

**Max Charvolen**

**A Working Dynamic**

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Five different approaches to the same plastic work. Five specialists from as many fields of discipline have been called upon here to approach a resolutely artistic work which claims to be pictorial, and exclusively pictorial. Jacques Beuffet, art historian, Diana Gay, curator, René Lozi, mathematician, Bertrand Roussel, prehistorian, Hervé Castanet, psychoanalyst, and myself, the author of these lines, writer and art critic, are all interested in the work of a painter: Max Charvolen.

While it is common to question the history and critique of art in order to understand the issues and challenges of an artistic process, it may seem questionable to study it using the tools, methods and procedures of disciplines whose specific purpose is not art.

This statement applies to any object approached with the resources of a discipline other than the one in which it was created. We can also apply it to an approach that uses the resources of the arts to account for objects which do not belong to any art field ... And we define a world with clearly outlined contours, with perfectly stable fields and practices, and definite boundaries between disciplines... A frozen world.

Fields of discipline are born, develop, change and disappear. The status of objects that one era classifies in a particular practice change, whether they are for daily use, rituals, pleasure, whether they are the tools and materials for certain professions or the results of these - manual or intellectual - professional practices, their place and role in a human group vary according to history, changes in social needs and practices, relationships between disciplines, etc.

Of all human practices, the practices of art, particularly plastic art and language art, are the most difficult to define. Sometimes they merge with other practices, sometimes they appear as one of their possible dimensions; the repertoire of objects involved evolves over the decades; their objectives, their effects, their necessity are debated within the same social formation; the relevance, effectiveness and quality of the objects they produce are subject to constant reassessment, to the point that it seems possible to define them more by how they are received than how they are produced.

It is from this double observation, the evolution of the boundaries between disciplines, the mobility of the artistic field and the uncertainty of its objects, that we can allow ourselves to consider the objects of art from extremely diverse points of view or positions and to question their practices through disciplines that would initially seem foreign to them.

This review begins with a general presentation of Charvolen's approach, and will attempt to pinpoint the questions that his approach raises in other disciplinary fields. Jacques Beaufret will put Charvolen's work in context in contemporary art. Diana Gay will discuss the problems involved in the conservation and presentation of these works. Bertrand Roussel and René Lozi will examine, respectively, the relationship between Charvolen's approach and archeology and the theory of information. Finally, Hervé Castanet will analyze the way in which the deconstruction of representation involves the body's presence.

### Max Charvolen, painting in question

Max Charvolen questions the field of art, casts doubt on its values, objectives, tools and means. In the '60s and '70s, he was part of a nebula of artists we usually group together under the term of "analytical and critical painting", in which we situate such artists as Buren, Buraglio, Viallat, Pagès, Duchêne... , who have at times formed groups (see the groups BMPT, INTERVENTION, Supports-Surfaces, ABC, Textstruction, or Group 70, of which Charvolen was a member...). These painters are characterized by the radical break they make from the elements of art, their refusal of any pathos and any affectivity, their reasoned approach to practice, their attention to the status of the viewer and to the conditions of the production and reception of art, and their interest in non-artistic disciplines, particularly the humanities and social sciences.

The notions of work and creation are then called into question, to favor how the work is produced. In these approaches, aesthetics are no longer the primary objective of art, nor its exclusive object. Process matters more than its result, or at least the result matters only insofar as it carries and reveals the process which produced it.

Without dwelling on the interest and the validity of this approach to the artistic phenomenon (to which the reader will find an echo in Jacques Beaufret's text), I will focus my attention on the particular issues Max Charvolen put in place during this period, on the way he worked on them during the 1970s, and the direction he

took as of the 1980s. He then developed an original work on the relationship between art and the territory (physical, historical and social, places of exhibition ...) that it comes from. This justifies the interest that specialists from various disciplines have given to his approach, both from the artistic point of view and that of their own disciplinary concerns.

