

## Chronological extracts

*Max Charvolen*

*Fragment of a response to the review Chorus 1969/1970*

Defining my work means benefiting from what the research carried out to date has taught me, questioning it or accepting it as such, and trying to go further. This doesn't mean "doing something new" at all costs (...) painting is centralized in such a way there are only limited exchanges of interest between a few initiates, and this deprives art of its true meaning, which is to influence the environment it originates from. We often hear the word *culture* in connection with art, as if it were a fixed, unassailable concept that needs to be protected. For me, *culture* can just as well involve buying a toothbrush in a supermarket and differentiating between nylon and natural bristles. It is a dynamic that acts on our behavior, and we can either refuse or accept it. Art comes from this same dynamic environment. To have an impact it "needs to be" an integral part of life and not be immersed in a closed circuit that distributes it in small drops like a sacred thing, diverts it from its true goal and makes it look meaningless to most people because of its illogical path.

*Raphael Monticelli*

*Max Charvolen catalog, Lechaux Gallery, Paris, January 1978*

The canvas is not a passive place, where traces are simply placed, or place themselves. Even before any inscription, before any plastic research, it is already the object of a privileged relation or, if one prefers, its very existence supposes precise and complex relations between people. Its introduction into the field of art didn't just happen by chance but was the result of the evolving relationships that it affects in turn. As for orthogonality, it represents our immediate experience of sensitive space with extreme economy and puzzling evidence, and we have a habit of organizing it up and down, right and left, front and back, just as if our body were the only measure, just as a child learns to stand on his legs at the same time he learns to draw within the limits of a sheet of paper ... if he has one.

(...)

To touch the canvas, manipulate it, tear it up, cut it, twist it, crumple it, is to subject this figuration to the repercussions of dispersing the physical space that we have experienced for over half century and, in its weakened echo, from science, from discovery, we get the feeling that no immediate appearances can be absolutely trusted ...

R. Monticelli is a writer and art critic

*Marcelin Pleynet*

*Catalog Charvolen, Jaccard, Kermarrec at the Cantini museum, Marseille, 1982*

Let us see (...) how the works that Max Charvolen is showing today are made. After choosing a room, an architectural volume, he identifies the limits, planes or angles by covering, traces and colors. We see that here a double attitude appears almost immediately, insofar as the paint is applied on a closed plane, a surface that it transforms by coloring it, by opening it to color. The volume of the architectural space is both recognized and its qualities exposed, so to speak. These qualities determine how the artist chooses such or such a mode of intervention or chromatic accentuation. Thus, the first gesture, determined by the artist's reaction and sensitivity to the quality of a volume (he always chooses a space we live in) logically introduces us to the conditions required for color to appear in a work of art, namely his sensitivity to space.

*Marcelin Pleynet is a poet, novelist and art critic*

*Claude Fournet*

*Max Charvolen catalog, Nice Museums Contemporary Art Gallery, 1981*

Unlike many others, Max Charvolen never dismisses painting. He attracts it, he even stirs it up, but he never forgets its place. In practice, we witness a state of permeation between everyday things and the covering of these by a material which is matter (generally glue), but also materiality: the designation of matter - in a "time of color ". Whether a step, a window or a door, what settles there, deforms or conforms to it, *is* painting. This could be obviously clear, but it is not. The materialist undertaking described here has the power of a spell that is all the stronger as the restraint of the painting paradoxically gives it a dimension (a desire?) that it tries to avoid. A form of alchemy is played out. Something does - and does not - coincide, is - and is not - the painter, expresses too much and is silent. The place of the home is also one of mystery and poetry.

*Claude Fournet is a writer and poet and has been curator in various museums*

*RM, Charvolen, Maccaferri, Miguel, catalog, Fondation Sicard-Iperti, Vallauris, 1992*

(...) It seems to me that Max Charvolen has always worked on the absence of things. Not work showing the absence of the object, nor the absent object that the work recalls, but the work that creates the object's absence as it is being done, and in a certain way tends to take the object's place. It might be the idea of absence that always makes me dream of travelling when I see Charvolen's work. I have never quite known whether he turns his viewers into Ulysses or Penelope, either those who record absence in their travels, or those who create it in during the day and undo it at night. I feel it is significant from this point of view that he has often worked on places of passage: doors, windows, staircases; or even that he has made his works places of passage in themselves (...)

