

Fall

for

Jean-François Fourtoul

Installation

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Jean-François Fourtou turns a childhood home upside down.

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Photos **Jean-François Fourtou**, courtesy of **JGM Galerie Paris**

Tombée du Ciel is a sculptural work by French artist Jean-François Fourtou. The installation is based on memories of his grandparents' house.



In the kitchen, two red chairs and a pale blue table – complete with bowls of soup, tureen, cutlery, bottle of wine – hang from the tiled ‘ceiling’.

Surely the last thing you'd expect to see in the Palmeraie area of Marrakech: in the middle of a field, surrounded by palm trees, a small house, roof side down, seems about to topple over. *Tombée du Ciel* – or *The House Fallen from the Sky* – is a sculptural work by French artist Jean-François Fourtou, whose parents, Janelly and Jean-René Fourtou, own Dar el Sadaka, a private 10-hectare property here that includes a ten-room getaway for women.

Made from pale grey stone with white framing, *Tombée du Ciel* is typical of seaside homes in western France. But everything in the house is upside down, from wall-mounted paintings to a vase of flowers on a pedestal. In the kitchen, two red chairs and a pale blue table – complete with bowls of soup, tureen, cutlery, bottle of wine – hang from the tiled 'ceiling'. In the bedroom, wooden floorboards are the backdrop for a simple bed with a floral blanket. Walking through the modestly decorated house and up the ladder to the first floor gives you vertigo. Besides being topsy-turvy, the house has the nostalgic atmosphere of a bygone era.

'I wanted to pay homage to my grandparents, especially my grandfather, who was very important for me when I was a child. This work is based on the house in which he died 30 years ago,' says Fourtou. 'It was a small holiday home that he rented in La Rochelle, so I made it as if he had sent it to me from heaven. That's also why I hung everything upside down. But even I was surprised by the feeling of unease – as if you're on a boat, destabilized by the water.'

Inspiration for the interior also came from the artist's memories of childhood. 'I started by looking at familiar objects that had belonged to my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents in a search for things with which to furnish the house,' he continues. 'I found these plates, with the cherry decoration, and they reminded me of the ones I used to use – and the sideboard where we put all the crockery. It's not an exact reconstruction, but I managed to generate the sensation I was after.' Although the pieces of furniture were easy to hang upside down, Fourtou had more trouble working with the smaller objects. 'I'm still struggling to find a way to get a bar of soap to remain in place.'

Working with a design agency, Fourtou realized a house that seems ready to keel over rather than a structure that is anchored to the site. In fact, the finished installation is strong enough to survive an earthquake. 'Astonishingly, I never make models first; I make them afterwards,' he admits. 'If I started with a model, I'd no longer want to make the larger piece.'

Fourtou, 47, divides most of his time between Madrid and Marrakech. It's in Paris that we meet, however, at his ...



Overhead in the bedroom, wooden floorboards serve as a backdrop for a simple bed with a floral blanket.

'I made the house as if my grandfather had sent it to me from heaven'



Besides being topsy-turvy, the house has the nostalgic atmosphere of a bygone era.

Everything in the house is upside down and at a slight tilt.

... pied-à-terre near La Place des Vosges, where he lived while attending the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. It's a sixth-floor studio apartment with an ivy-laden terrace. Like *Tombée du Ciel*, his flat is a place of hidden meanings and surprises. A long desk slides apart to reveal a bathtub, a wall of black-and-white photographs can be pulled down to use as a bed, and dozens of small sculptures of variously shaped snails are attached to the windows, linking interior to exterior. 'Art is a way of looking at life differently,' he says, pointing out the shift that occurs when we view certain pieces.

The domain in Marrakech is his field of experimentation. His sculptures of horses, birds and tortoises appear like itinerant apparitions in the gardens and beside the swimming pool, while his sculpture of a gigantic giraffe towers over the pink living-room furniture. On occasion, works by artists in residence are also exhibited at Dar el Sadaka. Fourtou's parents operate a charitable foundation, in conjunction with other Moroccan associations, for disadvantaged women and children. Through the foundation, artists are invited to participate in collaborative projects. This part of the family's work is a completely separate venture from the luxury resort for women, however, which offers guests a programme with a focus on yoga and wellness.

Tombée du Ciel is Fourtou's second large-scale sculptural project in Marrakech, following *La Maison de Géant* (2007), a giant's house in which all objects are twice their normal size. Accessible via a labyrinth of bamboo on one side and olive trees on the other, it also involves memories of the past and the make-believe world of childhood. 'For me, architecture is really a return to primary sensations, and with *La Maison de Géant* I wanted to rediscover the sensations of wellbeing and protection I had in the room I occupied at my great-grandmother's house in a village in Saint Émilien, near Bordeaux,' he says. 'I tried to create the spirit of that room, using objects double their original size, as if I were once again a child of five. I was not only recalling a privileged childhood with my grandparents but also thinking about my seven-year-old daughter – thanks to her, I still live in a childhood universe.'

Fourtou's next project is an enormous 'beehive', a dwelling for his parents that he expects to complete within the next 18 months. 'It will be a very big house, like a labyrinth, with giant bees – and with a perception of things enhanced by the change of scale.' No doubt the new work will be playful and imaginative, an environment meant to reawaken a sense of childlike wonder. 'What I make is aimed at adults, above all, to help them rediscover forgotten sensations.' —

fourtou.aeroplastics.net



Jean-François Fourtou (1964)



Jean-François Fourtou was born in Paris, the city in which he studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, graduating in 1992.

Later he lived in Madrid and in New York City. In the 1990s, he became known for his animal sculptures: figures of lambs, giraffes, snails and orangutans, among others. Fourtou based his early work on memories of his childhood, and he continues to do so today, with larger art installations that refer to

places he remembers from days gone by. He has re-created cabins, houses, interiors and hideaways, always playing with scale and perception: expanding or reducing the original size, or having us look at familiar things in a new way. His largest 'work' can be seen as his parents' home, Dar el Sadaka, 10 hectares of land close to Marrakech that includes a luxury resort. The artist's ambition, which he has been working to accomplish for the past ten years, is to make Dar el Sadaka the permanent site of his oeuvre. Currently, Fourtou divides his time between Marrakech and Madrid, the two cities in which he lives and works.

In addition to *Tombée du Ciel*, Fourtou built other art installations at Dar el Sadaka that bring to life spaces he remembers from his childhood.



In re-creating the spatial images of his youth, Fourtou often plays with scale; like most adults, he remembers places from childhood as being much larger than they really were.



'If I started with a model, I'd no longer want to make the larger piece'

Jean-François Fourtou in one of his sculptures. He has also made a limited number of C-prints featuring his work.

