

## INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIER DELAVALLADE

*After an art school course, you chose to start studies of landscapes. Can you explain this choice?*

I think, quite simply, that I love space and Landscape art is an art that produces some. In my case, so does painting.

I started with art school studies, but to me, the artist's position seemed selfish, self-centred and insufficiently committed.

Landscape art was new and part of a reality that I needed, which is the reason why I started. Then, there was a turnaround, I had all the right reasons to do it (commitment) but mine was no longer there, I started painting again... I understood that what made me paint was precisely the lack of reasons. I then narrowed my field of action.

What I liked about landscapes, the project, was that an art was saying that the tree wasn't at the right place. Neither was the mountain. I found that dissatisfaction with the existing very invigorating.

It seems to me that we live in a time where Landscape has become a vague notion, where ecology, the "all of us together", the respect for the existing, lead to a contentment of what we have in a state of pleasant contemplation... but I think that it is only a stage that looks like what we experience, a form of expectation...

As if we expected a situation to tell us what we should do. I feel that it conceals something...

*Landscapes have a strong presence in your work. However, they are not exclusive. Figure, or to be more precise, figures, appear. Sometimes explicitly: I am thinking about that fictional character, K. Sometimes, on the contrary, with very little visibility or even unconsciously. Figures can be read in your paintings just like they can be made out in clouds. And sometimes, the same applies to the landscape itself, particularly in the latest series that you are showing in Kerguéhennec. We may get the feeling that the work you implement defeats our reading attempts and our desire for recognition.*

The K series showed a character, mostly inanimate, in landscape scenes with end or beginning-of-the world lights.

However, the important thing didn't solely lie in these scenes where, in a way, I was showing an indifference to the landscape, but it also lies also in the disjunction between colour and drawing. The canvases were saturated with colour and the drawing didn't match those lights. That disjunction found ended up in the inverted monochromes, in the sense that the drawing is "out of control" and the colour assembles.

Through this hiatus between drawing and colour, another gap between context and out of context was being signified; it is a question that fuelled me during the crossover you mentioned in the course of my studies: what resists our surroundings?

It is a paradox: to have an attention towards what pre-exists and not wanting to depend on it.

Your expression surprises me, as we know but cannot accept it, our desire for recognition is endless. This urge probably exists, this beat in the way shapes are next to each other in my painting. Yes, I probably produce this research in these shapes.

These paintings are produced with a set of traces, frictions, arabesques, puddles, traces that more or less represent what organs or objects would be. These traces are without objects, yet they can make them. I don't want this vocabulary to be homogeneous, it carries along everything: abstract lines, big nose, a stomach, holes, bits of flowers... (probably a reminiscence of K). What make me work is the proximity of all this.

I often see people smile while looking at my paintings, I do hope and think that this vicinity is exhilarating.

About the defeat of the reading, yes, I don't think we read a painting, we look at it, therefore there is no progression but rather a spreading of perception, a stretching (but I am a bad reader, I read like I look, I look at the

pages and I disorderly look for sentences that will grab my attention).

*Yes, a stretching that is not only horizontal but also vertical. You don't use landscape formats, but portrait formats, as they are called by paint merchants, and that, to me, is essential. Therefore, you place the viewer not only in a spectator's position but as a character standing in front of the painting. And this posture also refers to the position of the body of the person who paints, to the scale of their own body, even if the canvas is on the floor. The movement matches amplitude of the body even if this body is not -or no longer is- a unified body but a dismembered, scattered set...*

The almost exclusive use of the vertical format is probably the symptom or the sign of a will to be more inside than outside when I look at these paintings.

*The world that you offer us is a world of floating shapes, always in motion. Chinese painting springs to mind. There is no hierarchy in the painting, each space is painted, the gaze isn't led by the construction, from one point to another. At the same time, there is a movement, a spinning even. And depth too. Without resorting to the classic ploys of composition, but rather by stratification.*

Yes to floating, yes to motion, but Chinese painting, I don't think so! Or at least, not the mental image I have of it. Unfortunately, I don't know Chinese painting or if I do, it's definitely the stereotypical perception we have of it, because it will probably fit this mental image that we have of Chinese painting.

If I use these stereotypes, and I would do that to disperse a possible misunderstanding, this painting would convey a harmony, an economy of means, an intrinsic precision linked to the movement and its strength or serenity... All these words are just as many pitfalls that mark out my path. To say it brutally, I want no harmony, no precise movements or serenity. Ultimately, if these sensations are here, and I can recognise it, it is because they have been through their contrary and exact opposite.

I am not looking for anything accurate, quite the opposite.

This question matters to me. To implement movement again is clearly to be confronted to the idea that movement possesses an innocent truth as an initial virtue. I would rather stand up for the movement as a complex moment of articulation, or even an updating between what penetrates me and what I want to get rid of.

To be honest with you, I feel I have more of a connection with western baroque. A type of baroque shredded by minimalism...

On the other hand, I agree with what you say about the hierarchy. I do think that the formation of surfaces, their configurations, their distributions, is neither progressive nor linear. I hope for their layout to be both disconcerting and obvious, and that is precisely when there is a calculation, a strategy of harmonies and disharmonies.

There are moments when paintings get stuck, sometimes you have to block and saturate more to get "out" of it. During a work session, the verb "chain" came to mind, I was thinking that I should absolutely avoid the connection of two configurations and, simultaneously, I was looking at the remaining space and its risk of regularity. I was painting while repeating "don't chain, don't chain..." Conversely, with the distance left between two "formations", therefore with white in the case of these paintings, the risk of elegance must always be warded off. I have nothing against elegance, except that it only leaves me dissatisfied.

Here, we are talking about composition, and even about distribution. In my paintings, there are several systems of composition/decomposition; several modes coexist. Configuration by vicinity or by saturation and superposition.