At the start of Charvolen's work, there is tearing ... of the canvas or paper, whose shape crumbles and is lost before being reconstructed on places or objects ... And so it goes, from dispersal to reunification, from gestures of suffering to those of preservation. The objects need to be protected, surrounded, bandaged ... afterwards, nothing is more violent than the tearing-off phase that produces the work, and by which the object disappears.

Another approach might say that Charvolen suffers from the absence of the world, and that he is asking art to take the absent world's place, as if he were pulling something out of nothing, or as if he were trying to ward off nothingness.

*Renato Barilli*

*Max Charvolen, in Les portulans de l'Immédiat, al Dante editions and Vivas Gallery, 1996*

(...) The most specific aspect of Charvolen's approach lies in the "return". Faced with its own rights, painting here renounces its particular rights in many ways. It submits to the logic of the irregularity of surfaces, of the variety of formats and figures, and humbly accepts to adhere to the structure of the building proper without imposing its own requirements. However, after all these capitulations, the

process needs to be reversed, an autonomous surface needs to be released from the support, and this surface must not be shown according to the laws of three-dimensional objects, but those of their two-dimensional projections. Here again we recover something, at least partly, that has always been one of the privileges of painting.

(...)

Charvolen differs from the point of view of Christo, and all others who work by molding, in that his entire endeavor is not to glorify the object in and of itself, but the possibility that what remains of it, however faithful, accepts the mystery of its transformation into a "plane" on a surface, with the virtual life that a variety of colors allows. Although it has paid every possible tribute to the support and the surface, painting has the ultimate victory.

Renato Barilli is a literary critic, art critic and art historian

Jean Petitot

The clean body of the canvas, op. cit. 1996

One of the most interesting aspects of post-war experimental art is the way in which, in the aftermath of the deconstruction of painting, a few rare artists succeeded in reinventing certain constructive necessities of traditional pictorial experiences, but in an original, renewed, non-standard, sometimes even reversed way. It is with this in mind that I would like to offer a few brief remarks on the work of Max Charvolen.

By inverting traditional structure, the problem that this artist inherited concerns the link between the canvas and the representation of space, built space in particular. It is commonplace to recall that modern painting was formed during the Renaissance by developing the tools of projective geometry (the *dolce prospettiva*) that made it possible to construct an exact three-dimensional representation of space. These constructive principles manifest themselves most strongly in the simulation of architectural structures. The painted canvas is then instituted as a material support for an *ideality*, the ideality of space, the geometry of bodies.

(...)

Perhaps the most fundamental difference between these two eras of scientific reality simulation derives from the fact that in imaging software it is easy to make a scene move (i.e. to chain 2D spatial projections in time), whereas in classical

painting only one view is represented, and its choice is a crucial problem (we had to wait for cubism to try to synthesize several views).

Here we won't develop on the way computer techniques in computer graphics are the heirs to Renaissance techniques. Let's just say that in both cases there is the question, using a material device (canvas + painter / screen + computer) having a 2D interface (canvas / screen), of representing the ideal objective geometry of the world.

Max Charvolen has managed to reverse this most powerful tradition by experimenting with the canvas as a raw medium. Reclaiming a *2D canvas-3D space* relationship from this very basic materiality is certainly a remarkable achievement.

(...)

*Jean Petitot is a philosopher and mathematician*

*RM, On mapping our personal territories, op. cit. 1996*

The world once failed Charvolen; something inexplicably broke. Permanently. Here is the tragedy: when the only remaining certainty is that, irretrievably, our own imperfection is inscribed in the imperfection of the world. What was lacking was not the image of the world, but the measure of it, the rules of its organization, its orientation and meaning. In the most physical immediate space, a loss of landmarks is linked to the extraordinary reorganization of our image of the world, and in all likelihood is one of the constituents of modernity and its avatars. It explains a need which is the basis of most of the art adventures of this time. It draws us progressively away from the images of the world that build our childhood. Charvolen treats two wounds: the one that opens between oneself and the outside world and the one that opens between the world and the inside self ... He retains only three elements from the world:

- what delimits the practical and immediate space of human life: the objects it marks out, the frame which structures and informs it,
- what gives a practical and immediate measure of the objects and buildings: the body acting, using, moving, extended by objects, tools and the spaces where it stands,

-what makes it possible to keep track of it all, the tools of the memory of the body, the canvas, the color, the paint.

