

# La Source du Lion

## Artistic project in the Hermitage Park in Casablanca

[www.lasourcedulion.org](http://www.lasourcedulion.org)

### Social context

CASABLANCA: Economic capital of Morocco with more than 5 million inhabitants. A diversified population, Moroccans coming from all parts of the country to find work there. The Hermitage quarter is one of the quarters which has received the rural populations fleeing from the Moroccan countryside and the difficulties of life there.

HERMITAGE PARK: An 18 hectare park, one of the two large public parks in Casablanca. Users and residents: People migrating from the countryside in the 1970's. They have a low annual income, the majority of women are illiterate, very high population density. Totally insecure, the park was basically visited by men and children who went to play in the rubbish, burning the trees and breaking anything rising above ground level. A place where the only law was that of the strongest.

Administrative situation – before 2005: The park is positioned on the border between two urban districts in the administrative division (1976/2004), and because of this it obtains no concrete administrative responsibility and does not benefit from any form of security. Since land is very expensive in Casablanca, the park ran the risk of being broken into parts.

The park is fragmented into separate zones, several state institutions have illegally constructed outbuildings there: Ministry of Culture (Casablanca delegation), of Education (academy), Municipality of Maarif (rubbish and waste materials, temporary accommodation for officials.....), local authority agent (haphazard café). The park as a prototype constitutes a laboratory of contemplation and experimentation.

### Methodologies

The Hermitage Park project is structured in three phases:

**I/ The model project**

**II/ The Hermitage in the planning phase**

**III/ The Hermitage in the planning phase: territorial construction site**

CONCEPT: Art as communication – Work to scale

MEASURING REALITY

**I/ The model project. Artistic communication II. February 2002/April 2003.**

Deciphering a reality: Information and documentation  
Recollections of the park: Words, photographs, picture books, postcards, web...  
Vitality around the park: Seeking local actors, meetings with the associations  
Seeking partners  
Survey of the park. February - April 2002  
Measuring the park / Experiencing the park  
Perimeter, litter, trees, soils, buildings, furnishing, everything that is in the park in detail.  
Declaration of the Hermitage. 4th July 2002

#### COPYING REALITY

Making a 1/100th model of the 18 hectares of the park  
Participating workshop open at the Villa des Arts every day for eight months.  
Call for contribution: Human and material  
Petition of the park  
Regular organised visits to the park  
Presentation of the model  
International meetings of artist groups: France, Belgium, Spain, Holland  
Meetings and debates with the public and the local authorities / engaged art in society

#### ACTING ON THE SCALE OF A REALITY

### **II/ The Hermitage in project / Artistic Communication III. April/May 2004**

Cleaning the park  
Weekly meetings "the Wednesdays of the Hermitage" with all the civil and military services of the town involved in the Hermitage. - Involvement of the quarter - First direct action in the Hermitage / Re appropriating a territory.  
Multidisciplinary workshops for the children of the quarter  
Specific workshops (tales of the Hermitage) for mothers.  
First International Artistic Meetings of the Hermitage  
Workshop / Contemplation workshops: Artists, park users and public authorities  
Proposals of the artists and recommendations / Public presentation on July 9 in the park.  
Construction sites in the park  
Opening up the park and a voice - link park/city centre.  
Inauguration of the new lion and cleaning up a new "parc du lion" area

### **III. The Hermitage in the planning phase: territorial construction site. Artistic communication IV. April/May 2005**

Actions of the artists in the park with the aim of involving the inhabitants and the park users in the artistic proposals.  
Twinning of the park and other parks in the world: "Gardens of the world" project, Schiedam (Holland) Chicago, project open for a long term.  
Dislocation of the principle of this action onto another territory in Casablanca, the zoo of Ain Sebaa: "Le lion se meurt" (the lion passes away) project, another construction site opened by an artistic action.

Decision of the city to remove the park from the privatisation policy of the parks of Morocco.

Final rehabilitation of the integrated park in the process started with the model project.

## **Interaction with partners (communities, public or private institutions, others)**

The creation of the model is collective

Its non creation is also collective

In "Declaration", July 2002.

Types of interactions developed in the different phases of the Hermitage project.

The model project:

Call to contribution for the creation of the model, artists, photographers, amateur web designers, public, partners (gifts in nature: wood, glue, cement, paper, photo printing...), around thirty people helped to make the model over several months.

Meetings at the time of painting

Meeting for artists, curators, journalists, cultural institution and public authorities,

International meetings of artist groups

The Hermitage in the planning phase:

Contemplation unit regarding the Hermitage and the creation of CPAH (Comité de Préservation et d'animation de l'Hermitage) (Committee of Preservation and animation of the Hermitage) consisting of several volunteers (artist, artistic coordinator, architect, designer, director of publication, journalist, and representative of public authorities).

Artistic workshops of the Hermitage, children and parents – regular meetings with the park users.

The different actions of the artists involve the park users and the quarter inhabitants.

The municipal employees of the park as well as weekly meetings with all the town services directly connected to the park.

International workshop, annual meeting amongst the invited artists, the users of the park, the Mayor and the foreign officials from the invited artists' countries (Belgium, France, Holland ...)

The schools: Several schools currently organise events in the park. At the moment of each artistic communication, the artists contribute for specific workshops with the school groups and the young people of the quarter.

Throughout the year, informal meetings with the park users give the park back its vocation of place/link between the individuals united around a common project.

All the artists' production workshops are open, each year we involve young people from Casablanca Universities and their teachers in various phases of the projects

Three university research papers (Morocco and France) which are based on the experience of the Hermitage and the source du lion.

