

## GINA PANE

The main representative of body art in France, Gina Pane was very influential in the 1960s and 1970s. Her works questioned the role of ethics in aesthetics. Starting from the experience of her body and its vulnerability, she created a precise and rigorous language expressing both compassion for others and the social contradictions of the times.

Nowadays, as major exhibitions are once again highlighting conceptual practice together with various forms of attitude-based art, Gina Pane's work is being reappraised. Although her work has closed in on itself since her untimely death in 1990, young artists who are at present reconsidering body art are able to probe its intransigent singularity. She taught at Le Mans art school (in the west of France) from 1976 to 1989; her former students remember her as a fine and committed teacher.

Gina Pane's work is made up of split episodes exploring different categories of expression. There are Action Reports, consisting of photos taken during performances, preliminary sketches revealing how the rhythm of the Action was built up, assemblages that, under the generic title *Partitions* (Scores), bring the Wounds cycle to a close, and murals exploring a territory that belongs both to painting and sculpture.

From 1980 on, Gina Pane conceived and created mural installations where she evoked purely metaphorically the physical wounds, which were emblematic of the actions. In developing them visually, the artist was led to translate the language of the body into the certainty of materials. Wood, iron, copper and glass generated works that were visually powerful and rigorous. To give an example, *The Golden Legend*, inspired by the 'sacred flesh' of the early Christian philosopher Tertullian, combines at different levels a large number of graphic, chromatic, volumetric and plastic elements revealing the scope of the artist's inner world.

## IN FAVOUR OF A LIBERATING ART EDUCATION

Here are a few remarks about teaching.

Schools should remain in touch with developments in our society. In my opinion education should prepare students for a changing world, prepare them to assume their responsibilities despite the feelings of insecurity they experience when they enter the professional arena. So education is an activity that looks to the future.

The relationship between students and teachers is essential. Teachers must have confidence in individuals as well as in the group. This is the key to true education. I do not wish to found my teaching upon words, but on the contrary, upon the awareness of experienced scientific reality, upon experiments in a field of interest where students feel free to choose the medium most appropriate to their own creativity. I will help them develop their ideas by providing them with all the necessary information and by offering my experience. What is most important is to enable everyone to open up and grow, and to progress towards their inner self, their unity.

I want to emphasise how pernicious 'art recipes' are, based exclusively on an out-of-date analysis of other artists' work, and deprived of any creative spark.

Students should have access to contemporary mediums such as photography, video, film - also in their approach to concepts - while remaining in touch with classical mediums like painting and so on. The teacher should demonstrate that new possibilities lie within these classical tools.

I think I can construct a teaching programme based on all the domains I have crossed on my journey: historical, artistic, economic, sociological, psychological.

Each person's originality is of crucial importance, and one person's experience can never be reduced to somebody else's. Hence, education cannot rely on compromise. Refusing to compromise is the price to be paid by the student who strives towards dialogue, and at the same time is aware of his own limits.

Genuine solidarity is essential for a study group, providing opportunities for debates, confrontation and criticism. A reciprocal exchange of views between teacher and student prevents their relationship from becoming exclusive or oppressive.

Students must realise that the 'master' does not provide the rules; he is an instrument helping them to construct their own rules.

Gina Pane

## SITE-SPECIFIC WORK: ART STUDENTS WITHIN THE CITY

### A Methodology

Teachers and students came up with the idea that the Fine Arts School should focus on the population of Le Mans.

I wish to outline here a procedure in the light of the questions we will encounter at a later stage. I intend to define the operating tools rather than the operation itself.

1. The first step would be to awake the students' interest in the relationship between the town and the school, then examine the many difficulties the group will have to face while instituting innovative productions.
2. To create the necessary conditions, it would be best not to anticipate the duration of the project but rather to organise the time available.
3. A series of seminars should be organised so the team can elaborate the project guidelines and decide on a general direction. A communication and research framework should be constructed with the primary aim of creating a determining link between the school director, the teaching staff and the students, with a view to analysing situations and proposals.
4. Contradictions - between what is said and what is done - observed during the preparatory stage should be considered as real facts and their implications examined.

