

Milène Guermont: “To create is an act of love”

By David Hanau

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An engineer by training and an artist by vocation, [Milène Guermont](#) has spent the past twenty years building a body of work that is as monumental as it is intimate—from *Polysensual Concrete* and *Phares* on Place de la Concorde, to the 60-square-meter [Maison Guermont](#). An interview with a visual artist who places touch and the human being at the heart of everything.

DH: You’re often described as an artist-engineer. Is that still something unique to you, or a necessary condition for inventing new forms?

MG: There are as many arts as there are artists. For me, it really stems from a long-standing desire to master technical tools in order to take the materialization of certain deeply poetic ideas even further. I’ve always believed that mastering language and tools could help me push the forms of my work even further. Advanced math and engineering school weren’t a panacea, but they gave me tools I use every day. Every day I’m an engineer, but it’s the engineer who comes to assist the artist. I work with other engineers; I haven’t mastered everything. But what I enjoy is creating something new. And sometimes, that involves developing new technical tools.

DH: Your work places touch at the center. Is this a way of resisting an art world dominated by images and the rapid circulation of signs, or does it stem from something else?

MG: From the very beginning, this has been the genesis of my work... I'm in Geneva, I touch an ordinary concrete wall, and I had a very strong impression of being by the sea. It might sound a bit crazy, but I was in the heart of Geneva, touching that piece of concrete, and I felt like I was facing the ocean. Hence the idea to create *Marée Matrice*, a Polysensual Concrete artwork, to give tangible form to what I had experienced: when you brush against it, you hear the sound of the sea. This tactile approach allows me to forge a connection with the audience that can be very powerful: touching, being touched, inviting people to brush against it... It's about getting as close as possible to someone's innermost self. And it also allows me to engage with a wide variety of audiences who don't necessarily have a background in art history. My works in Polysensual Concrete can be accessible to the hearing-impaired, visually impaired, even to those with intellectual disabilities, because these works are extremely durable. I really wanted my work to have multiple levels of interpretation.

I chose concrete; it's the most widely produced material in the world after water. The new types of concrete are ten times stronger, so I can let people touch them. I remember a digital art jury, over ten years ago, to whom I spoke about touch, about touching the material... And in the end, I was chosen because, in my works made of Polysensual Concrete, there is digital technology, but it serves the artwork – almost serving humanity – to foster a human-to-human connection, to create a unique bond between you and the artwork, just as between two human beings.



DH: How do you ensure that technical innovation doesn't overshadow the emotional aspect?

MG: By keeping the technical side in the background. To me, it's always really just a tool. In fact, there have been several times in my life when I've had to make choices. When I won the Oséo Award in 2009 for my concrete innovations, and I was being approached from all sides to join an incubator... I told myself: I have these skills, patents that I could industrialize and commercialize... But life is very short. What does truly excite me? Creating extraordinary projects with passionate people. I chose the path of emotion, the path of art, rather than that of pure tech with industrial, economic, and commercial objectives. It was a real choice. We live such a short time on Earth; we must leave our mark with works that re-examine the history of art, that re-examine life itself!

DH: In 2025, you received various forms of institutional and media recognition. How do you feel about this new visibility?

MG: I'd say three things. The first is "Thank you." I'm truly grateful, regardless of the field – whether it's in the world of entrepreneurship, industry, art, or culture. My first accolades came on the international stage. And it's very difficult – the statistics prove it – to be a visible French female artist in our country. So, these recognitions are precious.

I had this awareness while working on *Phares* at Place de la Concorde, when I received an inquiry from an American journalist who asked me: "But why don't I see you everywhere? *Phares* is the only work of its kind in history; it's twice as big as Pei's pyramid; it's an eco-friendly work; it bridges East and West; it was chosen from among 17,000 projects. Why don't I see you everywhere?" She wrote an article comparing four creations for public space: a tower by Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid's stadium that never got built, Anish Kapoor's "queen's vagina", and *Phares*. This article was a way of bringing attention to the invisibility of women in public spaces, particularly in France. I tried to find some statistics: in terms of the number of female artists exhibited in galleries, France ranks last in Europe. This recognition, received today, fulfills my own feelings, and those that foreigners have shared with me. That said, I'm only at the beginning of my career. These are just the first signs of recognition. There are so many other rewards to achieve... and so many projects I'd love to accomplish!



***Maison Guermont* occupies sixty square meters nestled in the New Athens neighborhood of Paris, a “livable artwork” that opens once or twice a month to a very limited number of visitors. While it is difficult to categorize this project, that may be the artist’s most radical gesture.**

DH: With *Maison Guermont*, you’ve taken it a step further – toward the total work of art, the livable space, and performance. What has this project allowed you to express that sculpture alone could no longer contain?