The primary object of Charvolen's work in the late sixties was the canvas. Like the artists mentioned above, he did not consider it as a simple medium, or simply an element of art, but as a particular space, a material object whose materiality, the product of a socially and historically charged technique, deserves attention. A plastic space, a representation of painting - itself a simulacrum of the wall in which he could open a window - and a place where forms unfold. Stretched on a frame, it is marked out by a format and is predetermined as two-dimensional. Freed from the frame, it can no longer be a classic painting canvas, and opens up to all kinds of new manipulations: folding, crumpling, cutting, gluing, stapling. It can be replaced by other materials, flexible or rigid, woven or not, which will affect shapes and perception otherwise. The reader will associate these approaches with other artistic paths, from Hantaï or Matisse to Viallat and Saytour, from Buraglio and Dolla to Kijno. Charvolen began by bringing together, on a new medium, a form inherited from Pop Art and the technique of cutting. In 1968, he worked with female forms repetitively cut out of sheets of vinyl, and explored formal variations according to size, or the addition of other elements.

The female bust then served as a matrix to question the limits of the medium on which it appeared. Working by cutting, the artist highlighted both sides of the canvas by opening it or folding it upside down.

A problem arose here which was to be permanent in Charvolen's approach: cutting produces a void in the support, revealing the space in which the work is shown: the space outside the work enters it and becomes part of it ... These relationships between the floor, walls and ceiling can be found even in his most recent works.

As the bust form was used, it lost its identity, read less and less as a figure; it then seemed obvious to Charvolen that the relationship established by the figure must be overcome.

Thus, in 1971, after making cutouts of busts in blue monochrome fabrics, he formalized his purpose and decided to work on only one image: that of the frame itself, the orthogonal space of Western painting since the Renaissance, and continued his research in this direction until the end of the seventies. The results

required a particular lexicon: forms and counter-forms, frame strips, decreasing formats and format overflow.

Let us specify two points: the first is the return of the image of the frame, affirmed by his making wooden structures and placing them on strips of sewn fabric... The second concerns the fabric in which the counter-form is cut only on three of its sides: the fourth side then lets the canvas be folded onto itself. This detail will be decisive for the rest of the process.

It is important to pause for a moment and look at the issues and works of this essential period in Charvolen's approach.

By going from the bust form to the orthogonal form, Charvolen decided that his only referents as a painter would be what the practice of painting and the particular space of the canvas immediately offered. He then set aside all other images, even those in art history. Within a fabric, he repeatedly cut out what could be a canvas and simultaneously showed the fabric from which the shapes were cut and the resulting rectangular shapes.

In the early 1970s, he systematically explored the relationships between the original fabric and cut shapes, the modes of coloring that can differentiate them, or that can differentiate the phases of their treatment, and the ways they could be presented when shown, taking into account the viewer's position.

It should be noted that here he developed procedures that are still there in his work forty years later: cutting, functional coloring, the relationship between a matrix and its plastic treatment, the exploration of the various states of a form, the questions related to showing art works in spaces that are not intended to receive them.

The variation of forms and counter-forms took on different aspects over the years, as the format, the number of cuts, the possibilities allowing the cut fabric to be stretched (from canvas hardened by paint to the use of Japanese frames), and the ways to hang the work varied.

From 1974-1975 the artist added another variation to his work with canvas by abandoning the simple orthogonal format and producing triangular shapes resulting from folding the canvas onto itself.

The works produced during this period bear witness to the new fields that opened up in Charvolen's thought. Working with canvas outside a frame had allowed

painters unprecedented manipulations. Wording things this way seems to restrict these practices to a purely formal dimension, and yet this is not so. Whether the surfaces intended to receive traces, signs, symbols, or words are called supports or substrates, whether they are woven or non-woven, flexible or rigid, paper, vinyl, wood, etc., they are in themselves objects, traces, signs and symbols. To use them differently, to manipulate them, is to question their status, to transform them, to give another form to the sign and to the symbol, to seek another symbolism. Fontana, Hantai. At the least, in the formats that it traditionally adopts, the canvas represents the wall. At the least, plastic space symbolizes physical space. To work with plastic space is, at the very least, to symbolize physical space in a different way, or to say that the space in which we live needs another symbolization than the one we have inherited. Tearing or cutting plastic space is tearing or cutting up symbols.

Triangular folding made it necessary for Charvolen to find new methods of work, depending on whether the canvas was to be kept in its entirety and whether he decided to mark the folds, by pigmentation or sewing, for example, or whether he cut the canvas by following the folds and then sought to reunite the fragments. In the end, this makes the artist's body, his position and gestures appear differently, more obviously, in the process underway.

