



press release

## maurice benayoun

**des *Grandes Questions* à *La Décharge***

from *The Big Questions* to *The-Dump.net*

**from the 10<sup>th</sup> January to the 8<sup>th</sup>  
february 2008**

It is a first performance of that kind, a first performance as well for the work of Maurice Benayoun and for the European School of Visual Arts (EESI) and the young digital art it represents.

First retrospective exhibition of the work of this artist

([www.benayoun.com](http://www.benayoun.com)) who is a leader in the field of digital art.

A first performance for the ÉESI, after a series of exhibitions - Peter Greenaway, Guillaume Pinard, Pierrick Sorin, Paul Armand Gette, Fabricio Plessi, Toni Brown... - which is not only welcoming Maurice Benayoun on the site of the school but which has also conceived, along with the artist, a pedagogy opening on the digital world; thus having previously contributed in a concrete way to the production of his surprising *Emotion Vending Machine*.

In *Imagina* (Monaco), in *SIGGRAPH* (USA), in *Ars Electronica* (Linz, Austria) or in the *Georges Pompidou Center* (France)... in contemporary art museums, in most international events around art and new technologies, Maurice Benayoun represents a new generation of artists who don't consider new technologies of the image as a problem but as the means to reveal the closer links we are to develop with new forms of representation of the world.

This is why the ÉESI, in co-ordination with M.Benayoun, displays a "retrospective" of around 10 devices installations selected over a period covering the last 14 years.

From *Is God Flat ?* (1994) to *Dump* (2008) on a 200m square surface, we are displaying for the visitors of this exhibition "**from The Big Questions to The Dump**", an emotional and interactive maze composed of participative installations, sculptures and sensation machines...historical but also realized especially for this event.

A remarkable challenge as far as in this field, works are rarely exhibited and our knowledge in this domain is often a second hand one ; based on echoes we grasp here and there, theoretical works or accounts of festivals.

The exhibition "**from The Big Questions to The Dump**" imagines an initiatory circuit between men and images, between the Big Questions, the emotions of the world and that of the World Wide Web (www). A crossing through time, a circuit selected over 14 years of creation of an artist who rarely goes backwards.

Awarded prizes in the most prestigious festivals, Maurice Benayoun is currently facing the obsolescence of technologies which don't convey the artistic, aesthetical and ethical issues which are way above the ROM, RAM and bits. Indeed the soft as well as hard drives of his devices, at any step of his work have always been ahead of the various potentialities. Although Benayoun has often resorted to the most outstanding machines of his time for his works, computers are outdated in no time by new ones. Therefore, it is now difficult to perform the works of this artist on existing computers. This is why is it difficult to exhibit his works and propose them to a larger audience. Restoring and enabling the exhibition of previous digital art works (dating back to 12 or 13 years only) was suited to the working field of the ÉESI, as one of its fields of research focuses on the question of "reflecting upon" the contemporaneity of the digital and cinematographic archive.

In 1994, during the previous century, an article in the Newspaper *Le Monde* by Jean-Paul Fargier described *Is God flat ?* ( the first of Maurice Benayoun's Big Questions) as « the first metaphysical video game »

*Is God Flat ?* was followed by *Is the Devil Curved ?* At *Imagina* and it forecasted *World Skin a Photo-safari in the Land of War* ("Golden Nica" of Interactive Art at *Ars Electronica* 1998) and the CAVE, its immersive device. It also conveyed Benayoun's taste for the issues and the viewer's body and of the interactive image in real time.

The work of Maurice Benayoun displayed then (we were in the XX<sup>th</sup> century) a work in which the image was shown in equal terms to the viewer, where the world stood as image, where thinking was more than obvious on each new piece of work of this bulimic and Jack-of all-trades artist...between the virtual and the factual.

In these recent years, apart from **Cosmopolis**, a gigantic installation which travelled across China with great success during *the Year of France in China* and apart from a public work commissioned for The Grand Palais (Paris) : **Still Moving**, Maurice Benayoun and his accomplice, the musician Jean-Baptiste Barrière, have been playing above all on our emotions, our sight, our touch our thoughts, on sound and space.