5. Students will have to cope with:

- \* operational difficulties:
  - initiating a form of collaboration they would not normally have to set up with the official bodies that the population
  - investigating a new psycho-sociological world
  - improving the quality of their strategy as applied to the city
  - establishing team-based research
  - fostering contact and exchange between the different teams
  - confronting either ideas or completed projects
  - organising an information search
- \* architectural questions:
  - solving problems of spatial integration
  - designing a functional place
  - choosing a site fit for a specific art project
  - structuring an urban space
- \* structural questions:
  - adopting analysis and control procedures to cope with unexpected difficulties
- \* personal challenges:
  - acting as play group leader
  - acting as coordinator
  - being a go-between
- \* financial difficulties:
  - budgeting for the project
  - facing existing constraints such as budget cuts, security regulations, occupation of public space etc.

6. Plans could be made for a permanent link for the school located in the city, in connection with individual attitudes, in order to further integration.

Gina Pane

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### **Jean-Louis Raymond**

*In 1979 Jean-Louis Raymond was appointed professor of ceramics, a title redolent of craftsmanship and the virtues of tradition. However, in his classes Jean-Louis Raymond bore witness to the evolution of contemporary creation developing in proximity to a vast system of associations and references, and he referred to modern times as well as to the origins of some forms of expression. The positions he adopted as a teacher harmonised with and complemented those of Gina Pane, despite the generation gap and their respective - non-overlapping - areas of commitment. For two decades he has closely studied the role assigned to art schools; he explains Gina Pane's contribution to teaching as an artist in terms of defining the artist's symbolic role within an educational framework that wishes to preserve in art a complete image of the world. Jean-Louis Raymond evokes Gina Pane with no regard for himself or his own work, which he pursues in deliberate solitude. His modesty reveals the deep authenticity of his sensitivity and of his testimony.*

**Jean-Louis Raymond:** I want to say straight away how I pleased I am to have the opportunity to discuss Gina Pane's lesser known side, that of teacher. When I myself started teaching as a young man, in 1979, and discovered there was a famous artist among his colleagues. I knew that working with her would be of immense significance to me. She taught the painting class. She placed the concept of painting at the centre of reflection and theory building. She encouraged most of the students to paint. This is not the case today.

**Anne Tronche:** Did you know that she was originally a painter? Her first works, exhibited in the 1960s at the Simone Heller Gallery, expressed the dogma of concrete art and geometry. This explains why her actions were so controlled by reasoning and

intelligence.

**JLR:** She was seen as an artist very much in the classical tradition of painting. In her classes she asserted the mystery of what has been thought in order to restore a depth of view worthy of human dignity. At the same time she wanted her students to learn a symbolic order articulating formal intentions with emotional content. She went far beyond strictly educational assignments in an attempt to express the necessity of creativity. I would say that with her it was a question of inspiration.

**AT:** You use the term 'inspiration', which addresses physical as well as psychological issues, both of which were present in Gina Pane's body actions. Could you explain further?

**JLR:** I am using this term as a contrast to the present situation among first year students. Mystery is a word they do not know. In their minds, events and facts are governed by principles of reality, which makes them simple.

**AT:** How was she able to explain her ambitions at a time when students entered art schools much younger and at a lower academic level?

**JLR:** She was exceptionally good at listening to people. Most students in Le Mans come from a rural or working-class background. Gina Pane was genuinely attentive to her students' words or allusions that, in her view, revealed desires taking shape. She thought that their imaginative power stemmed from their social environment. Strangely enough, the distance she kept between herself and other people was in inverse proportion to her ability to focus on a developing mind unfamiliar with the dialectic of art. She succeeded in finding a common language even with those who were most incapable of verbal formulation. This is a clear indication of the trust she placed in others, of her expectations. She hoped the school would offer some of them the possibility of being reborn, whatever their background, whatever their intellectual capacities.

**AT:** Some students told me she could be very tough, up to the point where she demanded that those who had disappointed her leave the school.

