

This French Artist Believes In Going Straight To The Essential And Making Compromises

Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle Contributor

Y-Jean Mun-Delsalle is a Paris-based reporter covering art and culture

Rio de Janeiro-based artist [Rero](#), aka Alexis Devevey, who has made a name for himself through his works featuring a thick black line striking through uppercase letters in the universal Verdana font, tells us why less is more.

Rero, Untitled (ART IS GREAT TO WASTE TIME BEFORE DYING...), 2012, mixed media on canvas, 160 x 200 ... [+] PHOTO COURTESY OF RERO

What was your it like studying graphic design at the London College of Communication?

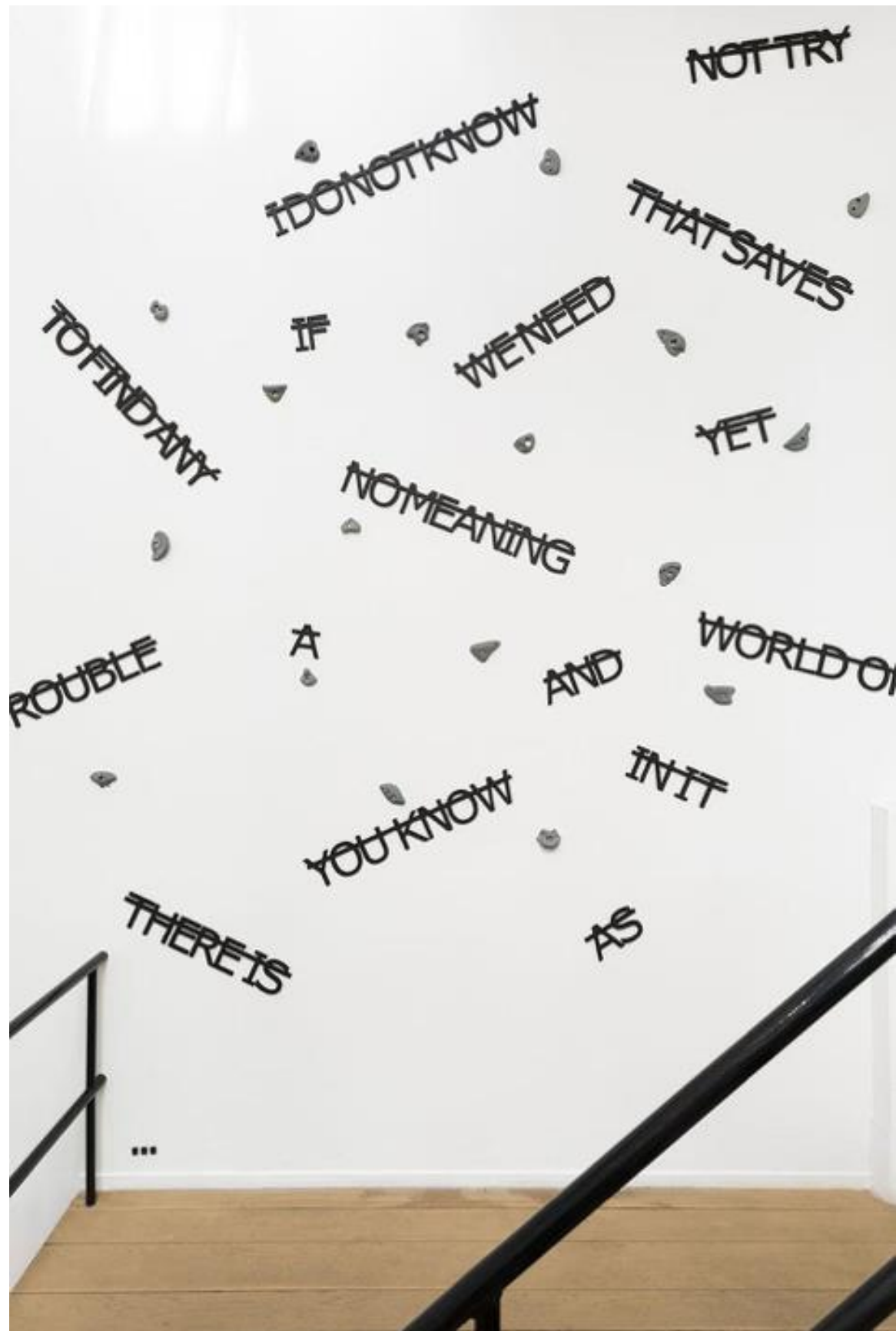
I did foundation graphic design for one year, and at this moment, my professor said, “Alexis, sometimes you

