

Brûler sa maison (burning your own house)

In Jérôme Boutterin's recent paintings, blobs of saturated colour occupy a territory on the canvas. They are indifferent to what surrounds them, the surface juxtaposes zones without integrating them, the artistic energy generates protruding curves, blank pages, hatchings and movements extrapolating disorder into one colour. The composition operates as closely as possible to its own unbinding. There is no pathos of the abyss. The instability of these paintings dramatises a pictorial state that is labile, fluctuating, hard to get to and easy to lose: carefreeness.

In a way, the entire "monochromatic" work of the artist creates the trajectories of such an effect, knowing that it is neither spontaneous nor manageable, that it is again earned by going through some of the "hows" and "whys" of painting. What is the relationship to its history, to the contemporary experience? What are the pragmatic procedures, what are the repercussions of the body? What becomes of the logic of content and form, of figure? And above all, in what way can this heavy mass of questioning transform into the assertive object of carefreeness?

Firstly, Jérôme Boutterin's painting starts with itself; in other words, it starts by not justifying itself. It adopts the frontality, the marked-out frame of the canvas, the decontextualisation, the pictorial matter as its area of efficacy. The association of each painting with a colour does not answer for an idea of painting but is in keeping with a "restricted action". It is a restriction through which the pictorial disorder worsens and holds it together at the same time. It is a moment of work, not its essence.

In these paintings, the colour is not a single unit, a colour differentiates itself by segments, its variation envelops multiple dimensions. On our boxes of coloured pencils, we were taught that yellow moves forward while blue takes a step back. Here, we can see that blue moves forward and blue takes a step back, depending on its degrees of saturation and its internal dynamics. The superposition of two shades of blue will, in turns, create the dimension of depth, a stratification and the comeback of surface. In a 2008 painting, three washed-out curves seem to be growing back, or even seal a zone of dark hatchings. A dense mass of blue draws alongside the light doodle, so much so that the two shapes find themselves on the same level: and that's when figures appear as pieces from the background. Nothing stays in place. And since colour is intrinsically a connection, one single

colour can be that just as much. Last but not least, there is the logic of the series. Bright pink, dark or pale blue, purple, ochre, orange. The work of colours is simultaneously present in each colour taken in isolation as well as in the palette offered as a variety by all the paintings.

Saturation is a chromatic variation. But it steps in just as much in the distribution of surface, in which case juxtaposition is its contrary. At times the traces are next to each other without covering each other, some bordering on others, drawing distinct territories. The gaze circulates, jumping from one to the other. At times they cover each other, their shapes overlap, stratify and fill the space: a landscape tangled with paint can be seen. These discontinuous or concentrated atmospheres are diversely inhabited by protuberances, grotesque curves and hybrid figures with an improbable scale: by the presence of bodies.

A bird-man perches like a tightrope walker on the outline of a huge organ; he squats the empty centre of a painting. An elementary figure of a cell, a big nose, the petal of a flower, a forsaken testicle, a weird metamorphic shape endlessly keeps adding itself to the landscapes it is going through, interfering with the spaces whose colour it adopts, every time. Sometimes, it gets near the animal: seahorse, horse, the head of a dog or a mouse, it varies. Its repeated effraction signals a body seized by its mutability, its *eros*, a body which frees itself from its identity. It is precisely this input that we call thought. Here, its difference passes through this vital blob that inhabits the paintings, confides in it, hangs around or even vanishes in it, like a constant exasperation.

What about Jérôme Boutterin's relationship with the history of painting, with its current history? Movements borrowed from abstract expressionism, quixotic figures that are reminiscent of Odilon Redon, decorative logic, pop chromatism: each one of these moments is present, none of them determines an overall coherence anymore. In an orange painting, an emphatic movement lodged itself in the top part of the painting, above a figure resembling a seahorse. The sovereign energy of the of the drawing is cut by the frame. We imagine, not an overflowing internal expression, but the orange paint going over the edges and onto the wall. In the surface of the painting, the body mass of the hand forms a cumulus of suspended pigment: it is a trace amongst other traces, not a signature.

These paintings are decorative and not decorative, or rather, they are no longer decorative from being too decorative. The most recent paintings worsen this incompatibility. There is always something that comes and spoils the rhythm, a stain that is a bit too disruptive, a distinct imbalance. While the decorative, as Matisse defines it, "channels

the viewer's spirit in a way that they can rely on the painting but can entirely think about something else than the particular object, if it is held back without being held", here, what is played out is something less operational, and even completely precarious. These paintings on the verge of coming undone are only held together by the layout of our gaze, by precise effectuations of what disturbs them and throws them off balance.

These multiple borrowings are not a labour of memory, but one of disaffiliation: it is the strange effort of producing a new zone of forgetfulness. Everything happens as if the artist became friendly with a painting, a procedure, a flow to revive the little "whirlwind of life" that makes up its own desire. In a conversation, Cage tells Guston: "When you start working, everyone is in your studio – the past, your friends, enemies, the world of art, and above all your own ideas, they are all there. But while you keep painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely on your own. Then, if you are lucky, you also leave". This is Jérôme Boutterin, the way I imagine him in his studio.

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