**JLR:** Actually, she established an insurmountable distance in her relationships with people but she provoked in order to stimulate. She was provocative. Students who had been put to the test either passed or failed definitively. The weakest, the least motivated could choose to quit. Yet these confrontations were extenuated by other teachers who might decide to stand up for these students or to protect them. She used to interact with students in a very personal way. She used to make appointments to meet them on a one-to-one basis but very formally. And she always addressed them in a formal way. From an ethical point of view her attitude set an example. Everybody knew everybody's role. This mutual relationship rooted in a set of codes and rules created a 'place for possibility'. I am certain she was highly emotional, that was the reason why she did not want things to be uncontrolled. Very soon I came to appreciate this attitude. To me it seemed to be protecting something in her innermost being that should not be reached too easily.

**AT:** Do you think that teaching represented for her a dynamics necessary for the elaboration of her own language?

**JLR:** Definitely. The idea that drove her on was that you also teach what you don't know. It seems paradoxical at first, yet it encompasses doubt and curiosity regarding change. It gave her teaching an essential depth, but it also introduced into her work energies that could not be satisfied with the results. The way she opposed conventional ideas and deeply anchored habits in the end brought about a real dynamism. Her often-demonstrated capacity to resist became legendary. One day Alexandre Bonnier, Art Education Inspector, asked us 'Have you ever heard Gina Pane say "yes"?' What teaching represented in her deepest being, I couldn't say, I was never close enough to her to exchange ideas on this point. We held each other in high esteem and the most remarkable discussions we had focused on the sacred. These conversations relied on texts we had read, publications such as the review *Change*, or works we had discovered and then closely studied.

**AT:** She exhibited together with other teachers at the Collegial Saint-Pierre la Cour. Did you take this opportunity to discuss her artistic production?

**JLR:** Her work was not a topic for conversation, and I could accept that. We did go and visit her exhibitions in Paris, but they were not discussed. When this group exhibition was set up in Le Mans we did not comment on each other's work. Each work embodies one individual. To question further would have amounted to an attempt to understand the whole of someone's mind. To abstain from commenting was to acknowledge that any work requires a little bit of silence. We did however have debates on the nature of each other's positioning in the world. One issue of the review *Le Débat (The Debate)* focused on Heidegger. One of the authors violently attacked the philosopher for the ideological stance he had taken and his attitude toward Nazism. That led us to focus on individual commitment in troubled historical periods. I remember we talked about some figures in recent history, like Drieu La Rochelle. Unexpectedly, Gina Pane was interested in this kind of ambiguous behaviour because it revealed the complexity of human feelings; it was an example of the paradoxes to be found in action. Trying to understand was not for her an empty slogan, so she created an active model for the practice of art that is in fact a universal model. I think that the school in Le Mans played a key role thanks to Gina Pane.

**AT:** Which word would describe her best?

**JLR:** Just one word would be too limited. I would say her inspiring personality.

## Jean-Francois Lecourt

*At the age of seventeen, Jean-Francois Lecourt attended Gina Pane's classes as a second-year student in Le Mans. He is now an artist who approaches photography with his body. He is aware of the great influence Gina Pane had on his personal development and the nature of his future commitments. The very special process he set up - creating self-portraits by firing a gun into a camera - revives the spirit of performance. Today Jean-Francois Lecourt understands that Gina Pane helped him to discover that 'the act generates the work'. His self-portraits, which bring into play behaviour and gestural acting, use mirror photography as a form of iconoclasm that invites the partial destruction of the image, of his very self-representation. He ritualises gun firing just as Gina Pane ritualised wounds. His work is symbolic of time and space and illuminated by the incompleteness it suggests; it draws most of its acuity from a saturnine melancholy.*

**Anne Tronche:** Why do you think your name is on the very short list I was given of students who worked with Gina Pane?