So such a "retrospective", couldn't be imagined without connecting yesterday to tomorrow, without promoting a rigid chronology between digital works which penetrate history and the emergence of new creations... does the notion of navigation in space and time suggested by hypermedia set free from the linear rigour of chronology ?

Yesterday represented by the four questions: **Is God Flat? Is the Devil Curved? And What about Me? 1 and 2.**

Today, visualized by a work between the factual (sculpture) and the virtual (the concepts), between the **Frozen Feelings** and **the Dump** from which are taken **Blind Love Ready Made** and **Dump by the Metre**, two creations realized for Poitiers.

Between these two worlds, we also show at the ÉESI : the putting into practice of the automatic report, original of the **Tunnel under the Atlantic**, between the Pompidou Centre and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Quebec 1995.

Two installations out of Benayoun's saga : **Mechanics of Emotions**

- **e-Stock** will come from China, where it was created in the frame of **e-Market** exhibition in Shanghai.

- **Emotion Vending Machine** a work of art coproduced with the ÉESI, an Emotion Vending machine analyses in real time the emotions of the world via Internet and enables the visitor to select a pictorial and musical cocktail recoverable with a USB key ( so don't forget your USB key).

In 2006, after having coproduced **Emotion Vending machine** - for **the Smiles Machine**, exhibition curated by Anne-Marie Duguet in the frame of the **Transmediale** in Berlin ( February-March 2006) the ÉESI got involved in the conception of this retrospective with Maurice Benayoun according to three main axes :

- **Pedagogical**, by gathering historical and contemporary works of this major digital art artist.

- **Co-producer**, as a medium of creation, since the contribution of the ÉESI to **Emotion Vending Machine** of the different works of Benayoun.

- **Patrimonial**, by imagining the portage on PCs of the historical works of an artist who has always worked with up-to-date technologies, on works which can only be done on scientific calculators. Now, these works will be shown on mere PCs. So, the fact of converting their programs for contemporary computers is related to a mission of preservation, restoration, and broadcasting for a larger audience.

In doing so, the **European school of visual arts** (ÉESI) consolidates its mission as an actor of the regional, national and international contemporary digital art.

## The European school of visual arts

Since its foundation, in 1995, the **European school of visual arts** has developed a teaching around digital art and new narratives within a pedagogy based on research topics and artistic projects. Unique in this field, The ÉESI is located in France on two sites, and proposes complete studies, ranging from drawing to programming : A masters in Comic strip ( Angoulême), a Masters in art and science (Poitiers), as well as a doctorate in relation to the University.

[www.eesi.eu](http://www.eesi.eu)

Partners of the European school of Visual Arts :



## Useful information

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## des **Grandes Questions** à **La Décharge**

from *The Big Questions* to *The-Dump.net*

ten devices by Maurice Benayoun, in collaboration with Jean Baptiste Barrière.

**Retrospective exhibition conceived and organised by the *European school of visual arts* on the site of Poitiers.**

Curator : **Jean Jacques Gay** - [jjg@larevue.fr](mailto:jjg@larevue.fr)

Director general of the Eesi : **Hubertus Von Amelunxen**

General coordinator: **Michel Bompieyre**

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Dates : **exhibition open from the 10<sup>th</sup> of January to the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2008.**

Opening : **the 10th January at 7.00 pm.**

Conference by Maurice Benayoun: **10<sup>th</sup> of January at 5.30 pm.**

Location: **the European school of visual arts, site of Poitiers, 26 rue Jean Alexandre.**

### Free entrance

**From 9 to 12 am and from 2 to 7 pm ; monday to friday**

Visitors information: [www.eesi.eu](http://www.eesi.eu) or +33(0)5 49 88 96 53

Blog : [www.larevue.fr](http://www.larevue.fr)

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