The artist then retained the lessons and questions of the previous period, such as linking fragments from the same space, the functional use of color and line, or the way of presenting the results in an exhibition. He added cuts that didn't follow the fabric's thread, he felt a need to produce plastic objects in one piece that show fragments of the same fabric, and demonstrate the ideas of variation and series in the types of folding and the ways the fragments are re-united.

At the end of the 1970s, he would apply these questions and lessons to a new series of works, going back to the original orthogonal format as a reference, keeping this format as a frame strip and combining the other fragments around it. In fact, a new idea then emerged in Charvolen's work. The painters of the analytical and critical movement chose not to deal with the question of the figure. We therefore sometimes see them as abstract painters. Deliberately intellectualized or, at the very least, rejecting affective and spontaneous aspects, their approaches occasionally allowed them to be classified among the conceptual artists.

Non-figurative, Charvolen seems to be ... However, as of the 1970s, he believed that if his painting did not seek to be figurative, it nevertheless dealt with

representation, because it started from a referent: the classic canvas, and that it showed an approach, and that the result “makes an image”.

This reflection helps us to understand the change in the late seventies.

He went back to the orthogonal format model, to the ‘frame strip’ as an image, and first, Charvolen reunited the fragments by stitching them in all kinds of ways to the frame strip and forming various extensions. The objects resulting from this period appear as kinds of massive, long, narrow agglomerates.

It was at this time that the idea of bringing together the fragments and giving them format and form appeared, not from the canvas - a symbolic space - but from the physical space that the canvas symbolizes... This was the beginning of an extremely fruitful period that has lasted to this day.

In 1979, Charvolen produced his first series on buildings. All the questions and issues from the previous decade concerning the status of plastic space and its symbolic dimension, the relationship to a referent, the rational and rigorous, the analytical and critical approach, the rejection of pathos and expressiveness were still there. He also kept most of his approaches: work on pieces of canvas, cutting fragments across the thread, the idea of reuniting the fragments, the functional use of color, etc.

The description of the technical process is simple in principle: once he chooses the location and determines its size according to the position of his body, gestures and movements, he covers the surface with fragments of glued fabric, colored in various ways. When everything is dry, he removes the canvas from the wall and lays it flat. The time during which the work remains on site before being removed can vary from a few days, as was the case on the Delphi site, a few months, as at the Léger museum in Biot, to several years, as with the staircase leading into the cellar of a building.

The work on buildings brings new questions and requires new techniques: the relationship of the body to physical space, the choice of workspaces (implying a relocation of the studio, now no longer needed for his work), the choice of appropriate glue, the ways to add pigment to the glue and color the fragments, procedures for peeling, tearing off without tearing the fabric when taking the work off, spreading it flat and keeping it in one piece.

Between places and objects: the question of models

In the 1980s, Charvolen treated buildings and objects equally. In both cases, he had to decide from then on to use "models" or "matrixes" on which the work would be formed, and note the type of objects and places chosen. In both cases, they were everyday objects and places with no particular characteristic or attraction. The objects: chairs, tables and tools for masonry, carpentry, agriculture, shovels, picks, hammers, trowels, painter's knives. The places: fragments of habitat, a living area, a window frame, a workshop area, a shower, etc.

For a short period, objects were to undergo a particular treatment by being thickly covered, making their original shapes gradually fade. At the same time, some disturbing works overlaid both the flattened object and its shadow. Gradually, the painter's attention was given only to buildings. The diversity of these depended on what he was offered, what spaces were made available to him.

Thus, after having covered parts of his own habitat, then having systematically explored a room in a building used for official accommodation, Charvolen implemented a specific procedure to choose the spaces in a building to be treated.

Whether urban housing, village housing, a gallery, an official building, whether or not he's working on a public order, Charvolen always begins by examining the place in search of an "architectural node": most often a passage, door, window, staircase, a space open to movement. If the search for the space to be treated takes architectural characteristics into account, this is simply part of a purely plastic approach from one place to another. The new questions that arise while working on one place are reinvested in the next places and help to determine the particular location on which the new work will be done. In turn, each new location leads to questions and requires new approaches. A few examples will illustrate this.