With these three elements, his entire system consists, first, of covering the built space, using common art materials: canvas, paste, paint ... In this way the artist's work is reversed: instead of painting the image of the place on canvas, Charvolen paints his canvas by sticking it to the real place. As he prepares the canvas that he sticks on the place or the object, we are reminded of shredded cloth and poultice, or a dispersed bandage, and a dressing and mummification. This world is so fragile that it must be protected and kept safe.

Paradoxically, the process of safekeeping is carried out in a fury. How else can I define the violence with which Charvolen works to make the pieces of canvas adhere to the support? In some way, this frenzy of safekeeping risks suffocating what it claims to save. Moreover, tearing off the canvas after the glue has dried is done with equal violence, to make the mold go from a volume to a flat surface... now we think of rags.

At the end of the procedure, what remains is the canvas. In its format, its shapes, its colors, its marks, its imprints, the canvas keeps the memory of a place affected by the bodies that haunt it. Nothing here is the result of a theoretical idea of space. The measurements of the canvas, its forms, its format and its marks are presented as independent of the artist's will or a preconceived concept of the world. The work is not the result of an idea of the world that has been projected onto the canvas. On the contrary, everything is shown as the necessary result of coming hand-to-hand with a fragment of the world, of an experience of the world that constructs the place where it is recorded: the canvas.

What turns Charvolen's unexpected canvases into so many places of incomprehensible evidence is undoubtedly because in multiple ways they reflect the common experience of an almost painful relationship with a fragmented world whose image we are trying to reconstruct.

*Christian Artaud*

The way to Max Charvolen's place, *in catalog "Charvolen, works on frame"*,  
*Espace Vallès ed. Saint Martin d'Hères, 1997*

I walk down to the street. I'm first aware of the stairwell, the elevator, the light timer, the garbage cans, the door, going into the crowd, the growing noise, eye movement, passing cars, dust, shops, oil, gasoline, poop, piss, papers, butts, perfumes, faces. All this makes up the clothing of things.

I'm going to see Max. What I touch, and the background noises in my ears, tell me that I'm in familiar territory. What I can see-perceive-realize is also what I can see-know-conceive. What I hear and understand gives me a satisfaction that could be mistaken for dissatisfaction. What I feel is identified with what I am. What I see refers me to what I experience. I think of the taste in my mouth and the speed - too slow to get from one point to another. All this gives me access to things. I arrive at Max's. A work by Max Charvolen is akin to becoming aware of a territory. It controls forms and volumes. Its floating surfaces invade the grounds of my singular confrontations with the surrounding world. It envelops objects and architecture only to develop enough material to reveal a certain anthropometry. The position of the artist's eyes and feet in a particular place starts off a procedure to reach what is accessible as, immobile in one place but using wide gestures, he calibrates his living space.

A work by Max Charvolen is therefore conceived in part of a place, an architecture, a space. However, it is independent of the site that it molds because when the mold is removed nothing remains real except a succession of planes and sections. The habitat is an illusion. The artist's body visibly highlights its limits, but the field of operations is in no way restricted to physical capacities. The work acts as a restitution. It looks back. It is like a skin, because the real body cannot be represented. The artist's gesture is guided by the sphere of what he can touch. The development of different sides, or surfaces, of the same object (the corner of a room, a piece of wall or hallway, a staircase, a plank and cupboard) is always a surprise. Visible and hidden planes are revealed, all areas are flattened and spread out. We want to reconstruct the space mentally by using the edges, differentiated areas, or angles, shown following the instruction to show everything.

A work by Max Charvolen is a suddenly-revealed apparition of what the eye knows about its environment. The eye knows more than you think, as it can shape the space that exists between it and the spaces perceived optically and intuitively. Checkerboard effects, playing with the opposition of colors and the visualization of flat areas, help to reveal this surrounding *locus solus*, which is also a place of movement, an encompassing invasion. The work itself is the place of work. The workshop is the world.

*Christian Artaud is a poet*

*Claude Parent*

*Transmutation et inversion, in Une oeuvre de Charvolen, Iconotext, Muntaner  
2000 editions*

There is (... in Charvolen's work) a concrete TRANSMUTATION of space through the prints colored directly on the original volume, on the surface to be read in two dimensions.

In this global reading of the explored place, color acts as a revealer.  
It's the agent of passage.

