



## Four birds with one stone

**LILIANNE MILGROM**

As convenient and efficient as the Paris metro system is, it can get awfully exhausting and time-consuming dragging oneself from one end of Paris to the other in the quest for Art. Which is why I was so pleased to focus on a cluster of major museums within a stone's throw of each other in the sixteenth arrondissement. I am talking about the Musée d'Art Moderne, the Palais Tokyo, the Musée Galliera and the Musée Guimet. The museums are so close to each other that one could be tempted to visit them all in one day.

As it happens, the fashion museum (Musée Galliera) is closed for construction until 2012, and the Palais Tokyo is temporarily closed while it gears up for its upcoming exhibition opening October 19th. Which is just as well, as attempting a museum marathon would have required me to spend the next day having my feet massaged while watching mindless sitcoms to recover!

So I began the day at the [Guimet Museum](#) which is devoted to the religions of Ancient Egypt, Classical Antiquity and Asia. It was the brain-child of early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrialist Emile Guimet who acquired a remarkable collection during his extensive travels. To be perfectly frank I do not find religious art and artifacts particularly exciting, and I am the first to admit that this is due in part to my ignorance in this field. The purpose of my visit to the Guimet was to check out the works of French-Chinese conceptual artist [Chen Zhen](#). But as soon as I entered the museum I felt a wonderful sense of calm. The architects for the recently renovated museum did

justice to the principles of Eastern philosophy and aesthetics. They designed with a special eye for spacing, and the dichotomy between full and empty, negative and positive space.

The collection is magnificent, and each piece is displayed to its best advantage. I have a particular penchant for exhibitions where ancient or classical art is juxtaposed with contemporary art, providing a visual (and conceptual) dialogue between artists past and present. By tastefully placing the works of Chen Zhen and Pakistan's greatest contemporary artist, [Rashid Rana](#) next to selected pieces from its collection, the museum succeeded in establishing the link between ancient and modern. Zhen's moving installation entitled *Round Table* was perfectly matched to the museum's round gallery on the fourth floor. One is saddened to know that the artist died at the age of 45 while at the peak of a career which explored the dualities of East and West. It was difficult to leaving the serenity of the Guimet Museum.



**Rashid Rana's large scale digital photo collage in front of ancient devotional carving**

Upon exiting the Guimet I walked half a block towards the imposing [Musée d'Art Moderne](#) to catch the retrospective on Tulsa-born American photographer Larry Clark, called *Kiss The Past Hello*. The photographer's website describes him as a story-teller. "His stories boldly confront themes of youth culture, sex, violence and drugs. A disturbing portrayal of teenage life."

Clark's photographs and videos drew the crowds in large numbers. As I jostled to see his vintage black and white photographs and more recent color photographs, the depressing scenes were just that. Depressing. Many photographers have chosen the down-and-out as subjects, but what sets Clark apart is the *age* of his subjects. Clark has recorded a slice of society that most of us will never have access to, and so it felt like a voyeuristic experience looking at disenfranchised teenagers shooting up, having sex and simulating suicide. The

photographs become redundant after a while, but what is making the show something of a *scandale* is the Paris municipality's reactionary decision to ban admission to those under 18 years of age. Somehow this seems to make Clark's subjects seem even more like victims of contemporary art.



One of the tamer portraits by Larry Clark

In a large gallery opposite this exhibition, the same museum was showcasing another show of a very different nature. I specifically use the word 'nature' here because artist Didier Marcel's impeccable show *sommes-nous l'élégance*, is all about our natural environment. Marcel's large minimalist works use forms found in nature, either directly or by replicating them in a variety of materials. The overall feeling is one of peace and respect, inviting introspection.



Didier Marcel's large rock forms

I was actually disappointed not to be able to pop in next door to the [Palais Tokyo](#), reopened in 2002 as a site for contemporary experimental art. The museum itself is experimental in several ways. Unlike most major museums it is dedicated to temporary exhibitions and has no permanent acquisitions. And it takes its fun, young image to the max by being the only museum to stay open from noon to midnight. The next anticipated exhibition called *Fresh Hell* will be opening on October 19<sup>th</sup> and featuring a DJ all night long. Sound like a great evening!

Just across the road, Paris' fashion museum, the [Musée Galliera](#) is undergoing a major renovation, but its majestic building, landscaped grounds and flower gardens are absolutely breathtaking. On an Indian summer's day, it was the perfect place to stroll and think about the infinite ways mankind finds to express his (or her) creativity...