MG: It’s not just a work you can look at or touch. Here I wanted to go even further, since it’s a work you can breathe, that you can live... *Maison Guermont* opens as part of a new kind of show called an *Immersion*, a performance with mediators, when I am myself dressed in a performative garment-artwork. Before, I invited the audience to become actors by brushing against the Polysensual Concrete wall-artworks; by touching the pyramids that began to pulsate, they triggered light, sound, and vibrations. Here, it is I, myself, who take action. *Maison Guermont* allowed me to explore a different field I hadn’t anticipated: that of performance – not by the audience, but by myself.

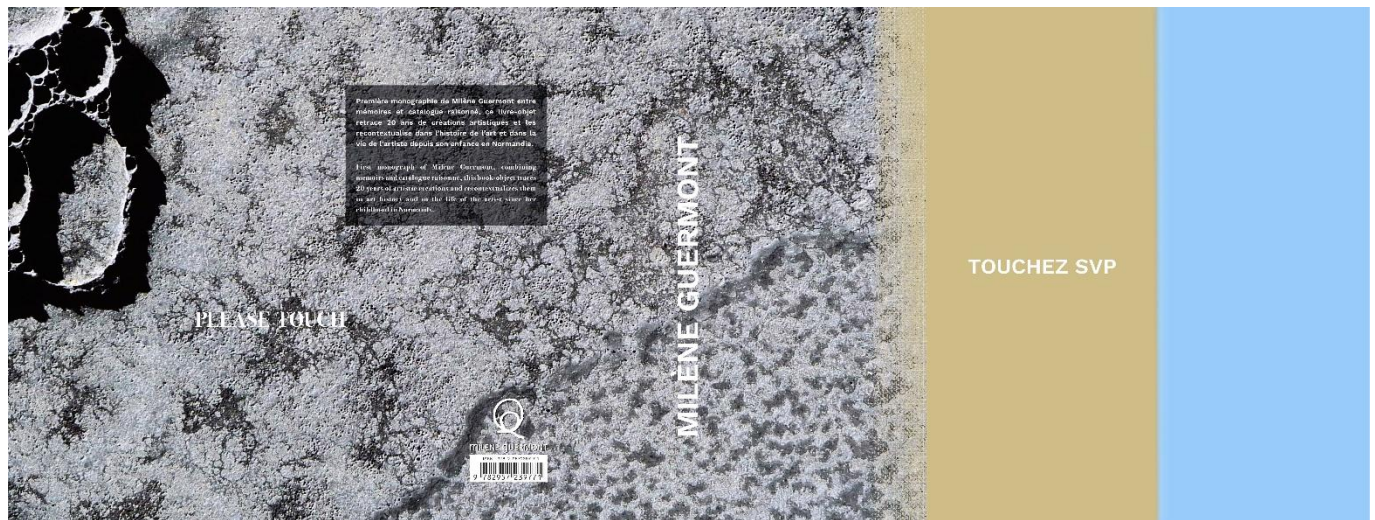
DH: With *Please Touch*, your first monograph, you look back on twenty years of creative work. What stands out to you most honestly: a sense of consistency, an obsession, or moments of rupture?

MG: A calling: the calling to create. I was born to create. I believe you’re born an artist; after that, you either develop your calling or you don’t. What excites me is creating extraordinary projects with fascinating people. Besides, the extraordinary isn’t necessarily about doing something “big.” It could be that piece weighing just a few kilos in Polysensual Concrete for Sophie, a collector who lost her father, who died suddenly just as we were about to create another artwork. That sculpture helped her get through her grief. The extraordinary can be found right there, in the few kilos of this sensitive, ultra-high-performance sculpture. You only live once. And for me, creating is an act of love. And that’s the final line in *Please Touch*.

DH: What is your main challenge today?

MG: I have several. The first, as always, is sharing. I was talking about sharing my work with the public and with the people who contribute to it. Here, it’s about sharing *Maison Guermont*: it’s open to only a very small number of people. It’s a work that explores intimacy, and we aren’t the same person when there are two, five, or fifty of us. And it’s relatively “small,” 60 square meters. To discover it, beyond the *Immersions* held once or twice a month, there’s this monograph, *Please Touch*, featuring 30 authors and over 500 images. Then, I’m working on an extension. I’d also very much like to have an exhibition to present the creative process: we could start with the sketches; there’s so much to say about this artwork, which encompasses so many worlds...

Next, I’ve been working for several years on a multi-site installation in a public space, in a particularly complex foreign country. I can’t say much more about it, given the current geopolitical and diplomatic stakes... I multiply the possibilities of expressions of this artwork, right up until the very last moment. It will bring connection and light, and will highlight what is always at the heart of my work: the human being. Sometimes, art is all that remains as the only exchange still possible. Sometimes, there is nothing left but art, nothing left but culture, nothing left but history that cannot be erased. This goes beyond the artistic process; it is a civic act. And that, that interests me very much.



Please Touch, a monograph by Milène Guermont (30 contributors, over 500 images), is available at mileneguermont.com and in the bookstores of Artcurial and the Grand Palais.

Maison Guermont welcomes visitors in Paris's 9th arrondissement; book an *Immersion* experience at maisonguermont.com.

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