It completely avoids the effect of nostalgia, which can always happen when memory intervenes. Thanks to color, this work of "transcriber", in spite of the author's absolute fidelity to the place, introduces an interpretation, a shift the moment the space is tilted on the surface, and this reassures us about the authentic modernity of the results of what we can call Max Charvolen's exploratory method.

On the wall the very trace of the place disappears. We read something else there.  
We see the birth of another creature.

Forget the staircase, the landing, the threshold of a door, the wall, the ceiling or the floor.

Gone is the architectural hierarchy.  
Another hierarchy is set up.

Only an archaeologist, if he is learned enough, if he is sensitive and attentive enough, will be able much later to find it amusing, distract us or satisfy his ego, by applying himself to finding the components of the original building, regardless of whether or not they have disappeared.

At this time then, a scholarly reading, a reading from memory, will give a third life to the place of origin, by practicing a second inversion, or - even better - a retroversion. A scientific one.



It would be interesting if Max Charvolen were to live long enough to witness the irony of this final avatar of his work.

*Claude Parent is an architect*

*Herve Castanet*

*Reality and the Signifier, op. cit. 2000*

Charvolen's work questions the concept of *reality*, the concept that uses up so much ink among philosophers and theorists, the concept that seems to indicate the concrete evidence of what makes *my world*.

- How's that ? You're inventing things!

- I draw conclusions from the works of Charvolen, and I read. Max writes in his Working Notes: "Painting never stops showing... In its ascent, the relationship to the model is transformed... when we peel the model and we spread out the resulting model, when we place its flattened, bursting version vertically, a relationship of representation, or even identification, emerges that is different from the model, and this gap in recognition becomes a producer of questions. This *gap* is very important. There is a gap between the model (the thing placed in the world) and its representation which, as such, produces a radical deconstruction of it. Max insists on this as a consequence of his work: "The result of representation as a tool for transforming the initial model."

*Hervé Castanet is a psychoanalyst*

*Martin Winckler*

*The Snowman with a Yellow Shoe, op. cit 2000*

Powerful. The term is appropriate, but terribly limited. There is power in Charvolen's work, but also something visceral. Stairs, after all, are what we call the "common areas" of a building. The presence of a staircase is justified but also imperceptibly shaped by the passage of bodies, from bottom to top and up and

down. Hands leave marks on the ramp. Feet wear down the steps. On the walls, breathing leaves droplets of moisture. Shoes that pass on the stairs deposit dirt and crap, clothes drop hair and microscopic fragments of skin. No matter how much you sweep or vacuum, there will always be something left. When we think of a place of residence, the staircase is successively a vertical guide (how many floors to climb) then a horizontal one (the landing, the door of the apartment we're going to enter). One comes after the other, but the two don't exist simultaneously. Of course, not everything is within human reach: there are inaccessible corners. They are the ones that bind the staircase's space. And then there's "the center of the stairwell", that completely empty, changeable space in which, when it exists, you can pull a basket up from a string, throw a key, or throw down a body. A staircase is an invisible space in which life passes or rushes, but doesn't stay. And yet, in some of the "empty" staircases that Charvolen's work inhabits, I think I can feel bodies asleep, numb, homeless men and women, on the wall I think I see the greasy trace of their halo of misery.

(...)

In the unfolded, exposed, work Charvolen offers, there is a trace of all this: the patience, the power, the secrecy, the tearing, the drops of paint and sweat mixed together, the muscles which tighten and the knife that cuts, the groans of the artist and the frozen breath of the unconscious bodies.

And then I am struck by a paradox: this work looks like the mortal remains of an animal or a demigod, with outlines that are impossible to define. But the feeling that pervades is not a hunter's devastating pride, but the modest pride of the craftsman. There was no animal to kill. There was no demigod to scrutinize. Charvolen doesn't strip corpses - even if he pretends he does by peeling off stairs. He is a giver of life. On the wall, I - the child - see a man. He has no head. He has a big yellow shoe on one foot, and a blue one on the other. His arms look like wings. And he's dancing.

*Martin Winckler is a writer*

*Benoit Philippe Pekle*  
*An Anatomy Lesson, op. cit. 2000*

The viewer sees a deployment of interiors: the hidden place, the place where the alchemy of living things takes place, is brutally turned around, laid bare, made visible. What the skin, the appearance, or the facade hid is now revealed and becomes a real image, a "real icon".

