



THE UNPLAYED NOTES MUSEUM PRESS REVIEW

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After the Artpocalypse

Loris Gréaud assesses the
damage done to his solo
exhibition in Dallas.

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On the evening of Saturday, January 17, the artist **Loris Gréaud** opened *The Unplayed Notes Museum*, his solo exhibition at the **Dallas Contemporary**, to a private audience—and then immediately destroyed it. A riot, choreographed by Gréaud and carried out by actors, stuntmen, and museum security, broke out that left the show in pieces, patrons in the parking lot, and the museum in complete darkness.

Gréaud, 35, is a showman artist, known for theater and grandiosity. He takes over entire museums, as he did in Dallas, in order to create sensorial experiences that are total. When he inhabited the 40,000-square foot Palais de Tokyo in Paris in 2008, the vending machines dispensed candy that tasted of nothing and galleries were perfumed with the imagined scent of Mars. So when Dallas Contemporary executive director Peter Doroshenko gave him carte blanche, Gréaud recalled, “We agreed to do something crazy.”

That was a few days before the opening, and the artist was nervous. Even though the choreography was tight and the time frame concentrated—chaos would reign for a well-rehearsed 40 seconds before the unsuspecting crowd would be ushered outside—Gréaud was unnerved by the unpredictability of mobs. “There is going to be a moment where we are going to lose control, basically,” he said. “This is where the project really happens.”

Before he could destroy the project, Gréaud had to build it first. He filled the 20,000-square foot space with what he thought of as a natural history museum, but one that catalogues a world of his own imagining, populated by marble statues of angels and beastlike sculptures of uncertain species. Then he spent two weeks carefully installing the work, half of which was earmarked for vandalism. “Is it a real museum inside the museum?” he asked. “Yes and no. Is that real work we’re destroying? Yes and no. I’m trying to reach this weird moment of irresolution.”

When the moment came, the destruction was swift—and loud. “The sound of everything falling to the floor was really shocking,” Gréaud said when I checked in with him a couple of days after. The artist protested his exhaustion, but as he talked he grew almost giddy: “It was one of the most exciting art experiences I’ve done.” Film of the happening taken by bystanders resembles found-footage horror movies. “There was a 12-year old girl, an actor, who was out of control,” Gréaud recalled. “She ended up on a pedestal throwing light bulbs at a painting. It was like she was possessed.” He added, “Part of the script was to go off script.”

The whole event took longer than expected—a full minute—and left more of the work in pieces than Gréaud had planned, almost three-quarters of it by his accounting. And the project’s final element, the audience’s reaction, was mixed. “Some people were scared, some really excited, and some really angry,” the artist said. The eerie timing of the staged riot to the Charlie Hebdo protests in Paris, not to mention the explosive events in America the past year, had not escaped them. “A lot of the questions I got were political,” he explained. “The violence was meant to be neutral, but of course people will project.”

As for the artist, Gréaud was rattled by the experience. “Actually, on the way to dinner after the opening, I felt a little shaky,” he said. “And a little sad. I was worried that I won’t be able to reach this level of tension in my work again.” He paused. “What if this is it?”