illustrate one image with one text, but I'm really sure you can use just text to illustrate what you want to say." When I put my work on the street, I created one image because only with the context like where I decided to fix this text, I was able to create one image. I called it "image negation" because it was without images. Just the fact to put one text in context, you create one mental image. And in the end, I always try to find one meaning even if there's no meaning. For example, in *The Plague* by Albert Camus, the character Joseph Grand is always trying to find the first sentence of his new book. He's writing, and at the end of the book, you understand that he needs to take off all the adjectives and write only subject, verb, complement. He decides to reduce the number of words. All my work is this: in one, two or three words, you need to be able to create one image, to create one sensation for viewers. It's very difficult because there is so many information, and in the end, you need to reduce and reduce to express more. It's totally "less is more". My book *Via Negativa* is this. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry used to say, "Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." During this period when we are totally polluted by everything, it's very interesting to be able to reduce.

View of the Joseph Grand exhibition at Backslash Gallery in Paris PHOTO JÉRÔME MICHEL



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Is this idea of concision and getting straight to the point why your work is so appealing?

I try to do this, but it's difficult. I try to reduce to the maximum to be simple but not simplistic. We can express a lot with just a few words, and for me, it's very difficult, but I think you have this impact more in Oriental culture. The French like to talk and explain, and I have in my brain all this conversation, but when I decide to show something, it needs to be straight to the point.

The French language uses more words than the English language...

For sure, it's true. I always think about English to do shorter texts. I also use Latin because it's shorter, more abstract than English. It's interesting to use a language not really used now to talk about this question of the more you travel across the oceans, you just change the sky, but you don't change your mind. If you decide not to change your mind, you can travel all over the world but stay in the same place. During Covid-19, we couldn't travel and we had to find a substitution for travel in our minds without a physical experience, so it was virtual travel, visiting all the museums virtually that we couldn't see in real life. It was frustrating. Maybe we can travel a lot but without changing our minds, or maybe we can travel a little and are able to change our minds.

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Are you concerned with environmental issues?

Yes, for sure. The only thing is it's very difficult. Many things we say we want to do it perfectly, but because we can't do it perfectly, we don't do anything. I always say I live with my contradictions; I don't say I'm trying to change the world. I just try to show the contradictions, to understand and to live with these contradictions because there are many things we can't change and we have to deal with this. I'm not radical. And this is the same for food, if you eat animals or not. One guy I really respect in this sphere a lot is Nassim Taleb who said we can't say we need

only one thing. Initially, when humans used to go to find food, one day they would find one animal, so they would eat one meat. Two days later, they would find nothing, so they would not eat. After, they would find one vegetable, so they'll eat one vegetable. Naturally, we are one organism that eats more or less everything. The only thing is we can't eat the same thing every time. We need to adapt. If we take care of the meat, we take care of the landscape, the thing we need to fight is the industrialization of meat, of everything, but if we do so in a positive way, we can manage. It's a big question, it's true, and we can't be radical about everything; we have to make compromises. I always say you can make compromises, but never sacrifice because if you sacrifice, in the end, you always have a bad experience and the result is never good, is never a happy ending. You need to learn how to make compromises and my work is this.