

"If you Build a House, You Need a Piece of Land": In Conversation with Not Vital

Not Vital: Building My Own Habitat

on Louisiana Channel



Written by Jullia Joson

"If you're a painter, you need a canvas. If you're a sculptor, you need marble or plaster. And if you build a house, you need a piece of land." Welcome to the wonderful world of [Not Vital](#), where the Swiss multi-faceted artist shows us his sculpture park, foundation, and castle in this video.

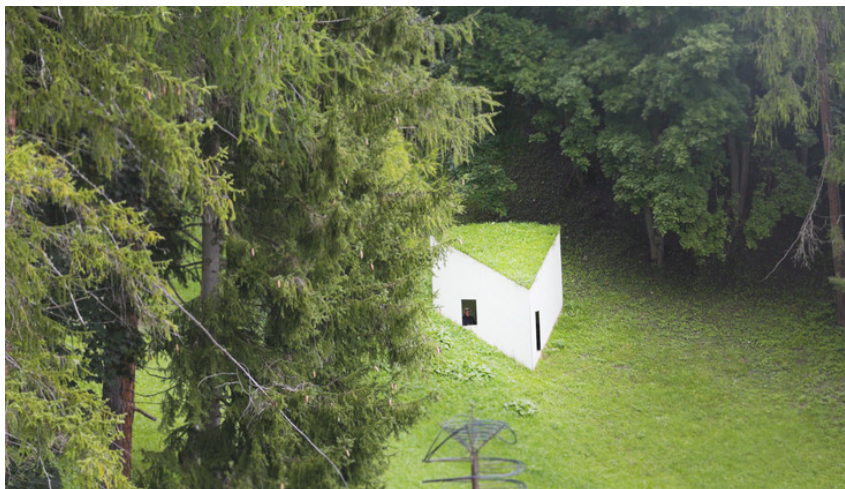
Louisiana Channel meets [Not Vital](#) in his studio in Sent, the town in Switzerland where he grew up and one of the places where he still lives. Building places to live have been with him since childhood: "My first work was more related to trying to build a house or a habitat. The first one was when I was only three years old in 1951. There was so much snow that my brother and I built a tunnel," he says and continues: "I think that it was the first time I realized that I like to build my own habitat. Even though it was much more comfortable to live in the house, I spent the day in the tunnel. I remember the light, the smell of the snow. I just felt great."

Through the years, Vital has led a nomadic life, seeking and building homes in various cities around the globe: Paris, New York, Beijing, Rio de Janeiro. He has bought an island made of Marble in Patagonia, called [NotOna](#). In Niger, he has built a house whose only purpose is to watch the sunset. He calls these hybrids of sculpture and architecture 'Scarch': "It opened up a whole new world for me, which became very important. I'm calling that 'Scarch' because it's a kind of sculpture and architecture. I didn't want to be an architect or study architecture because I would probably have gone in a different direction." Buying pieces of land worldwide is essential for his artistic practice. He explains:

“If you’re a painter, you need a canvas. If you’re a sculptor, you need marble or plaster. And if you build a house, you need a piece of land. That’s kind of all related.” — Not Vital ”



‘Sarch’ is not the only thing Vital makes. He also creates sculptures in silver, makes humorous wordplays with antlers, and paints portraits: “I want to show the way I see. I don’t want to change anything.” The portraits he started painting in 2008. Often they depict the people surrounding him. Other times, it is significant artists such as a young Rembrandt and Nina Simone. “When I paint, I think about a lot of Rothko. The colors. How to put two colors together. But of course, this is figurative.”



Vital reflects and continues: “Actually, they have everything in it. They have eyes and noses. And that’s great by painting that whatever you put in the canvas stays in the canvas. Even though you paint it over, it’s still there.” [Not Vital](#) does not differ between the many different artforms he works with: “Art is one. It doesn’t matter if it’s the 15th century or if it’s now. It’s all related.”



Not Vital (b. 1948) is a Swiss artist who works in diverse media across installations, paintings, drawings, and sculptures, typically integrating architecture. Vital divides his time between the United States, Niger, Italy, China, and Switzerland, and his art is centered on personal impressions and experiences from around the world. This somewhat anthropological approach is also reflected in how his career is structured into sections, e.g. glass blowers in Murano or paper artists in Bhutan.



Vital's work has been featured in the [49th Venice Biennale](#) in Italy (2001), and he has held significant exhibitions at prominent venues such as the Kunsthalle Bielefeld in Germany (2005), The Arts Club of Chicago in the United States (2006), Ullens Center For Contemporary Art in Beijing, China (2011), the Museo d'arte di Mendrisio in Switzerland (2014-15) and Galerie [Thaddaeus Ropac](#), London (2021).