



Press release

Espace Muraille presents
LIFE FORMS
PHILIPPE LARDY

EXHIBITION: 7 October to 17 December 2016
Espace Muraille, Place des Casemates 5, Geneva

Tuesday to Friday: 10.00–12 noon and 1pm–6pm
Saturday: 1pm–6pm
Access: Bus 3 or 5 to Athénée

Opening: Thursday 6 October from 6pm



Espace Muraille unveils *Life Forms*,
an introspective journey through the work of Philippe Lardy

GENEVA, AUGUST 3rd, 2016 – Philippe Lardy is a Swiss artist who has returned to his home country after a career as an illustrator in the United States and France. He will be exhibiting his works in Espace Muraille's gallery from 7 October to 17 December 2016. *Life Forms* seeks to reconnect with the creativity of childhood – a world of play incorporating chance, accident and free interpretation. More than thirty works, mostly recent paintings, have been created using a variety of media, shapes and colours. Visitors will be transported to the heart of a universe of symbolism in perpetual evolution.

Caroline and Eric Freymond, creators of Espace Muraille, have given the Genevan artist free rein: 'We have long followed Philippe Lardy's work and he is an artist we have truly fallen in love with. There's something remarkable about his unusual career, particularly the way he has made the transition from illustration to painting. He's moved away from the narrative aspect of his drawings in order to connect with a freer form of art, one that's charged with symbolism.' Captivated by the 'vital forms' of his twisted paper shapes, the couple had already put together an exhibition entitled *Life Forms* in Paris in 2012. This new exhibition at Espace Muraille, bearing the same title, traces the development of an introspective journey that began here many years ago.

Inspired by Scandinavian legends and fairytales, where the boundaries between the subterranean and the celestial are often blurred, Philippe Lardy has made a close study of the world of dreams, and here explores the dreamlike nature of archetypes. For this exhibition, he has thrown himself into a game of free interpretation, taking as its starting point a twisted piece of paper – the inspiration for these paintings, drawings and sculptures. Tiny component parts of this prototype are then enlarged. These vital forms or 'microforms', alluded to in the title of the exhibition, 'appear in the folds of these strips of paper, like chains symbolizing the DNA that transmits life from generation to generation'. *Life Forms* conveys the idea of progress in art and its capacity to evolve or disintegrate in history.

***Life Forms*: a tour through Espace Muraille**

Espace Muraille has inspired Philippe Lardy: 'The layout of the gallery – with its vast, luminous first level, followed by this descent underground, gives one the sensation of a progression towards a mysterious secret, like some kind of mystical journey.' What is more, for the artist, the works are often produced at the expense of a 'descent into hell' of sorts. Conscience and intuition, loss of bearings and equilibrium... When the image is finally revealed, an unexpected space, a new symbolism, has taken over.

In a formal sense, *Life Forms*, with these intertwined shapes, is searching for the boundary, the tipping point, between solid forms and the third dimension. Transparency or solidity, depth or surface, forwards or backwards... These strips of twisted paper are at once a concrete and a symbolic subject. Each model is one component part in a chain of motifs, but can also create a new chain by combining with another module: a way of imagining life that regenerates itself spontaneously.

The works have been created using a vast range of different materials – oil on wood, acrylic, casein paint on cardboard, graphite, patchwork or even paper rolled on wood – whose intrinsic qualities have been reappropriated and developed by Philippe Lardy. Among the works exhibited here, the 'microforms' of *Life Form 10* (acrylic and graphite on paper, 90 x 120cm, 2015) intertwine in the style of a double helix in a DNA chain until they form a kind of swirl in blue and beige tones on a blue background. *Life Shape 3* (casein and acrylic on rolled paper, 74 x 83, 2015), proves startling in its own way through the way it harmonically fuses blues and whites on a beige background. Philippe

Lardy says 'The work that best represents me right now is the one I find most elusive, in its technique and its aspect. It might well inspire a series of works in the future. *Life Form 3* (casein, graphite and coloured pencils on rolled paper, 178 x 92, 2016) is part animal: half pencil, half insect. It was created using red and blue coloured pencil and graphite on prepared paper.'