A book entitled "Echo Hermitage" speaks out for all the individuals who have been con-

nected with the project in some way or another. This book comes out in paperback edition at the beginning of 2006.

## References

### February 2002

Hassan Darsi and Florence Renault-Darsi visit the Hermitage park and decide to devise an artistic project, called "The maquette project"

### July 2002

Presentation of "Ouverture" at the Villa des Arts – an exhaustive inventory of what comprises the park:

cultivated land, buildings, detailed plans, discarded material and refuse, photographic material, internet site, "declaration" Hermitage poster, platform for the maquette.

### September 2002

Inauguration of the site for making the maquette in the atelier open on this occasion in the gardens surrounding Villa des Arts, and call for material and human manpower contributions. Petition for the park.

### April 2003. Artistic showcase II

Presentation of the maquette. Artists' collectives of Spain, France and the Netherlands are invited to present their projects. Meetings with the public are scheduled.

Two weeks later, 2000 truckloads of refuse are removed.

### September 2003. First direct contact with the park and the area

Two rooms are renovated and opened for artistic activities.

### April 2004. Artistic showcase III

Workshop

The artists of artistic showcase II are again invited, the beginning of new thought on the Hermitage Park.

### 9 July 2004. Official inauguration of the new lion

Clear-up of the parc du lion

### September 2004

Freeing of the park

Work start-up on the new avenue

Workshop in Rotterdam

Companies are engaged for park upkeep.

Several dwellings are created through the park redevelopment project.

### April 2005. Artistic showcase IV

The Hermitage project process, territory on site.

Initiatives by artists inside and outside the park

Clear-up of the depot; the park rediscovers its understanding and is completely freed of discarded material

Inauguration of the international project "Jardins du monde"

### July 2006

The Mohamed VI Foundation for the Environment intervenes and decides to redevelop the Hermitage Park.

The artists' suggestions are incorporated into the landscape plan by Atelier Vert, the agency appointed by the Foundation and Casablanca town hall.

**December 2005.** Echo Hermitage

Book written by Martine Derain together with Hassan Darsi and Florence Renault, to be published by Le Fenec.

The book describes the details of the park project through the personal testimony of all those involved from 2002 through 2005.

**2006**

Several presentations of the project from 2002 to 2005 are planned for Morocco and Europe.

Information and pictures at: [www.lasourcedulion.org](http://www.lasourcedulion.org)

## **Critical points and applied solutions**

### **Social context**

Quarter scale: The inhabitants of the quarters overlooking the park are uprooted from their native lands, they were precipitated into the "modernity" of a city. They had no way of integrating the city development. Public areas (the park for example) seem to have no use and carry out no function, so they are disappearing.

Because of their high rate of illiteracy the people have been kept in the dark about decisions taken by the public authorities in the quarter, and have difficulty in making themselves heard regarding their living area. The repressive past is in the collective memory of the Moroccans, basically of the disadvantaged classes.

### **APPROACH**

"reserving the park, is giving it a function".

This was our slogan in the first phase of the "Hermitage in the planning phase" and this is the catch phrase for the rehabilitation project.

Work in order for the quarter inhabitants to re-appropriate the park, workshops for the children, workshops for the mothers all the actions of the artists in the Hermitage.

Young people and women have been demonstrating their desire to join forces around the park for a year. (Example: Women do not go to sports grounds in the presence of men and demand a space for themselves)

Artistic proposals in associating the people and their word in the park (Artistic communication IV)

### **Artistic context**

Our approach does not come into the artist categories "plastic arts", it is at the frontier of several society matters.

"We only subsidise artistic projects and not projects regarding the environment" = typical response of Moroccan foundations financing artists

### **APPROACH / Production of literature around the project**

The Hermitage project (all the projects conceived by the source du lion) operates a new

vision in the plastic arts of Morocco, is considered a reference and is held up as one of the most important works in the last five years in Morocco. We have managed to create intelligent links with certain elements of the specialised press and large public daily newspapers to operate changes in the analytical approach of the project, to make our intentions easy to understand.

Communication IV was based on transmission. All the artists' projects included an association with the inhabitants of the quarter, children, young people, women, park employees... Re-habilitating a park and re-establishing the artist in what they are capable of providing a society with.

### **Political context**

The project intention goes directly back to the chaotic way of managing the municipalities and the districts, which is why certain local actors are reticent to effectively join the project.

#### **APPROACH**

We have managed to develop connections inside the administration which allow us to develop our project.

The magnitude of the project has led the local public authorities to seriously collaborate with our actions and to promote the question of the Hermitage park as one of the most important projects in the city.

Communicate positively about the park both about what it is a what it could become. Reveal its potential by artistic and cultural projects. The park has been considered a place of perdition for decades, change this image in the eyes of the Casablancans, users and public authorities.

### **Economic/juridical context**

The Source du lion has received no local or international operating subsidy until now. Within the leeway of what is recognised as art, outside the closed circuits of a certain art market and Ministerial subsidies, our action is limited.

Legal decrees regarding associations do not allow associations of artists to give salaries. Only development associations (the handicapped, infancy.) are acknowledged as public utilities

#### **APPROACH**

The town council has finally decided this year to grant the source du lion an annual subsidy for the children's workshops (awaiting confirmation).

We continue to seek financing for our projects day after day.

### **Training and actors in the project**

Lack of moderators, mediators and local artists capable of joining in such an artistic approach. The absence and the lack of training in the fields of negotiation and artistic creation is the effect of too weak potential opportunities.

#### **APPROACH**

We have integrated two students in the project who are learning in the field.