The adhesion of the fabrics becomes tangible and the precise articulation where sculpture is different from architecture becomes understandable.

So many connections with "work on buildings".

A relationship ranging from simplicity to complexity comes into play. An apparent simplicity of construction on the one hand: the human eye naturally integrates built objects, knows how to read them or at least has an apparent natural reading of them. Any man can name wall, door, lintel, step, column as if this went without saying. Who is aware of the human "properties" of architecture, that began during the transition from nomadism to settlement, and presupposed a relationship to space and to the world expressed in terms of proximity or distance, above and below, scale and proportion. "As if it went without saying" to understand the dual relationship of man to his habitat, this centuries-old alchemy where man builds what he is made up of. "As if it were obvious" to understand that the uniqueness of human architecture is its error and fallibility, its ability to collapse for lack of construction: an experience that ants or bees never have. And, on the other hand, the apparent complexity of "flattening" the contrivance is revealed in another apparently more complex, but in reality simpler, view: as a work of genesis.

The transition from plane to volume, this work of complexification, of working within constraints where, when what is uncontrolled or unwanted appears, it is read in reverse, like a backward step that leads us to re-read, to deconstruct in order to reconstruct something else. We can speak of reconstruction, of reproduction in the vital sense of the term, because there is no question of recomposition.

(...).

Work where we use the same words as with writing, but a writing or its process would be "upside down" if the writer, like the architect, had the talent to create a three-dimensional universe from a few signs on a page : drawing, plan, or words - no matter, Charvolen makes us take the opposite route to arrive, if I dare say, at the utopia developed from the plan to scale one.

(...)

*Brother Benoit Philippe Peckle is a philosopher and architectural historian*

*Jean-Marc Levy-Leblond*  
*Takeoff, op. cit. 2000*

It was seeing Charvolen at work that made me better understand my own activity as a physicist, or rather perceive it - physically, in the primary, bodily sense of the word. What do I do when I develop the theory of a phenomenon other than coat it with a continuous conceptual material that is sufficiently flexible and solid - mathematical formalism has these virtues - to fit closely, if I do things well, to the most prominent aspects? But, I cannot limit myself to the cladding that covers its object so well that it can hardly be distinguished from it and tells me very little about it, because I cannot see it from far away enough to understand its entirety, nor then exhibit it to share my knowledge. I have to peel off this coating, and lay it flat. And this is where the success of scientific work comes into play. There is no pre-established process for cutting out the tracing of reality: an infinity of possibilities - choice of words, symbols, narrative sequences - are available to structure experimental results and theoretical notions in a linear narrative (publication is for the scientist what the canvas is to the artist: his production), just as it is for the artist to draw the lines to cut along so he can “rectify his left surface”, if I may be granted, beyond its formalism, some evocative mathematical language. But before even deploying the work, we must succeed in detaching it in one piece, maintaining the phenomenon's coherence - like Charvolen in this particularly moving photo where he extracts his work from the stairwell he explored by coating it. And there is no guarantee that once spread out on a blank page, like Charvolen's on the exhibition wall, in full light, accessible to all eyes, this description will sufficiently retain the strength of truth - or rather conviction. The plastic metaphor (and the word has rarely been so correct...) here has the main virtue of allowing us to overcome the false debate between relativism and objectivism in science. Contrary to a frequent, lazy image, science does not *stick* to reality. It *applies* its thought to reality only to detach itself from it, and it is in this gap that it constitutes knowledge. Like Charvolen's canvases, scientific analyses keep a close connexion with reality and gain access to a freedom of form which is their risk and their strength.

*Jean Marc Lévy Leblond is a physicist and essayist*

*Michel Butor*  
*The house of our dreams, op. cit. 2000*

(...)  
reflections

Many different cuts allow us to reconstruct the same object. But once the cutting has been done, we get new objects.

Let's take a die that we have spread out into a Latin cross around the side with a single dot. Around it we will have the 2, 3, 4 and 5. The 6 can hang on one of the previous four. I can fold the petals towards me on my side of number 1, or away from me on the other side. We then get two symmetrical volumes. The focal side remains in the plane of the board which acts as a mirror. Alice has entrusted us with the key to her inside-out world.