In 2003, Max Charvolen did a work on the archaeological site of Delphi. He dealt with a fragment of the ruins of the Treasury of the Massaliots. The reasons for this choice will be explained later. For the purpose of our demonstration, let us just remember that Charvolen posed a new problem: the relation between his work and archaeological approaches. In this review, an approach to this can be found in Bertrand Roussel's text. The Treasury of the Massaliots indeed widened his questioning: do the historical characteristics of an architecture impose a particular form on a work, and are they readable there as such? This precise question would be addressed during the exhibition at the Carros Art Center (CIAC).

The CIAC is set in a stately building in the Nice region. The building has been constantly redesigned since the Middle Ages and has a remarkable architectural diversity. Charvolen chose to treat each of the historical portions so as to show, if

possible, the way in which a historical form fits into a plastic work. In a way, René Lozi's text addresses this question more broadly by treating the circulation of information between physical space and plastic space in Charvolen's work.

For Charvolen, the experience of the CIAC was hardly convincing: architectural history is not, according to him, legible in the plastic result, or if it is, it is marginally, plastically indifferent.

On the other hand, what seemed far more relevant to him was to work on multiple “nodes” in the same space or in the same built unit. The works produced, plastically very diverse, respond to each other and construct an evocative representation of the original space. A new question then arose: to what extent can a series of works produced in a vast space take charge of the characteristics and the identity of a place and make its presence tangible? We could easily say ‘the spirit’ or ‘the poetry’ ... we could also say “the genius of the place”. He found the architectural diversity of a place more stimulating than its obvious historical dimension, and he was given the opportunity to work on this in 2009.

Charvolen was the guest of honor at the 15th Avignon “Parcours de l’Art”, with a residency in Avignon. He decided not to treat a particular place in the city, but rather a whole series of urban spaces chosen for their ordinariness, their functional diversity, and their dispersion. Because these works, plastic fragments made on city fragments, would speak of what the city is, the artist gave them the name of “territorial tongues”.

We see how, from one place to another, Charvolen's approach continues, evolves and is transformed... From Delphi to Avignon, between 2003 and 2009, a new dimension appeared in Charvolen's artistic concerns: how does Art deal with time? how does Art represent space? how does Art speak of the city?

And how does art describe the particular genius of a city? After Avignon, in 2010 Charvolen went to Incheon, Korea, where he worked according to the same procedures, with the same techniques and the same questions as in Avignon, yet the works from Incheon have a totally different rendering. They speak - or ‘sing’ - differently.

Color ...

Since the 1960s, Charvolen has affirmed that color has a functional use, making it possible to see the different sides of a canvas, the moments of work, the states of a



surface. In a few cases, it marked the edge of the canvas to confirm its thickness and materiality, or the string used to hang it became part of the work itself. Later, color applied in solid sections or in lines marked the folding of the fabric on to itself. In certain works color was also marked by sewing, or marked the sewing. Finally, it differentiated various fragments cut from the fabric both by its pigmentation and by the medium used.

In the work on buildings the parts were initially monochrome. Then using color made it possible to differentiate the planes of a volume, object or building. Color was again used for functional reasons. The transition was gradual, however, and as time went by color acquired further functions.

His first experiment with the use of color in his work on buildings took place in Nice at the Villa Masséna, the official accommodation of the director of the city's museums. Charvolen did several works in one of the apartment's bedrooms. He occupied several parts of the space and applied a particular use of color to each part. These ranged from a variation in the color of each individual fragment glued in a space, to canvas in its raw color, or to monochrome canvas, treating the ruptures in a space, and differentiating the planes. Every one of these uses has been repeated in the works produced over the following years.

Unbleached canvas has a particular role. In most cases, since the '80s, the unbleached canvas has been used on floors, with no added color and just marked by translucent glue. As the artist has to move around while working, the fragments stuck to the floor keep the traces of his movements over time. When he works in a space where many people pass, the floor records all the trampling, dirt, and accidents. The longer the work stays in place, the more traces there are on the floor, or pavement. The most remarkable example of this is the work done in the staircase to the cellar of the building where the artist lived. It stayed in place for more than six years before being taken off, the floors were walked on for a long time, bicycle tires marked the walls that also bear traces, scratches and dirt, from the passage of the building's occupants.

