

A large, white, teardrop-shaped sail is suspended in the air, flying against a dramatic sky filled with dark, heavy clouds and patches of lighter, golden light from the setting or rising sun. The sail is held up by a thin black pole and a horizontal line. The background shows a dark silhouette of a treeline and a grassy field at the bottom.

Les Simonnet
And Yet, They Fly

LES SIMONNET

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Marthe and Jean-Marie Simonnet have lived and worked together ever since they met at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, where they graduated in architecture in 1970. Based in Griselles in the Loiret region, this artist couple focus on creating sculpted and painted works in polyester. They combine a rational, modular approach (a legacy of the architectural thinking that underpins all their work) with an organic visual aesthetic that became increasingly established in the 1960s. However, there is one particular area of creation, the Simonnets' very own 'Violin d'Ingres', which is difficult to define. This is their monumental kites.

Since 1986, the couple have been developing an approach to kites that is not just decorative or simply playful, but genuinely structural. They have overcome the technical demands of securing and succeed in creating flexible, floating forms that open and close with the wind. Using a creative process that mirrors their land-based sculptures, the artists have deconstructed the structure of kites down to their key elements of line, plane and surface.

Having established that the most basic form of flight is the *Trisquet* (triangular in shape) Les Simonnet multiply this in a modular way in a sequence of combinations that allows the unexpected to emerge. By ignoring any need for symmetry, they recombine basic geometric shapes into increasingly complex volumes, resulting in truly technical marvels. The two creators accept that the final shape of their aerial sculptures, which is brought about by the play of the wind, will be changeable and ephemeral. It is like a poetic expression of each person's presence in this world.

However, exhibiting these kites is quite a challenge both for the institution and the artists. How can the beauty of snapshots of floating movement or the vibrations of the canvas be recaptured? How autonomous are these objects, which are somewhere between sculptures and children's toys, outside the performative act of enabling them to be activated? This really is a performance, an interwoven connection between bodies. Les Simonnet, who prefer to fly their kites as a couple, establish an intimate, silent dialogue with the wind. The latter also becomes the determinant of the works whose spatial relationships it modifies. This results in something undefinable that is part of the very essence of kites, making them autonomous and organic. In this way, dialogue gives way to dance, or even struggle when strong winds turn the kites into monsters which need taming.

In the past, Charles Baudelaire's albatrosses, as soon as they were dragged down on to the deck, 'pitifully let their great white wings, like oars, drag beside them'. Under the influence of gravity, our *kings of the sky* present a different dialectic on terra firma. When they just hang there, with no wind to keep them alive, the relationship between the works shifts from the performers' bodies to those of the audience. It is now our turn to experience monumentality. Let's wander through this interplay of volumes created by the inanimate canvases, displayed like a diorama of inverted breath.

LES SIMONNET

Marthe & Jean-Marie SIMONNET

France (1942 & 1939), live and work in Griselles

Hexadule

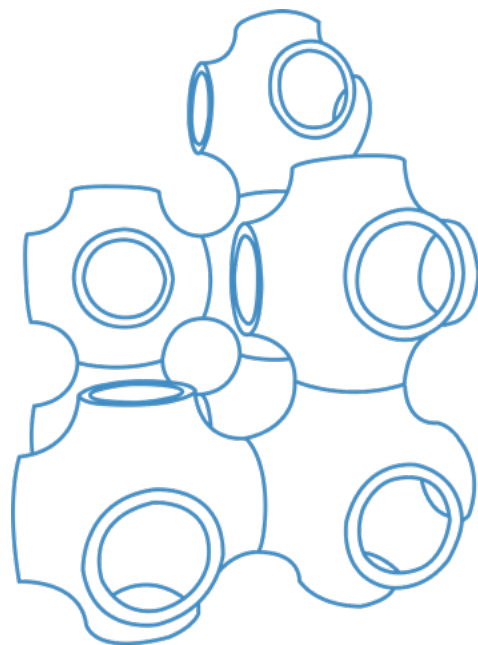
2020 (1970 module)

