

artnet news

Mike Bouchet's Contribution to Manifesta 11 Is an 80-Ton Mountain of Poo

Amah-Rose Abrams, Friday, April 8, 2016



The production line for *The Zurich Load*.

Photo: Camilo Brau.

The theme for Manifesta 11, opening in June this year, is “What People Do for Money: Joint Ventures” and participating artist Mike Bouchet has taken a novel approach to the idea.

Bouchet—known for his process-driven installations, sculptures, and paintings—wasn't interested in trades offered to him by the biennial, [where artists are joining forces with “hosts” who work in the city to conceive works](#), and felt much more curious about what people throw away, rather than what they make.





The raw material.
Photo: Camilo Brau.

Bouchet is working with the local sewage plant to create a “monumental” work, entitled *The Zurich Load* (2016), using the human waste created by the citizens of Zurich, which will sit in one of the largest exhibition spaces in the city, the first floor of the Migros Museum.

Weighing 80 tons, the final installation will indeed have a monumental quality to it, but how and why did Bouchet get this idea off the ground?

“I really wanted it to be something monumental and bigger,” Bouchet told artnet News as we watched the final stages of production. “It’s a huge undertaking, on a lot of levels this is an impossible piece to make,” he added.



The waste is mixed with cement, lime, and pigment.
Photo: Camilo Brau.

Bouchet and his team are currently fashioning the raw material into large bricks at a rate of 50 per day, a process that can only be done by hand. Which is precisely why making the substance safe to be around was the first challenge.

"I had to find sludge that was processed the same way as it is here. Every city has a different process, it's a totally controlled substance," he explained. "First we were using polymers and then we got in touch with a university that was beginning to work with concrete. Then I spoke to an art conservator."

Bouchet not only had to remove toxins from the waste, but also had to remove water, prevent it from rotting, and control the smell, which I have to say stayed with me for some time. The work can only be shown indoors, and when the exhibition finishes, it will be destroyed.

On considering a work for the city of Zurich, Bouchet was struck by the stereotype often held about the "clean" Swiss. He was drawn to the idea of allowing viewers

to get up close and personal with their waste, thus making it more of an approachable subject.

“With this work I like the idea of people being comfortable around it. There is reason why there's a taboo about waste that has built up over the ages,” Bouchet conceded as we literally watched poo become an art material.



The only process that works on waste is hand pressing.
Photo: Camilo Brau.

"It's a biohazard," Bouchet added. "So what I'm interested in making is a work that makes this base material something more benign and less threatening."

Bouchet likens the process they are using to make *The Zurich Load* to the making of frescos, due to the use of cement and lime. He also worked with the conservator to preserve the deep earthy brown color of the material.

Bouchet would not reveal what the final realized work may or may not look like. Viewers will have to head to Manifesta 11 on June 11th to see it for themselves.



One can only imagine what happens when a town is confronted with its own shit, but Bouchet hopes it will be a harmonious union.

“I like that everyone in Zurich made it, it's a collaborative work and you know, everyone's contribution counts, it's a community artwork!,” Bouchet laughed. “I laugh and I joke about it, but I'm also serious. I like that it's something that everyone helped make.”

[Manifesta 11](#) will be on view across several venues in Zurich, from June 11-September 18, 2016.