The first monochrome canvas paintings also bore traces of the artist's body. A still body: the work was done by covering the entire built volume the artist could reach without moving. This was a radical relationship of the body to space, of the body bonded to space. The only place the fragments could not be glued was on the floor where his feet were. Two holes in the finished work, two gaps in the collage, are proof of the artist's still presence. The absence of movement and gesture here meant the absence of canvas and therefore, of color.

The major function of colors, as we have said, is to mark the differences in planes. But they have other functions... First, they can mark the time of work. We can see this in the work of the 1960s and 1970s, and we can see it in the traces left on the unbleached canvas. They also mark the gestures of coloring: brushstrokes, knife strokes to make sure the glue sticks, and the marks his fingers left as he applied color to entire walls in some rooms.

Colors can also function according to circumstance, depending on the place, the request, in relation to a story, to a painter or to building techniques. For example, the colors of the work done on the main staircase of the Hôtel de Région PACA are those of the regional flag. At the Fernand Léger museum, Charvolen used the colors in Fernand Léger's stained glass window, which was right in front of him when he was doing the work. During the work on the Treasury of the Massaliots, he chose his palette according to what we know of the ancient colors that adorned buildings and statues, and sought to find the values closest to those used in Antiquity. He also gave them functions related to the characteristics of a ruin: a preserved wall, a ruined wall, the pin marks between stones, today's ground level, or the original ground level. In Korea, he changed his palette and used gilding, a pigment found abundantly in Korean culture.

We can see the diversity in the functions of color depending on the works produced. This is also part of a wish to give artistic form to a physical, carnal relationship to a territory.

### Science and technology

When Charvolen graduated from the Beaux-Arts he knew all the techniques that this school taught at the time, and yet the artistic process he would explore called these techniques into question, proved them to be inadequate, and led to questioning their status and their merits. The mere fact of treating the canvas as independent of the stretcher led him to question all kinds of very commonplace things, such as the quality of the support, the choice of formats, the finishing techniques, the way of using pigment, the brushes, etc.

Like other painters of his generation, he would use techniques that were not used in the plastic arts. He rediscovered craftsmen's techniques such as hot or cold dyeing for pigmentation, or using a chisel, a utility knife or the sewing machine ... In some cases, he used foreign techniques such as the Japanese frame, or he used color as a material, as a hardener, and not as a dye.

As his work progressed, he needed to find new techniques that corresponded as closely as possible to his artistic project.

In the beginning there was chemistry

As soon as Charvolen began to work on buildings and objects, the question arose of the choice of glues to use, pigments and / or dyes that color the glue in its mass or on its surface, so as to obtain a result that adheres to walls and can be torn off without damaging the work. The glue's bonding and pigmentation needed to resist the passage of time and remain flexible.

This research took a long time and required the work of specialists in adhesives and dyes. For example, at the artist's request studies were carried out by students of the University of Bordeaux on the resistance of adhesives to ultraviolet rays. From the beginning of the 1990s, these exchanges contributed to his final choice of materials, products and procedures. Some techniques have occasionally changed. For example, during the work on the Treasury of the Massaliots, the archaeologists responsible for the site declared that it was out of the question for the glue to be in contact with the stone of the building. Alkis Voliotis, an art restorer, helped to find an answer.

The mathematics of art

Charvolen called upon science and technology to solve practical problems. As early as the 1980s, he needed to turn to mathematicians to deal with problems linked to the process itself, to its development, and to its meaning. Two questions then arose: the first concerning the form resulting from the flattening of the covered spaces, the second concerning the contribution of Charvolen's approach to contemporary art.

Let's look at the first one. When the artist flattens a canvas glued to a volume into 2 dimensions, the result obtained is unique, and depends on a simple general protocol and immediate decisions that are difficult to master and predict. The protocol is simple: the cutting and flattening should result in a single piece, avoid weakening areas, and cuts should only be along edges.

Immediate decisions are difficult to make: choosing which edges to cut, what to cut and tear off first...