**Jean-Francois Lecourt:** Maybe because I was bent on creating a personal oeuvre and I was deeply influenced by Gina Pane. I met her first in my second year and then I worked with her for three more years. I entered the school at Le Mans when I was only sixteen. I had the freshness of youth and an unlimited thirst for learning. Needless to say I had a very receptive mind. Gina's words about nature or landscape echoed in my deepest being and revived memories of growing up in the countryside. I found some aspects of her language as well as her relationship to the world akin to mine. I was interested by her gestures, which generated symbolic energies, and by her behaviour that even in day-to-day matters reflected an awareness of creative thinking.

**AT:** You said you were very young when you entered the Fine Art School. I suppose you did not possess the necessary frame of reference to make aesthetic choices or to indicate a preference within the history of forms?

**JFL:** At that time I was looking for a way to live, I mean to exist, nothing more. I couldn't imagine myself becoming an artist later. Subconsciously, I was seeking mental stimulation at school.

**AT:** When Gina Pane became one of your teachers did you know the type of art she was producing?

**JFL:** I quickly got to know, although it was self-evident. At the time, teacher-artists were exerting a tremendous influence on schools through their personalities. Gina Pane awakened her students to current trends in contemporary art. Thanks to her we were introduced to conceptual art, land art, and minimal art. These artistic movements seemed to be in complete opposition to the traditional way of teaching art at that time. I don't have to tell you how valuable her contribution was. Not only did it help us to open up to new perspectives but also it brought along the murmuring of the world.

**AT:** Did she restrict her lessons to visual art issues or did she connect them to related areas?

**JFL:** She invited guest speakers. I remember one of them, someone who was half yogi, half dancer, who awakened our awareness of our bodies in their relation to space. Only a few of us accepted these experiments, but they seemed essential to me, also in order to learn how to paint. I think that only two students from our class, Nicole Schwartz and I, completed these exercises.

**AT:** Did you consider Gina Pane as a unique personality?

**JFL:** Yes, she was possessed by the singularity of her story.

**AT:** Did she advise you about a book list?

**JFL:** I can't remember. She used to make a lot of allusions during her classes. She would mention *Theory of Colours* by Goethe, refer to Nietzsche, or quote Matisse's *Writings*. Whether we went further with these texts was left to us to decide.

**AT:** Is there something she wanted to pass on to you that you now regard as fundamental?

**J. F. L.:** Touching, or rather, prohibited touching. I would even say touching without touching. She explained that if we had not been social beings, we would touch ourselves and touch each other before speaking. Within the word 'if' she incorporated both the necessity of the act and its prohibition. Later on I understood that art could reunite what has been separated and divided, that art relates unconscious drives to the elevated expectations of the mind. By creating a continuity between energies that are dialectically organised, art gives form to transgression. Because of the way she approached human relationships and subjected conventions to scrutiny, her teachings had a unique emotional touch, a kind of nobility endowed with true beauty.

**AT:** Did she, at any time during your studies, consider you as a future artist?

**JFL:** Her views about teaching were very strict. The roles of those who were teaching and those who were taught could not be reversed. During my last year she offered to take me with her on a project. In the end it fell through, but I must confess that this temporary association confused me since I didn't know the reasons behind it. But then I understood that she had called on me not as an artist but as an artist in the making.

**AT:** What did your final diploma consist of?

**JFL:** Work dealing with the experience of performance. At first I used photography as a medium for pictorial experiments in taking body measurements. Little by little, photography ceased to document actions, it turned into a language for questioning the act of recording.

**AT:** If we recall Gina Pane's *Constats d'action (Action Reports)* one might suggest that in terms of experimentation your route crossed hers in many ways. Did you sometimes feel like a follower?

**JFL:** She absolutely refused to enter into that type of relationship. But at the bottom of my heart I liked the idea. As time went on she became a 'symbolic mother'.

**AT:** Nowadays you are a practising artist and you participate in major events. Do you think about her?

**JFL:** Often

**AT:** You mean you recall her in your work?

**JFL:** Yes, but also in every day life considered as a fundamental encounter. It helps me. It is as if to remember her is to gather the moral strength to set off again. Moreover, performance has remained an important vehicle for art since the 1970s even though it went out of fashion very fast, too fast. There is still much to be discovered about this period. As far as Gina Pane is concerned I know that her importance has not yet been fully appreciated.