Sculpture

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester

300 x 200 x 200 cm

8 modules of 100 x 100 x 100 cm



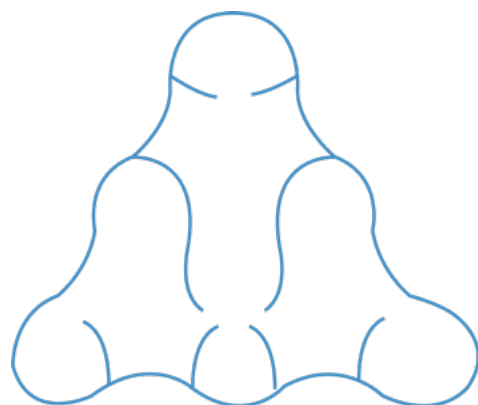
Pyramide

2020

Sculpture

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester

50 x 75 x 75 cm



Courtesy of the artists

This rounded *Pyramide* is intrinsically linked to the *Hexadule*, sculpture displayed in the courtyard of the Frac. The two works are the result of a shared modular game which, at different scales, offers a multitude of form-based solutions. Marthe and Jean-Marie Simonnet create all their works from basic geometric shapes that are the outcome of an analytical process of purification. These are then reproducible and infinitely adaptable. They produce all their work together, and want others to adopt their modules subsequently. The rationale that underpins their work is, in their view, the key to true collective creation. Issues of form can be considered objectively and express life in all its universality.

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Vivaces

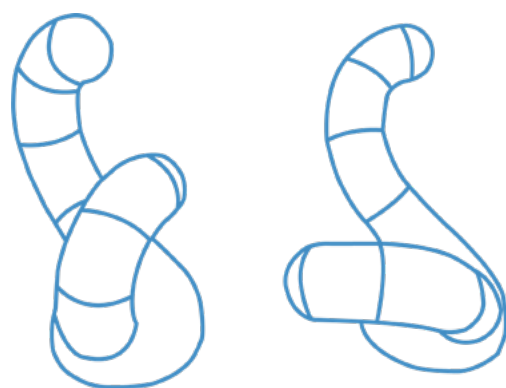
Polymorphes series

1992

Sculptures

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester

110 x 80 x 50 cm (each)



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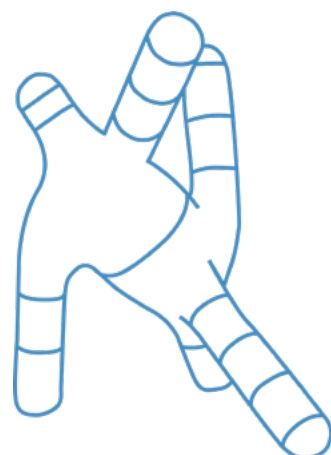
Polycloque

1992

Sculpture

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester

175 x 150 x 120 cm



Courtesy of the artists

Jean-Marie Simonnet created his first organic sculptures in the 1960s using glued paper on balloons in three shapes: oval, spherical and cylindrical. The limits of this process quickly led the couple to experiment with polyester casting which, combined with a streamlined production process in the form of modules, gave the artists the autonomy and freedom to create branching sculptures with curved volumes on a monumental scale. These 'play sculptures' that they developed from the 1970s onwards were first known as *Polymorphes* and were smooth, almost industrial forms made of modules with consistently circular cross sections. These later developed into *Polycloques*, which had a variety of cross-sections. Taking ownership of these modular series is all about play and the pleasure of manipulation, both for the artists and for the public. Their work has therefore often found its way into nursery schools.

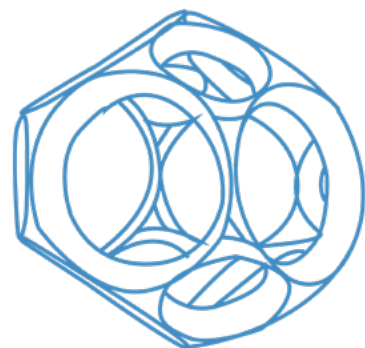
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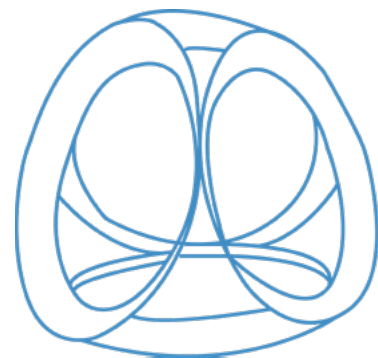
Structure conique octacycloèdre 2005