But what shape would the work have had if different decisions had been made? First, Charvolen explored other possibilities by working on models. He rapidly realized that this let him produce reduced models more quickly, but that their number was very insufficient when considering all the different possibilities he foresaw. Two questions then arose: how many 2-dimensional flattened possibilities could be achieved from one single covering of a volume? And was there a way to do this? To put it another way: how many two-dimensional representations can we make of a three-dimensional object? It is easy to understand why he put these questions to a mathematician specializing in computer science. He approached Loïc Pottier, researcher at the National Institute for Research in Computer Science and Automation, and his research has accompanied the artist's work since the late 1980s.

Before speaking of the impact of Loïc Pottier's research on Charvolen's approach, we must say two quick words about working on models. This phase indeed brought about a set of achievements and questions.

First, the change in scale. In an approach that consists of accounting for the 2D representation of a 3D space at scale 1, does the change of scale imply a change in the approach itself? The relationship between the viewer and the object is indeed completely different. The artist's physical involvement changes dramatically, his body language is transformed. And what is the relationship between the model and the place it represents? Is it part of the work? And what is the relationship of the flat layouts made on the model? ...with the original work? ...between each other? Each work leaves traces on the model. What is the status of these traces? All these questions, previously asked differently, would reappear in the first projects with Loïc Pottier. Charvolen had some (plastic) answers before his meeting the mathematician, the most notable being the question of scale. Instead of working only on 1/10-scale models, in 1981 he took advantage of exhibiting at the Ponchettes municipal gallery in Nice to work on a 2/1-scale model. The experience was revealing. Magnifying the scale allowed Charvolen to focus on a few issues and helped him to look into another method of exploring the diversity of 2-dimensional flattening.

Mathematics gives a simple answer to the question of number: the number of flattenings is a function of the number of sides, of which it is the factorial. For a parallelepipedon, the number of flattenings is  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6$ ; for a volume of 10 sides:  $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \dots \times 10$ . And if it has several dozen sides, the number is finite, mathematically representable, but unimaginable. We understand that only the digitization of data and its print-outs can explore - however little - this enormity.

But practically, whatever the means used, even computerized, and whatever the time available, the total number of flattenings is practically impossible. Loïc Pottier's contribution to the Charvolen project was theoretical and practical. The theoretical dimension of the problem can be found in the article he wrote in 1997... In practice he wrote the algorithm for carrying out digital flat layouts. It takes up less than a page. He also ensured its implementation to produce the flat layouts.

Digital flattening has since accompanied Charvolen's work whenever possible. It reveals many questions and has given rise to all different kinds of work.

Questions first focused on how many virtual flattenings were worth doing. To answer, Max Charvolen first referred to the time available. In the practical sense, time available for machines, time for the artist, time for the researcher. He crossed this question of time with the question of numbers. How many times does diversity become meaningful? The work on the Treasury of the Massaliots answered this question: the number of virtual flattenings was then related to the age of the city of Marseilles, i.e. 2,600.

The digital renderings of the work carried out on the Treasury of the Massaliots radicalized several other questions.

First, the question of the format: machines today can't print out a single flattening on a 1/1 scale. The formats chosen from the start depended on the plastic project pursued. Mostly in A4, more rarely in 10x15, or 24x36, sometimes over a few square centimeters, a postage-stamp format, making each flattening look like an ideogram. For the Treasury, the format chosen was that of the land register, a *grand-aigle* format, first tested on A4 paper. Anyone who does the math by multiplying the width of each drawing by the number of drawings will be convinced of the enormous amount of space required to present all of it.

Then there was the question of the status of these virtual flattenings in the artist's approach, among contemporary artistic and digital achievements, and finally as an object.

The status of Max Charvolen's digital object is special. Each digital flattening is an object made through today's means of image production and reproduction, and can potentially be reproduced in large numbers. However, the advantage lies in the contrary, in the possibility of carrying out a large number of unique digital

flattenings. We can see how, in practice, this counters the status of work being technically reproducible, as theorized by Walter Benjamin.

How does Charvolen's approach fit into all of today's digital image production? We can at least note that it goes against most digital imagery. It is neither a reconstitution of reality, nor enhanced reality, nor an exploration of the plastic capacities offered by the digital processing of drawing, painting and color. However, like digital imagery, Charvolen's flattenings give a plastic interpretation of visible reality. A reflection on this subject would certainly teach us a lot about the artist's particular contribution to the role that digital imagery now plays in our representation of the world.