In an inverted room, what is to the left of the fireplace passes to the right. But if I take the development of a piece of furniture, a chair for example, if I reconstitute a bar by folding the unfolded sides, I can go from inside to outside at will, from full to empty. The walls themselves become inhabitable.

Through these manipulations, the white of the plank, what remained between the spread-out sides, becomes an invasive space that crosses all the walls. I can turn my stairs around to go up or down on the reverse side of its steps.

In ancient theology we speak of a glorious body, the one we will have after the Last Judgment, in the garden city of celestial Jerusalem, a body transparent to light, able to pass through all the walls. In the meantime, here are glorious objects, glorious houses in which to tame our eternity.

*Michel Butor is a writer*

*Sandro Parmiggiani,*

*Watching the Abyss with the Eyes of Painting, op. cit. 2000*

(...) When I was a child, in my daily wanderings through the fields, I sometimes found and picked up a snake moult. Despite its transparency and its fragility, it made me think of the sinister movements of reptiles and I felt, confusedly, that I had to beware of them: this abandoned skin was proof that the snakes had been there, that they could be nearby without my realizing it, that they were perhaps waiting, just around the corner, or that they were following me, silent, ready to attack me ... An ethereal skin that dissolves when you try to squeeze it between your fingers, like ash, was all that was needed to awaken this obscure feeling of dread in me...

The same applies to the works of Max Charvolen: our imagination is immediately set in motion, but in this case the path backward is far more difficult and uneven: the echoes in us are much weaker, less nourished by suggestions and visions. Our gaze falls naturally on a living animal: to us it seems "worthy" of attention and interest. On the other hand, would you have the idea, while passing the threshold of a door or climbing the steps of a staircase, however majestic it is, not to limit yourself to passing there quickly, but to linger and observe the space where your feet are, where the ceilings and the walls have been placed, and try to "see" the mystery, the sign, the sense of the infinite and the continuous which is held there, as in everything on earth? On these walls and on these steps, no color strikes us or, in one way or another, simply carries us away, no line leads us to an outward vision. Often, the traces of time have bruised and damaged an ancient dignity, a splendor that has now disappeared, so much so that we spontaneously seek a light, an emergency exit, as if here our breath shortens, wanting larger spaces. These places, doors and stairs, are said to be 'of utility', as if to point out their servile nature, subordinate to other much more important places.

(...)

There is no doubt: Charvolen relates to the experience of Matisse, Fontana and Rothko. He does not do small delicate works or fine fragments. However, in his large works, as in the one we are talking about here, there is a dazzling manifestation of the constructive role of color.

(...)

Basically, Max Charvolen is a prophet. "Prophecy" is not just "predicting, announcing a future event", but also "giving voice to the body of the other". Max gave a place speech, and this place now speaks in a new language, even though the artist had to stop at its surface, even though he could go no further into the abyss of

its body. But, as Hugo von Hoffmansthal said, "There is only one place where you can hide depth: the surface".

*Sandro Parmiggiani is an art critic and historian*

Jean Arrouye

*in the Charvolen exhibition catalog, Fernand-Léger gallery / Credac Center for Contemporary Art in Ivry, 2004*

(The) expansion, in some (exemplary?) works, takes on impressive proportions. At the end of his work extrapolating, the portion of the *Small spiral staircase in the Arles museum, 2003* that Max Charvolen molded and spread flat occupies 800 x 590 cm and the *Stairwell at thirteen rue des Tours in Vallauris, 1998-99* has stretched into one of 582 x 805 cm. In all these cases, the transfiguration shifts from the intimate experience of a place corresponding to a man's proportions to the theatrical spectacle of a work that is no longer his size.

In addition, it is not without experiencing a feeling of strangeness that the artist, no doubt, who goes from his long work of gluing in a stairwell to hanging his anamorphic lining on the wall of a museum, and the spectator, certainly, who recognizes in the work clues of the place from which it is taken, stroll (facing more than eight meters in length one cannot stay still) in front of the specter of a staircase crushed on the exhibition wall while they observe that the floor and ceiling have become vertical surfaces. This (transient) dizziness is a source of the attraction exerted by Max Charvolen's works, and this is why it is important that they keep some traces of their place of origin, so that one can say, like the poet Louis-Gabriel Gros,

"What is erased can be read  
Before being erased "

The experience is close to a dream - or a nightmare - to see a familiar space disintegrate into a silent explosion in front of you or, recognizing a staircase that one could have taken (and on the steps of which we can see the marks of repeated passage), but hung vertically, and to discover that in relation to it we are like a fly resting on a side wall.

