

TEXT WRITTEN BY JEAN-CHRISTOPHE BAILLY, 2018

An art of slow and secret experiments, nocturnal for the most part, a fine science of depositions and extractions, a constantly maintained relationship with the nature and materiality of all that we can touch or see - that is how the work undertaken by Delphine Wibaux has appeared for several years now, a work that, given its scope, will endlessly draw on its own resources, like a series of experimental protocols renewing themselves repeatedly. At the root of this work, and perhaps already as a first summary, is a text written in 2013, *Partition lunaire*, in which the actions actually carried out by the artist are described as the gestures of a nocturnal quest with the characteristics of a fictional narrative - a sort of logbook that would move the reality of the studio towards the forest and the night, the narrator living inside a tree and only coming out between dusk and dawn. The fairy-tale dimension that permeates the entire text also irradiates the works, but the concern for the material qualification of the things and lights encountered is never abandoned. Moreover, it is the fairy-tale form or the fictionalisation that establishes the materiality and does it justice. The moon is the guarantor of this installation of the world and in the world: the enigmatic seal that haloes the actions is not a supplement, it is part of them, it underpins them.

“Shining by night with borrowed light, wandering round the earth” - that is how the moon comes in Parmenides’ poem (from the farthest reaches of what makes us what we are) and that is how it illuminates *Partition lunaire* and the actions described in it. The light from elsewhere arrives here, where we gather it. It is not as strong as that of the sun, it does not burn, but it acts gently, palely, and it is this action that Wibaux examines and collects. For her, it is not a question of trapping, but of recording, of collecting traces. What is gathered in this way, is the way in which the light emitted by the moon affects a given surface. Here the production of these surfaces comes into play, that is, an entire alchemy of preparation, intended to make them photosensitive: sensitive to the pale light whose intermittences and rhythms are spread out over the twenty-nine nights of the lunar cycle. The means of obtaining these surfaces are varied and secret: mainly blends and decoctions of plants. With what they reveal about patient, attentive workmanship as well as with what results as an image, we are very close to the climate of the invention of photography, notably Hippolyte Bayard’s tests as collected in his notebooks. One might say that with her various recording experiments, Wibaux undertakes almost photographic work, but without camera or pinhole - this time, the camera is the continuous light performance of the universe. One could conceive of photography in general as the interposing of a surface in a flux, but this time the surface is in the open air and the exposure time is very long or, strictly speaking, there really is no exposure, only the action of time - and it is continuous. The universe infuses.

The image thus obtained - by exposing the surfaces to direct light - pertains to what the Greeks called *acheiropoietic* images, made without hands, and this method, which is that of reflections and shadows, is that of an evolution. The exposure time of the sensitive surfaces developed by Wibaux are not only long (several months sometimes), but the results are often not fixed so that there is a continuity between what appears and what fades: the still image is as if subject to a very slow cross dissolve (a transformation that is "slower than the passage of a cloud but quicker than the formation of a wrinkle") that links it to its future - to its erasure. What comes is, at the same time, what goes. Wibaux speaks of "living images": there is no longer an image, but a passage, a trail. The idea that an image is a trail and, as such, a vestige; is where Wibaux's experiments lead us, be it through the fictionalisations of *Partition lunaire* or through staging them in ever varying ways, in spaces that they transfigure. I say "experiments" and not "works" as what imposes itself is precisely something that does not impose itself and that functions rather like a suggestion - a pause. What we see, whether via surfaces or volumes, is the very opposite of what is framed, put on a plinth, fixed; these are chips, fragments, offcuts; and hence it is within networks that the 'seen' is presented, presents itself, in the present of an action that is continuous. Take the way twenty-nine pieces of leather are hung from threads and exposed to the night in the fairy-tale forest that the trees of Luminy become... Or the laying of fragments or shards on the ground - her *Témoins souples*, strips of images placed on rocks or potsherds, presented along with underwater archaeological fragments.

