

The combinatorial writing of the painting

Some method is essential in the creation of a world. Structure, organization, drawing of the lines, settlement of the articulations, a system needs to be put to the test. The creation of a formal territory is held by a kind of mechanics. In standing in front of Matthieu Montchamp canvas and in penetrating his painting, we acknowledge, quickly enough, that this artwork has the rigor of its ambition. It makes its way, step by step, and settles the outlines of a universe filled with trappy landscapes. The painting seems to have chosen for object the thought of the loss and it invites the viewer into its shifting sands, without failing. Lying on tables or planks, whose equilibrium seems impossible, Matthieu Montchamp's world confides its fragility and organizes the drift of the eye in a mix of certainty and empiricism. The artist has imagined the vortex of the stroll, he has marked the paths in his landscapes, he has segmented the areas of the painting and created fake tracks. He has left a few crumbs to chance so that it seems almost possible to take another path, so that we can almost believe that everything is not settled in advance, that our eye has the right to escape in the space of his canvas. But it's mere illusion.

The artist plays with the superimpositions of reality's stratum, his artworks reveal, at the same time, the painter's and the language's territories. There is a kind of conscience, something that recalls detachment first of all because, in the end, the painting is painting (the drips, the strokes...), then because the language appears while being formulating in the narration (in particular through the objects' condition of the different landscape elements landed on the plans). The viewers assist the setting of the scene, they can catch the mechanics and the intentions, they sense the language in action. While talking about literature, Roland Barthes makes a distinction between "the text" and "the work". He analyses the text as a methodological field: "The Text is not coexistence of meanings but passage, traversal; thus it answers not to an interpretation, liberal though it may be, but to an explosion, a dissemination (...). The reader of the Text could be compared to an idle subject: this fairly empty subject strolls along the side of a valley at the bottom of which runs a *wadi*; What he sees is multiple and irreducible; it emerges from substances and levels that are heterogeneous and disconnected: lights, colors, vegetation, heat, air, bursts of noise, high-pitched bird calls, children's cries from the other side of the valley, paths, gestures, clothing of close and distant inhabitants. All these *occurrences* are partially identifiable: they proceed from known codes, but their combination is unique, founding the stroll in difference that can be repeated only as difference. This is what happens in the case of the Text: it can be itself only in its difference; its reading is self-effective and yet completely woven with quotations, references, and echoes. These are cultural languages, past or present, that traverse the text from one end to the other in a vast stereophony." Matthieu Montchamp's canvas openly follow the analogy, they seem to build with determination, this stroll Roland Barthes refers to.

The formal vocabulary of his painting is simple, it is mainly constituted by familiar elements whose object we fail to catch due to their daily, unconcerned proximity.

A mineral vocabulary of lop-sided forms, built under the form of ungraded architectures that due to their nature enter the canvas to organize the flow. The gutters' role, just like elements of the path in mini-golf, is mainly to contain the viewer's eye and to irrigate the painting. What prevails is the dynamics of the space, regardless of the means needed, the painting must live, must carry a sensitive connection, an impression throughout the reading. The gutters, just like elements of the path in mini-golf, have their importance because they disturb the scales. And hole number three becomes a semaphore, and the monastery finds its place on the stool just like a bibelot... Everything in his artwork contributes to clear away that strange heady mist. An unsettling feeling emanates from the canvas and inevitably penetrates the viewer.

Veiled by a succession of disqualified objects, the fiction invites itself, it makes its way. Element by element, it grows and settles the conditions of its efficiency through the evolution of the path. "Imagination is a tool of knowledge" wrote Régis Jauffret, "it looks from far away, it enters the details as if it wanted to explore the atoms, it dissects the real, it stretches it till its rupture point, it takes it to its deductions filled with axioms which by definition cannot be demonstrated." And from this diving into the texture of the real, a world with neither beginning nor end appears, a nowhere land with an unsteady equilibrium between the truth and the narration. The landscapes are plausible and uncertain at the same time, they form a

semi-world with an enigmatic organization.

One of the painting specificities is that it can carry its narration (in the artwork) and at the same time pull the History (in the text). It is built on “previous cultural languages” maybe more than any other medium. Matthieu Montchamp assimilated this transhistorical nature of the painting and its artwork oversteps the eras to become a kind of pictorial syncretism in which the XVII century takes on Velasquez’s, Giotto’s or Gasiorowski’s surrealism...In his paintings, the connection of the “geological” relief to the clumsy wrinkles, which could represent the historical force (if they were not part of the set of an electric train or little piles of sand)and the connection of the abstract, generic shapes to the sharp ridges and perfect surfaces, show the journey of the artwork in time. No matter what, the creation is inevitably beyond time, it is its own way to embrace all times (from Philip K. Dick to Masaccio).

Matthieu Montchamp’s paintings have made this constant movement their own, they are the set of an endless flow (between the different elements that compose the image, the scales, the levels of reality, the eras of history and art...). And because what moves is uncatchable and what is uncatchable remains undefined, then, a nebulous mystery pervades the perimeter drawn by his paintings. These wandering territories in which operate abstruse mechanics become the disconcerting images that echo in each one of us. As if in those paradoxical representations abandoned by presence something could deeply touch the human, as if those landscapes of wrinkles reflected some inner land.

Guillaume Mansart

Linguistic term referring to what has only one occurrence

2 Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text” published in *La Revue d'Esthétique*, n°3, Paris, 1971. Rptd. in Josue V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979), 73-81.] Régis Jauffret, Préambule du roman *Sévère*, Editions du Seuil, Mars 2010