Sculpture
Fiberglass-reinforced polyester
120 x 120 x 120 cm



Structure conique tétracycloèdre 2005

Sculpture
Fiberglass-reinforced polyester
120 x 160 x 160 cm



Courtesy of the artists

In 1970, Marthe and Jean-Marie Simonnet presented their final year architecture projects. Together, they had calculated, designed and modelled construction structures that broke down the sphere into multiple cones. Easy to handle thanks to the use of circular strips of flexible polyester, they were intended to be both practical and compatible with more industrial processes such as shotcreting. This attention to materials and techniques met practical, objective architectural requirements. The couple, equally sensitive to the issue of aesthetics, advocate a kind of thinking that generates an 'infinite number of organisations' that is conducive to a variety of uses.

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Le Grand Trisquet

1986

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

500 x 660 cm



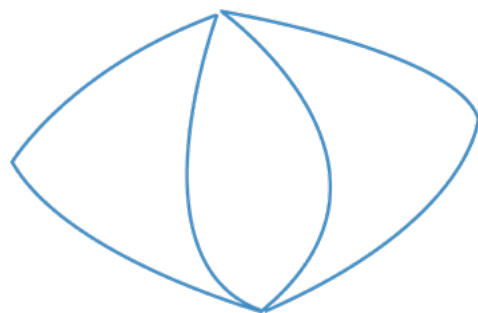
Double Trisquet

1986

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

2 cloths of 330 x 430 cm



Courtesy of the artists

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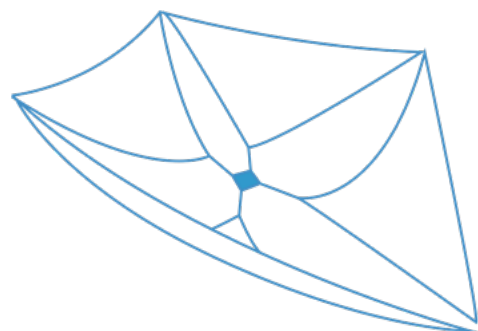
Les Quatre Triangles

n.d.

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

4 cloths of 230 x 320 cm and 1 cloth of 23 x 23 cm



Le Polytrisquet rouge

1997

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

Variable dimensions



Courtesy of the artists

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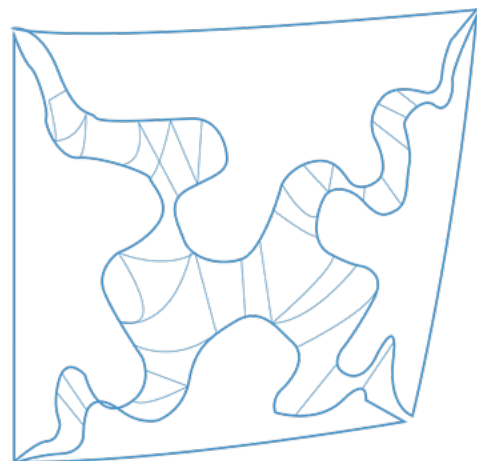
Le Carré puzzle

1996

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

300 x 300 cm



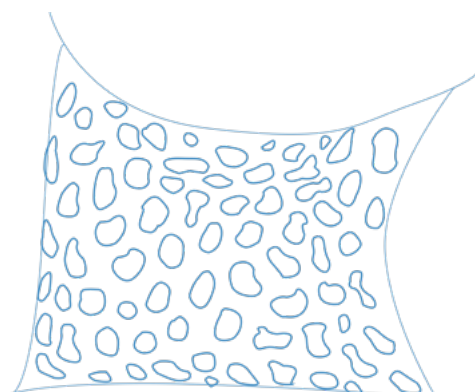
Les Gouttes d'or

1997

Kite

Spinnaker fabric and rope

450 x 550 cm



Courtesy of the artists

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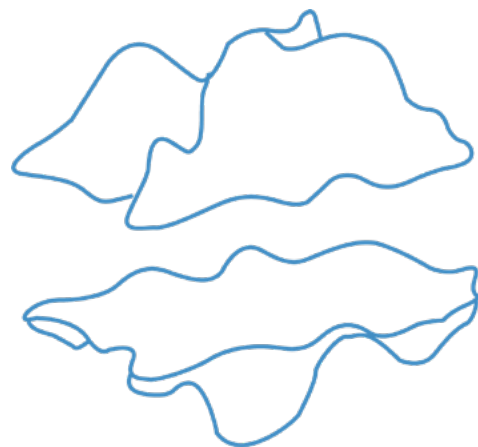
Équipartition de l'espace