Numerous paintings such as *Life Work 10* (acrylic on wood, 110 x 60, 2016) and *Life Work 11* (rolled paper on wood, 140 x 80) were inspired by a very distinctive kind of traditional paper: bituminized paper. This involves waxed paper containing a fine layer of bitumen at the centre as well as a network of threads. Developed before the use of plastic, it offered ideal waterproof qualities and conditions of durability. By peeling off layers of paper, the bitumen could be revealed, with the outline of the criss-crossed threads forming the structure of the surface. The creative possibilities were multiplied.

PHILIPPE LARDY – SHORT BIOGRAPHY

From illustration to design and painting: a liberating career shift

A talented and passionate artist, Philippe Lardy studied at the Institut supérieur d'arts plastiques (Higher Institute of Plastic Arts) in Brussels. In the 1980s, he moved to the United States to study at the School of Visual Arts (New York), where he dabbled in all sorts of different fields: painting with Jerry Moriarty and Anton van Dalen, illustration and graphic design. He went knocking on the doors of the major publishing houses with his portfolio, until he gradually started to receive commissions for illustrations for several major American publications, including the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Time* magazine and *Newsweek*. He created book covers and record covers. Somewhat unexpectedly, this became Lardy's career for 20 years, while he simultaneously developed his approach to painting. He says 'The amazing thing about illustration was the way it brought me into contact with people, creating images which would become part of people's lives. It was exhilarating.' When he returned to Paris in 2000, when the internet revolution was in full swing, commissions kept coming from all corners of the planet. Lardy felt suffocated by the pressure of the job and recalled what had inspired him in the first place – a passion for a freer form of creation, that could go in any direction. He shut down his website in 2008 and broke off communications with his sponsors – a far from painless process. He abandoned illustration for an altogether more personal creative philosophy. The exhibitions of his paintings, his production studio featuring a major book of drawings taking as its starting point images of the unconscious – *Hypersomnia* – and his collaboration, as artistic director, with the graphic magazine 'End-of-line special offers' all allowed him to rediscover the creative inspiration that had motivated him in the first instance. And yet his painting did not always develop as a reaction to these drawn-to-order illustrations. Often it would take as its source the detail of a vignette, or would take up a theme from a press illustration and develop it further, perhaps by complicating its meaning, or reshaping it by twisting a motif, similarly to the way he transforms these basic shapes today that emerge from twisted pieces of paper. Conversely, he has not abandoned the idea of going back to a form of artistic depiction – but to a reinvented representative style, from the perspective of abstract art.

'My drawings are born out of the desire to create narrative images. They operate like parables and their aim is to communicate an idea as graphically as possible. My painting, on the other hand, developed as a form of silence, as a counterpoint to the "information overload" of my illustrations,' the Genevan explains. Not that Lardy regrets his career as an illustrator. 'Illustration and painting are complementary activities: the one feeds off the other. My drawings connect me to the outside world, while painting offers me the opportunity for introspection,' he says.

Philippe Lardy's works have been exhibited in numerous countries across the world – Japan (1994), the United States, Belgium (both 1997), Italy (1999), France (2003, 2005, 2006, 2015), Canada (2009) and Seoul (2016). In collaboration with illustrator José Ortega, he co-published the book *GIN&COMIX*, a Franco-European selection of illustrations (1990). He is a founder member of the society of press,

book and commercial illustrators *Le Crayon*, and has received numerous prizes, including the Grand Prix Corporate Français (1996), the Ozzie Award Silver Medal for a magazine cover (2002) and the Coretta Scott King Award (2006).

Philippe Lardy has been based in Geneva since 2010.

ILLUSTRATIONS IN HD:

[Photos en HD Life forms Philippe Lardy](#)

Further information:

<http://lardyworld.blogspot.ch/>

Practical information and access

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