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Julio Le Parc, artist: "I was attacking the idea of the extraordinary artist"



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Karen Wright meets the Argentinian-born artist at his studio in Paris

KAREN WRIGHT | Thursday 27 November 2014

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Waiting to be buzzed into Julio Le Parc's studio in a street in Arcueil-Cachan, a suburb of Paris, I note the multitude of bells all labelled "Le Parc", proof that this building is more of a dynasty than a simple studio. Eventually, the door is opened by Yamil, his charming son (he has three children and five grandchildren, all of whom live in the building), who works full time in the practice as an enabler – archivist, designer and jack of all trades.

Le Parc was born in 1928 in Mendoza, Argentina. He studied at the School of Fine Arts in Buenos Aires and came to Paris in 1958 on a scholarship from the French Cultural Department, settling with a group of Latin American artists. "We wanted to see for ourselves," he said. "Paris was considered the international centre for contemporary work in the world." After eight months they were given the option to go back or to take the money from the return passage to remain in Paris, the option that Le Parc took. "We wanted to stay and experiment." His three-dimensional sculptural optical work referring to the neo-concrete movement in Latin America experimented with visual perception, something that Le Parc continues to do today.

The factory-scale studio has zones for different work and I am given a tour that starts with drawings that Le Parc has continued to make since he was a child (he confesses he was mediocre at school; though he was gifted at drawing cartoons and portraits of celebrity). We progress to a room that showcases Le Parc's continuing experimentation with light and moving optics that dizzy me as I enter. It is not surprising that Le Parc was signed up by the Denise René gallery, who also show Vasarely whose op-work relates to Le Parc. "There were no galleries, except Denise René, who were interested in my work."

In this environment, faced with the courtly elegant gentleman



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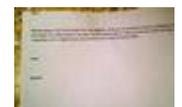
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artist, it is hard to consider Le Parc as a youthful anarchist, who at one point left his school to roam Argentina before returning and organising together with his fellow students "ruling the schools, cutting out all discipline's rules and regulations. They categorise the teachers: Good, Bad, or Unwanted, started an open-doors policy, come up with alternative learning methods, get in touch with young avant-garde artists, set up demonstrations, get arrested." I gently remind Le Parc of the "good old days", when he turned down a show at the Musée d'art Moderne de La Ville having flipped a coin to decide whether or not to take it.

As well as the optical works, Le Parc has experimented with participative games, something that a new generation of artists has embraced wholeheartedly. "I wanted to leave aside sentimentality to allow accessibility to people who had no history, to involve them. I was attacking the static nature of artworks. More importantly, I was attacking the idea of the extraordinary artist."

Le Parc insists on walking me to the exit. We stop by a box of his distorting eyeglasses, pausing to try them on, failing royally at an example of "participation through investigation". I leave with his words, ringing in my ears. "Can you ever be too old to experiment and make failures?"

Julio Le Parc continues at the Serpentine Gallery (020 7402 6075) until 15 February



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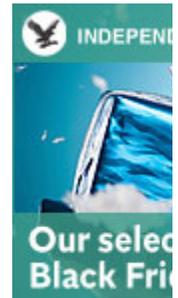


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