In this regard it is interesting to note that Charvolen developed a project with a digital imaging research unit of the CNRS. The idea, which came from the research unit, was to create a digital environment, a simulation, in which Charvolen could virtually intervene and act. The computer scientists proposed a digital image reconstituting the Treasury of the Massaliots that Charvolen could move around in, cover parts of and remove the covering virtually. The flattening phase would have been carried out by adapting the Loïc Pottier algorithm.

What place and role does digital flattening now play in Max Charvolen's approach? And what is the status of Loïc Pottier's algorithm? Jean Petitot argues that not only is the algorithm a complete part of Charvolen's artistic approach, but also that, as it is applicable to any structure, it is a creation in its own right, associating art and science. The interest of this is no less than that of the artistic process and the physical involvement of the artist.

The questions remain open.

Twice, Charvolen asked René Lozi, mathematician, about the lessons he was drawing from his relationship to the work. The first time, René Lozi worked on the issue of edges. The second time, in this review, he wonders about the way in which information theory makes it possible to perceive Charvolen's work, thus going far beyond the question posed above on relationships between Charvolen's approach and digital tools and achievements.

Whether a physical flattening or a digital flattening, Charvolen deals with a subject no doubt as old as painting: how to represent three-dimensional objects or three-dimensional spaces in two dimensions. Since the Renaissance, the response of Western painting has been through mathematics, through the mathematization of

space to master perspective. Another approach, to which Charvolen's approach is very sensitive, is that of cubism. How can several aspects, several sides, of a three-dimensional reality be brought out in a two-dimensional space? My hypothesis is that Charvolen's approach reverses the Renaissance problematic and radicalizes the Cubist approach. The Renaissance wondered how to give the illusion of three dimensions in two-dimensional space. Charvolen deals with the transfer of an entire three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional space, without the illusion of perspective and, with the digital side, by mathematizing space differently than did the painters of the Renaissance. This issue was addressed by Jean Petitot in *Les Portulans de l'Immédiat* (Immediate Portolans).

The question of demonstration

Since the 1960s, as we have seen, Charvolen's work puts forth particular problems for exhibition and conservation. The materials used and the formats obtained do not meet the usual conditions for conservation and for public viewing.

Diana Gay will address some aspects of this issue. Practically, the painter has regularly come to think of how, in a gallery or a museum, to present objects that were themselves created on a built space and, when putting them flat or deploying them, are poorly adapted to the architecture meant to receive them, and even sometimes overwhelms it because they don't fit!

A practical question indeed ... The work carried out in Le Cannet on three floors, between 1993 and 1997, or the flattening of the Treasury of the Massaliots, which covers nearly 400 m<sup>2</sup>, hardly find a space to suit them. Likewise, the 2,600 digital layouts of the Treasury of the Massaliots, even if they are limited to an A4 format, can hardly all be shown in a space usually meant to show art. The flattening of the Treasury in the *grand-aigle* format would require nearly two kilometers of picture rails, for example. This is possible for a public monument ... colossal, but not in the individual work of an artist. Unless they are shown in a pile... which is what Charvolen has done twice.

One can imagine that the problem is not just practical. If Max Charvolen's works question the space in which they are made, they also question the space meant to receive them.

The limits of usual museum space force the artist to transform the result of his work, or to present it in unexpected ways. Charvolen's works can cover part of the

ceiling and the floor, unfold in several sections of the exhibition space, or be folded onto themselves, partly hidden, in order to fit.

The question of exhibiting has therefore become important for the artist, who considers that each new scenario offers a different reading - a vision - of the same work, and explores certain potentialities. We can see that this approach is reminiscent of installations, but is far different due to the nature of the objects and the type of relationship they maintain with the exhibition space.

