

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Adams, Brooks, "Ugo Rondinone: Jardin des Tuileries Centquatre and Almine Rech," Art in America, December 2009

PARIS

## UGO RONDINONE JARDIN DES TUILERIES, CENTQUATRE AND ALMINÉ RECH

Ugo Rondinone might be called a curatorial artist. In 2007, he was given carte blanche to fill the Palais de Tokyo with modern and contemporary art. (None of Rondinone's own work was included.) The resulting show, "The Third Mind," was an unforgettable self-portrait at one remove—a teasing rebus of the Swiss-born artist's sources and affinities, which include everything from the diagrams of the 20th-century Swiss mystic Emma Kunz, paired with fluorescent yellow sculptures by Paul Thek, to a single night sky painting by Vija Celmins holding its own against an early black-velvet diorama by Karen Kilimnik.

This fall in Paris, with two large installations and a gallery show—all of his own work—Rondinone the showman emerged stronger than ever. In the Tuileries Garden, he deployed "Sunrise East" (2009), a group of 12 variously smiling and grimacing bronze sculpted heads installed around an existing circular pool. These colossal heads were just the right heights—between about 6 and 8 feet—and didn't interfere with the hordes of figurative marble groups, specimen trees, topiary sculpture and decorative urns that already populate the site. Slathered in silver auto-body paint, Rondinone's bronzes stood on concrete plinths that look to be casts of packing crates. These totems functioned well as user-friendly public art: you could rat-a-tat-tat your pen on the big hollow heads and measure your hand against the sculpture's viscerally finger-painted surfaces. You could even stick your fingers in the creatures' big gap-toothed mouths. From the back, Rondinone's silvery ghosties looked abstract, like scholar's rocks—another of his recent sculptural tropes. But from the front and side they felt like sturdy, benign spirits, fully in line with the artist's enthusiasm for early spiritist arcana.

At the Centquatre, a year-old contemporary arts center housed in the arched and skylit spaces of the city's disused



View of Ugo Rondinone's exhibition "La vie silencieuse," 2009, showing (left to right) two acrylic paintings, a polyurethane mask and a mixed-medium door, at Almine Rech.

(and now renovated) 19th-century funerary works, Rondinone installed the new *How Does It Feel?*, a forbidding sound sculpture of neo-minimalist design. The viewer walked around the mammoth square volume, which suggested a bunker or crematorium, trying to find a way in. Only by pressing on the composite-board walls, cleanly spray-painted with an allover brick pattern, did you finally locate the door, which popped open. Inside, you were subjected to a recording of a two-character play spoken by a man and a woman in bland American English. The text recalls mid-century American soap operas, or a Nichols and May routine on adultery. This was played in a loop—the characters switch roles after a minute and a half—that bounced from speaker to speaker around the gray burlap-covered walls. Concentric squares of neon on the gray ceiling completed the decor.

At Almine Rech, Rondinone posited "La vie silencieuse," a life lived with the wide-open eyes of a child, a monk or a country person looking at the night sky. On the big, black fields of paintings bearing impossibly long German titles printed on little adjacent plastic plaques (each denotes the day in June 2009 when it was painted) are spray-painted skeins of white suggesting stars (not to mention Ross Bleckner's paintings of the 1980s). These paintings were interspersed with large, black-painted wooden reliefs of rustic portals with titles like *Fullblown firmament fulfillment* (2008); they are replete with gaping keyholes, big padlocks and clanking chains (many of them cast in plastic). Additional punctuation came from three black polyurethane masks from the "Moonrise" series (2004). Slowly, the spray-painted stars began to rhyme with the glinting nails in the doors, which in turn played off the long, nail-like teeth of the masks, themselves grotesquely soft and pliable. Now the Rondinonian universe was really spinning.

—Brooks Adams



View of Rondinone's installation "Sunrise East," showing two of 12 bronze sculptures, in the Tuileries Garden.

*How Does It Feel?* and "Sunrise East" were both commissioned by the Festival d'Automne and on view from Sept. 17 to Nov. 15. "La vie silencieuse" was at Almine Rech, Paris, from Sept. 12 to Oct. 15.