



MIKE BOUCHET'S "SEQUEL" TO MOULIN ROUGE IS A CONTRADICTION OF BAZ LUHRMANN

At Azzedine Alaïa's Paris gallery, the artist endeavors to "Make Cabaret Great Again."

by Rebecca Voight

October 21, 2016 4:30 pm

“I

ve wanted to do this in Paris,” said the Frankfurt, Germany-based artist Mike Bouchet of his MR2 Cabaret that took over Galerie Azzedine Alaïa Wednesday night for a dinner spectacle. “It’s been in my head since 2001.”

A Dada-esque fantasy of a Parisian cabaret by a Southern Californian artist who has been living in Germany for the past 15 years, MR2 apparently tickled Azzedine Alaïa’s fancy. He gave Bouchet carte blanche for the show, which kicked off with a motorcycle stunt rider doing perilous wheelies in the gallery’s small old stone courtyard. The dinner for 150, prepared by the Alaïa kitchen under Bouchet’s direction, included sticky dinner rolls washed down with Pouilly-fuissé, poured by a crew of nervous black-suited waiters from Cherry red plastic jerrycans.

Consumerism is Bouchet’s favorite subject, and he will go to extremes to make art about it. In the past he’s created a mosaic of 10,000 porn videos (*Untitled Video*, 2011); concocted his own sticky formula for Cola Lite, with which he painted with and filled the rooftop pool of Chelsea’s Hotel Americain in 2013; and produced his own brand of jeans in a Colombian sweat shop in 2004, pairs of which he subsequently dropped from a plane back down on the town where they were manufactured.

For his *Zurich Load*, at last summer’s Manifesta 11 in Cologne, Germany, Bouchet took 80,000 tons of feces — the entire, um, output of the city of Zurich for one day — mixed it with cement and lye and pressed it into bricks to make a smelly grid that had the biennial’s neighbors complaining.

MR2 Cabaret, or *Moulin Rouge 2*, was Bouchet’s response to Baz Luhrmann’s 2001 film *Moulin Rouge*. “There’s been three versions: one in the 30’s, a film by John Huston in 1952, and then the last one which I thought was such a crazy trainwreck of sentimentality and sickening, layered up nostalgia,” Bouchet said, pulling no punches. “The film was just shellacked with cultural tropes, so I decided to make a sequel.”

Wearing a “Make Cabaret Great Again” trucker cap and a candy-striped tie over a fake paunch, Bouchet acted as the evening’s MC, a ranting, exploitative creep who stage manages the club’s wanna be star. There are simulated sex scenes on a turntable stage, interrupted by bouts of French kickboxing sailors, accompanied by music from an out-of-tune band featuring by a talentless German Leider singer and a troupe of wobbly can-can dancers.

Red was the evening’s dominant color. Bouchet’s *Big Red Zero* poster painting and others plastered with gooey-looking plastic maraschino cherries and French fries lined the walls with an embroidered packet of Pall Mall cigarettes on a red banner, a *Call of Duty: Big Red* faux film poster, and cardboard boxes stacked to the ceiling stamped with “MR2 Fucking Entertainment” in bright red lettering.

“Red wasn’t the origin of this, but I started to think about the color and cherries, which are an extremely potent symbols of sexuality and childhood innocence,” explained Bouchet. Maraschino cherries actually became a public health issue in 1901, the same year cabaret had its heyday in Germany, inspiring Dada theater. “They were the first mass-produced candy invented in France in the early 20th century. It was a huge business. The fruit was bleached, dyed, totally fake and so bad for you. There were health warnings about them in the U.S., but people kept eating more and more. Nobody cared.”