2022-2024

Sculpture and model

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester and wood

Variable dimensions and 8 modules of 14 x 30 x 15 cm



Courtesy of the artists

The creations of Les Simonnet are always a playful twist on the very principle of creation and manipulation. *Équipartition de l'espace* is a puzzle, a work of decomposition and recomposition in which two parallelepipeds become, in the hands of the artists, forms with free and organic sinuosity. Nothing reveals the rigour of their design better than the manipulation that displays their many possibilities in terms of form. Entirely made by hand using polyester casting, the modules are infinitely combinable to form unique reliefs. Module after module, a landscape, as dreamlike as it is joyful, is built before our eyes. And this landscape can reach monumental, even hypothetically infinite dimensions.

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Eau de-ci, eau-delà

2003



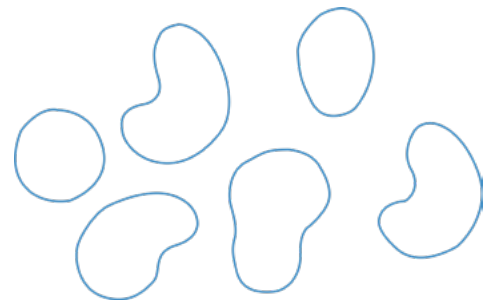
Painting

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester, polyester gel coat colours

Variable dimensions

Morceaux d'azur

2003



Painting

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester, polyester gel coat colours

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artists

LES SIMONNET

Marthe & Jean-Marie SIMONNET

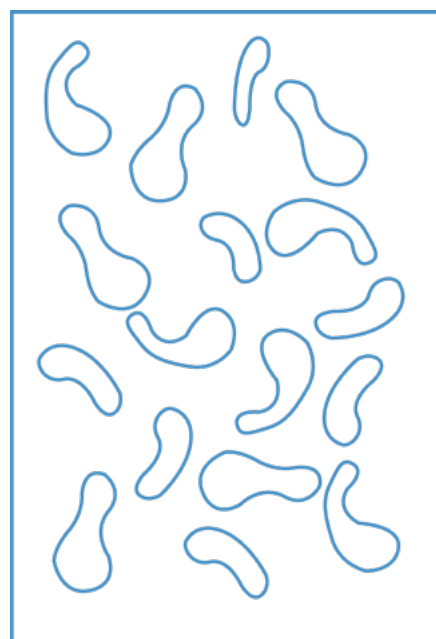
France (1942 & 1939), live and work in Griselles

Untitled
series *Grilles*

n.d.

Painting

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester, polyester gel coat colours
150 x 85 cm



Courtesy of the artists

The painting practice of Les Simonnet is in the same vein as their sculptural practice. The couple stand out by opting for plastic as their support, revisiting the question of medium. Their negative/positive process involves producing moulds in which they apply a layer of pigmented gel coat, itself covered in liquid polyester and fibreglass. Once the polymerisation process is completed, the paintings are extracted to reveal cameos of colour and organic shapes. This omnipresent notion of the living - inseparable from that of rationality for Les Simonnet - results in an explosion of a logic of form that combines - without contradiction - the Baroque and Constructivism.

Les Simonnet. *And Yet, They Fly*

2024

Film

Color, Sound

Duration

Direction: Étienne Bouvet

Production: Movida Production and Frac Centre-Val de Loire

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Marthe & Jean-Marie SIMONNET

France (1942 & 1939), live and work in Griselles

Model of the Simonnet House

1987

Model

Fiberglass-reinforced polyester and painting

18 x 30 x 55 cm



Courtesy of the artists

Designed for a hilly site, this organic-looking project follows in the footsteps of the bubble houses of the 1960s and 1970s, but differs in its refusal to integrate into the landscape. Marthe and Jean-Marie Simonnet, who are trained architects, have championed utilitarian function and variety of form by using a rational, quasi-modular approach that encourages expression. Plastic, an industrial, shiny material, contrasts sharply with so-called traditional houses. This bold choice posed a number of technical challenges that required research and experimentation to ensure the home's comfort. While the shells used to build the prototype home were made by the couple themselves, prefabrication was envisioned for private homes.