### Architecture and human sciences

Max Charvolen's interest in architecture is obvious, and many commentators have proposed an approach, from Marcelin Pleynet who presented him as a Bauhausler, to Claude Parent who noted that, with Charvolen, “[ the] inversion of the practice of the descriptive makes it possible for the observer to decipher the UNSEEN of the place, the NOT RECOGNIZED, and to reveal the components to him, not in an analytical disclosure, but in a synthesis sensitive to the limit of intellectuality ”. And Michel Butor writes in "The house of our dreams": "Here, while we wait for glorious objects, are glorious houses to tame our eternity. “

In fact, the way Charvolen deals with the space in which we live is part of a relationship between space and art, and between the artist and plastic space, that began in the twentieth century and transcends most aesthetic divides. At least since the post-war period - even if we can perceive premises of this since the beginning of the century - artists have gradually developed a non-contemplative relationship to real space, which is echoed by new forms of the relationship with plastic space. Real space is seen more as constructed and not a given, as a space to occupy and not just to look at, as a space marked and transformed by the activities of men, a social and historical space in which the artist is involved and acts, or with which he interacts. In other words, the notion of landscape gives way to that of territory.

At the same time, a painting, a window open to the world, gradually gives way to painting treated horizontally, on which we can stand, and which bears more the traces of what the artist does than a representation of what he sees. All-over painting, dripping, action painting, gestural painting, urban painting, graffiti art and installations emerge from this new approach to spaces of life and art.

This reflection led to the title of the first collective writing on Charvolen's work: *Les Portulans de l'immédiat* (Immediate Portolans), meaning that his work



endeavored to show our familiar spaces as close as possible to reality and to allow us to find our way in them, intuitively.

We still lack a reasoned approach to this “territorial art”. We would need a geographer attentive to the way in which territorial approaches find an echo in the practices of art.

On the other hand, the way in which historical and archaeological dimensions, whether intended or not, can be found in Charvolen’s work, the proximity between archaeological procedures deepening the knowledge of a territory and Charvolen’s approach are treated in this review by Bertrand Roussel, archaeologist, who curated the prehistoric collections of the Nice museums.

Beyond the representations of archaeological sites in art, artistic reconstructions of bygone periods, or metaphors (a painting can have overlaps, can reveal buried layers, etc.), Bertrand Roussel explains how close the two approaches can be.

What works signify in a given culture, the interpretability of traces, the vision they give of a process, the reconstruction they allow of a reality external to painting, or of a previous state of the elements which constitute it, this is a series of questions that can interest a semiotician. Nicole Biaggioli carries out this semiotic approach and distinguishes three tragedies in Max Charvolen’s work: "the passage, the image and language", and notes that "the device in which Charvolen attracts the referent and the sign is a process of semiotic transformation which is at the same time symmetrical and interactive, holding the mirror and the chain of events" before asking the “ritual question of the message of the work” and answer it by “it speaks especially to our body, to our feet, to our hands, to our eyes, and therefore to our imagination. [...] First of all, from the artist, come hundreds of daily gestures that he has had to add, to transmute one place into another, with material which, for centuries, had only been used to represent one place on another. And then, from us, come depths that we have little opportunity to visit.”

Based on Charvolen's work, and questioning his own discipline, psychoanalysis, Hervé Castanet explores the relationship between work and meaning with Charvolen, in that this work “shows its viewer [...] that the perceiving subject is “equivocal”, that is to say that there is no pre-discursive reality, that all reality is woven with language ”.

From another point of view, the relationship between painting and language seems to me to be extremely intricate in the work of Max Charvolen. Although in the

1960S and 1970s he seemed to want to limit everything that was said about his work to speaking only of his materials and his processes, the objects he showed made a statement that immediately disturbed what was apparently obvious. This curious experience has intrigued me since that time. I would say "canvas" but it was already no longer a canvas, "fabric", "tool", "pigment", "color", and, as the words came to rest on the object, they changed their meaning... Castanet is right: this reality is well interwoven with language, but how is language caught in the net?

Everything then has happened as though these objects, beyond their given designation, point in directions as yet unspoken of, as yet unexplored by our common speech.

Thus, for me, Charvolen's work became the prototype of what I was looking for in certain forms of art. I wanted to find myself at first confronted, silent, ignorant, dazed. "There is no pre-discursive reality" ... But perhaps there are objects that force their viewers to reconsider the web of language in which we are / they are caught.

That is why, very early on, a purely critical approach seemed insufficient to me to describe the "Charvolen experience". I have explored this through literature, storytelling, drama and poetry, and this is why I'm so curious about how others, with other tools, can speak about this experience.

*Raphaël Monticelli, Cahier Max Charvolen, Il particolare N ° 29, June 2015.*