo authorship as a form of totalitarianism). “There was a need for me to collaborate. And the need was going in two directions,” he says finally. “One was an intellectual decision to shift the attention from an artist making objects to the idea of artists collaborating to make projects.” But, he says, there’s a flip side to an art practice rooted in collaboration: He found that it allowed him to “learn how to relate to people.” He thinks for a minute. “Strangely enough, I discovered something about myself. So both are true,” he says. “Definitely.”

Ceruti also says the Sculpture Center honor “signals he is now part of our arts landscape to stay.” If that’s true, Parreno laughs, “I hope they help me find an apartment!”