



INTERVIEW WITH PHOTOGRAPHER CHARLES PÉTILLON

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If you are London-based I am sure you recall French artist Charles Pétilion's monumental installation in Covent Garden titled *Heartbeat*. Pétilion presented his first public art installation – and his first ever live work outside of France with 100,000 giant white balloons filling the grand interior of the 19th Century Market Building.

Using balloons photographer Charles Pétilion manages to transform everyday scenes using balloons in his art-installation series *Invasions*. The eclectic talent of Pétilion has led him to capture arranged installations in diverse environments – stimulating our sense for observation, leading the audience to discover what is could not be seen.

The 42-year-old, who divides his time between Paris and Lille, creates imaginary scenes and questions his audience. Charles Pétilion is a French photographer whose photographs of his iconic *Invasions* series represent different areas invaded by a cluster of inflatable white balloons, which appear like clouds, in a poetic staging. His work aims to make the public see the world around him with a different eye. White balloons bring to the childhood and the fragility and restore emotion in these places.

Today we share our interview with him and we are very excited to see what Pétilion has in store for 2017!

Instagrafite: With a perfect command of light and your subject you leave nothing to chance creating yourself your sets. Could you talk us through your vision and process?

Charles Pétillon: Vision and technique are two completely different things. The vision of the image is essentially based on conceptualisation. The idea you want to materialise in image. For me, this requires a lot of reflection. For the technique, there is nothing special except for my photographs with my balloons, I use Photoshop only to control the contrast, colours, but there are no tricks. The balloons are actually present. It is for this reason that I document more and more installations with small videos.



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Instagrafite: For your photo series *Invasions* the white balloons are spilling out of houses, overflowing from rusty cars; your art-installation become occupants of the diverse spaces they appear in. You give a new function that change people's perceptions on everyday scenes. Why is that?

Charles Pétilion: The answer is in your question, by giving a new function to spaces or objects, you change the perception, you transform the look. You no longer see things instead you look at them.

Instagrafite: Working with balloons must be challenging. Does it require the help of a team to build your creations?

Charles Pétilion: Facilities have varying degrees of complexity. For some of them, one or two people suffice, and for the most complex we are several tens of people.

Instagrafite: How do you pick the locations and work on the arrangements for your art-installation projects?

Charles Pétilion: The choice of places to carry out the installations is fundamental. I attach as much importance to the choice of the place as to the choice of the subject, for the place and the subject are one. The space in which I install my balloons becomes constitutive of the work. From then on, the installation

maintains, in turn, a dialogue or a balance of power with the place. It is for these reasons that I do not ask the question of the choice of a space in relation to technical constraints, but in relation to its relevance.



© Charles Pétilion

As mentioned earlier in 2015 French artist Charles Pétilion presented his first public art installation in Covent Garden, in London, as 100,000 giant white balloons fill the grand interior of the 19th Century Market Building. Weaving its way through the building, *Heartbeat* stretches 54 metres in length and 12 metres in width, and incorporates gentle pulsating white light to symbolise the beating of a heart and reflect the history, energy and dynamism of the city.

Charles Pétilion said: “The balloon invasions I create are metaphors. Their goal is to change the way in which we see the things we live alongside each day without really noticing them. With *Heartbeat* I wanted to represent the Market Building as the beating heart of this area – connecting its past with the present day to allow visitors to re-examine its role at the heart of London’s life.

“Each balloon has its own dimensions and yet is part of a giant but fragile composition that creates a floating cloud above the energy of the market below. This fragility is represented by contrasting materials and also the whiteness of the balloons that move and pulse appearing as alive and vibrant as the area itself.”

Instagrafite: The fragility of your creations emphasises the ephemeral aspect of your work. How do you prepare for this?

Charles Pétilion: The main constraint is the wind, it is for this reason that I realise my photographs from May to October.

Instagrafite: For the *Playstation* series, you will learn about the use of games in all their forms, their evolution and their influence on society. What was the genesis of this concept?

Charles Pétilion: In general, my ideas or the subjects that I wish to address are inspired by our daily life, the evolutions or mutations of our society.

Instagrafite: Is there a particular project that you most liked to conceive? I like all the projects since I chose them.

Charles Pétilion: I like all the projects since I chose them.



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© Charles Pétilion – *Playstation 2*



© Charles Pétillon – *Souvenirs de famille*



© Charles Pétilion – *Superpositions*

When Charles Pétilion enters into the forest, a place full of dreams and a picturesque enclosure filled with stories and magic, the presence of balloons introduces a style of writing coming from a world in Mutation. This natural space bears the scars of its heritage and ambition just like humans do.



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Interviewed by Julie