This rout of pragmatic experience turning into imaginary bewilderment does not fail to make us even dizzy. At the sight of these images of dislocated places where the red color extends dramatically, where the interior of buildings are very often exposed like a glove turned inside out, one experiences a (worried) enjoyment mixed with (delectable) fear, of the kind confessed by certain characters in short stories or novels by André Pieyre de Mandiargues and Jean Giono when seeing bodies pouring out their viscera, or even of the kind we imagine that Jack the Ripper could feel. There are transfigurations that resemble transgressions, and if the works of Max Charvolen always make such a strong impression, perhaps it's because they move troubled areas of deep affectivity.

*Jean Arrouye is an art historian*

*Bertrand Meyer Himhoff,  
In catalog, Max Charvolen Dé (s) tours exhibition, Toulouse Le Mirail  
University, Dec 2006*

(...)

The entire interest of Max Charvolen's approach lies in this relationship of painting with a place as a matrix. The canvas is modeled as the "skin" of an architecture; according to a loss, that of an origin of painting as an epic of architecture (with no nostalgia for a golden age of the decorative) where the function of painting was naturally attached to a place but also where all the monumental architecture was polychrome. It is modeled as an undone painting, an impossible figure of representation, an "end of representation - if to represent is to present something in its absence - but still representation, if to represent is to present all the same, to present the unrepresentable “.

The architectural and pictorial allegory of this figure could be a detail of the large fresco of the Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel where Michelangelo represented a Saint Bartholomew brandishing a human skin with the grimacing self-portrait of the painter ... This portraiture of remains with the hand holding the skin like a veil is also a tragic Véronique whose imprint of the Holy Face is that of the artist himself. This detour through the fresco has a double meaning concerning Max Charvolen, that of the material deposition of the work, its being taken off and that of a shroud, a receptacle for the body.

(...)



From the slow development of the work on the support in its place, which becomes one with the painting, to the metamorphosis of its passage from the third to the second dimension. This subtracted dimension is in a way no longer restored by the representative illusion of a space but by the transformation that works on the expanding format; by the spread of the painted canvas that exceeds the flat surface that was torn off and exposed, and which cuts it like a trophy laden with slag. Its unfolded envelope then functions as a large dissected pictorial body or as a plastic form with graphics proliferating in all directions and with anthropomorphic contours.

*Bertrand Meyer Himhoff is an artist*

*Nicole Biagioli*

*MU (ES) TATIONS, on the work of Max Charvolen, in "Max Charvolen on the treasure of the Marseillais, Delphes", museums of Marseille 2007*

Charvolen fights against three tragedies of our daily life: that of passage, of image and of language. To these three issues being continuously relaunched, he opposes three responses in action: tearing off, diversity and redistribution. These responses can be qualified as therapeutic because they change representations while respecting people's needs and desires. They acclimatize in the plastic arts the paradigm which has been revealed for fifty years as the most likely to unite and energize the human sciences and the hard sciences: that of change.

(...)

Let us ask the ritual question of the message of the work. If it says anything, what does it say? To us, as speakers, not much, at least directly. Indirectly, it takes us back through certain paths in the history of art. But it speaks above all to our body, to our feet, to our hands, to our eyes, and therefore to our imagination. Because at the same time that we locate the trace of what has been enveloped, we cannot help reacting to the new form, and inventing new meanings: the stairs become faces, birds, sex tools, shells.

What does it talk about ? First about the artist, and the hundreds of daily gestures that he had to add to transmute one place into another, with the material that for centuries had only served to represent one place on another.

And about us, in depths we have little opportunity to visit. Charvolen's art invites us to mobilize our psychic resources by tapping into our animality. We have mentioned molts when speaking about his envelopes. The dictionary helps refine the comparison. He teaches us that insects go through three stages of

transformation before finding their form: the chrysalis, the caterpillar locks itself into to moult, the nymph, an intermediate stage where it loses its initial shape and becomes a larva, and the imago, which is the final form of the sexual being, just before hatching.

In the animal world, the envelope is therefore a factor of both change and identity. By applying it to places and objects in our daily environment, Charvolen encourages us to change in order to better (re)discover ourselves.

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