There is nothing gratuitous about this exchange between an artistic production and something found - what is at stake and is shown, demonstrated even, is the passage of time and it is the gestures through which this passage may be rendered present. We have our senses available, that's no mean feat (and the *Partition lunaire* text can also be read as a detailed catalogue of our perceptual abilities), but the tools that Wibaux makes are like refiners of percept that augment and enrich our relationship with the perceptible. In their inventive technical diversity, they cover an expanse that goes from the oldest gestures (such as cooking and decoction) to the use of sophisticated methods from the natural sciences. The result of this broad range is a reinforced, refined, hypersensitive listening. The goal is not simply to obtain a superior quality of definition but, through it, to make our lives more real, more 'lifelike'. In a world of widespread instrumentalisation, occupations such as the slow production of these spectral moonlight reflections, or the baking of pigment-soaked ceramic fragments to see how they evolve, are clearly escapes, ways out. And what we see are traces of these escapes, the living signs of this recourse restricted to the materiality of the phenomenal world.

This world is both that of an infinite dispersion of occurrences and that of ceaseless exchanges between the infinitesimal and the immense. Vibrations, trembling, projections, erasures and metamorphoses. The texture (of the material, of the light) is the vehicle of these movements, which are like the emotions of nature. Sometimes the evening light projects onto the walls the shadows of branches and leaves that the

wind lightly shakes, and every time it is like a slow-motion film whose hold is considerable... It is towards such phenomena that Wibaux turns, recreating them. For example, take the hanging piece of glass whose projected image trembles when trains pass (one of the pieces form the "resonance laboratory" installed in the Friche de la Belle de Mai in the context of a joint project with Tom Rider). In truth, as the attention paid to such a tiny movement demonstrates, these experiments and installations are heading towards a choreography of sorts: nothing well-ordered, of course, but a series of signs, an apprenticeship of a slow kinematics that we should perhaps learn to attune ourselves to - the time to see, to see coming, and to listen.

We remember the gesture Gilles Deleuze used to mime "to be on the lookout", which was, according to him, the animal; Wibaux's works make one think of such lively attentiveness, of such tense vivacity: to be on the lookout, to be attentive, to hear and make heard the tiniest folds, the tiniest unfoldings. I talk of animals and think of the alert thread - that is its name - by which certain garden spiders are connected to their webs and which alerts them to anything that could happen. The alarm, the attention to signs, to sudden movements, to discrepancies is also what comprised the life of the small animal in "The Burrow", the short story by Kafka that it is impossible not to think about when reading *Partition lunaire*, the difference being that the recess of this underground world also becomes a sort of observatory in Wibaux's narrative; in its case, the night sky constitutes the core (endless and bottomless) of the preoccupation. And this sky, towards which we all too rarely turn our heads, is not only up there, but among us. In frequenting Wibaux's living images, one of the ideas that comes is that we are in truth already in the sky, immersed in the variation of its lights, exactly like plants are except that we have forgotten this. So, materiel evidence for the imaginary photosynthesis that is thus offered to us exists: the magnetic micrometeorites that Wibaux and Tom Rider gather - real celestial dust that, they remind us, we will walk on every three hundred steps, such is its abundance. The idea of A "perceptual sieve" generating falling dust through movements is here enriched by a celestial extension, and it is not by chance that the material of these grains was associated with the steps of a dancer in the "living installation" entitled *Dissoudre le lieu, récolter quelques traces de lumière*; nor is it by chance that this dancer, Yoshiko Tanigoshi, comes from a country, Japan, in which the awareness of the telluric is the most acute. The telluric, which may be considered the terrestrial activity par excellence, being a memory of the sky inscribed in the core of the Earth, mineral and sidereal combining in a prolix unity... As we can see, the associations rain down - like the dust. It is all just a matter of attentiveness and collection.

"The sum of that which touches us is called nature," wrote Novalis at the beginning of *The Novices of Sais*. Everything indicates that we should return to this definition, and in order to do so we need precise and sensitive indicators and tools. Unburdened from the pathos of the 'oeuvre', with freedom and invention, Wibaux's works are exactly this.