*Yes, superposition. It refers to grids, which had a strong presence in the previous paintings. Yet, grids haven't disappeared in Monochromes. They are not present over the whole canvas, and have become more discrete, but they are still there, not least through the*

*intersection of a double vertical/horizontal movement, which is a sort of initial, basic, archaic painting gesture, as taught in the building trade... At the same time, it makes the reading of the plane more complex, by bringing the frontality while digging the surface of the painting. Maybe that's what we call depth?*

The movement you refer to re-situates. Vertical/horizontal, it is the abscissa and the ordinate, thereby functioning like the memory or the initial signal of a possible depth of the plane surface.

*When reading about your work, we can see that is about monochromes. However, it feels a bit reductive and not quite accurate. In reality, it is about colour, one single but modulated colour, with juices of varying lightness, transparency effects and coverings. Can you tell us about colour? The choice of colours. And also, the question of monochrome, of this choice of one single colour for each composition.*

Yes, this term is reductive and even inaccurate, but I continue to use it. It is all the more erroneous that in my view, a certain history of monochrome goes against a depth seen as a decoy to, conversely, plot with the sublime. Yet my paintings don't distrust sham, they welcome it with benevolence. So, I keep this term because I am interested in this tension.

I choose one colour so I can think about the other colours without being able to make them. It is the old tale of constraint that allows something to be forced. I first chose the most saturated colours, which allowed a variation, almost going towards black for some of them.

Once again, in my case, keeping only one colour forced me to work on its saturation or its de-saturation.

I go towards the painting with only one possibility. I'm not far from thinking that these paintings are the projects of other paintings, they present themselves as the radiography of a painting, where only a wave, a frequency, is received. These colours are oils for several reasons: they are the most pigmented that can be found on the market, so they are almost

without a load apart from the oil, and then I use this technique for its working time which is very dilated. The first steps are quick, performed flat in order to avoid frontal composition. The second step is a lot longer in order to discern what is forming a set. The drying time of oil allows this distortion, this slowing of time.

*And also, these colours alone are articulated with others in the hanging process (not to mention the formats or materials – the canvas, the paper). The composition is also carried out at the scale of the place, on the wall, by juxtaposing a painting beside another, and then this wall faces that one...*

Yes, the exhibitions ask the question of colour again.

In the end, we come back to it. I conceive these paintings as being autonomous, then the exhibition poses the question of their vicinity. I resolve these cohabitations empirically. I allow myself numerous situations: quinacridone pink next to moss green, cyanine blue with auburn.

I don't hold back, I also use two shades of blue, a turquoise that finishes on cerulean blue. They are clashing shades. In their spacing also, either isolated or in close proximity.

I love painting because it shifts; I have no respect for the permanency of the position of a painting; a painting is meant to be shifted, moved, hung and even stolen.

An exhibition is a moment of gathering of these solitudes (us included), so the gathering builds something else, it builds another scene.

There is, in this nomadic, travelling position irreducible to the context, what makes its value. That I respect. Its lightness is the only thing that counts and costs...

I have to tell you that a conversation on the colour of a sofa and the colour of one of my paintings doesn't offend me, I look at how the painting will manage. It is on its own and I watch out for the moment when the painting will have the last word anyway. If it doesn't work, it's not the sofa's fault, it's the painting's fault. At first glance, there is an unresolved

question in the space of the painting; the sofa doesn't ask questions therefore it is negligible.

On the question of space, I actually think that I look at the paintings as they are being created, from above, because they lie flat. So, it is about distribution; there is a territorial as well as an image aspect in their composition.

*The question of space has a strong presence in your painting, within each painting, but also in the space of its exhibition... A question that is also resolved at the time of hanging.*

The exhibition, the moment of hanging is a new moment of vicinity. I think that I care about the interval, because within that interval there is also what hangs them to one another. That interval is, of course, "empty", as it is the walls, but is hard not to imagine the movements that would come out of the paintings; their possible extensions.

For the work we did together in Kerguéhennec, my initial project turned out to be obsolete and you do remember the way we gradually started the hanging again. Why obsolete? Probably because the lights in the rooms, each one different, was requiring new work. The planned face-to-face installations were no longer working.

Then, the aim of that exhibition was to show, through the monochromes, work that spanned over five years. I cared about that temporality in the sense that it was already about showing a story, and therefore, inevitably, comparing moments. Yet, what really touches me in the exhibition is that these moments become dilations, respirations, just like the paintings. In the work process, there came a moment of congestion and a moment of dilation, I could say a baroque moment and a more primitive, monobloc moment that culminates with the small formats.

Practically every room (except the last one) gathers paintings from 2008 facing recent paintings. What I find surprising is that the superposition and fragmentation movement, within the paintings, can be found again in these vicinities. I find beautiful the fact that the linearity of time escapes, cancels itself and

becomes an artistic unit. What disconcerts me, in the best sense of the term, is that this phenomenon of time cancellation is, in my opinion, one of the interests of the painting, and therefore finding it in a hanging moves me.

Finally, during the hanging, we talked a lot about colour but also about disharmony and harmony relating to colour; disharmony being as much a solution as harmony, and we are then faced with questions of coexistence. Yet, in colour, coexistence is riddled with common-places and preconceptions. If painting allows the treatment of forms of coexistence, then I think it's a good thing, especially when it goes through phases of disharmony, hazardous proximities, semi-tones.

*"Brûler sa maison" (burning your own house) is the title you chose for the Kerguéhennec exhibition. Can you tell us more?*

My paintings have no names so I give names to exhibitions. For *Brûler sa maison* it was very simple. I was transforming a workshop and I thought my space was really cluttered by older paintings because I had no storage. So, I destroyed paintings. Quite a lot of them. On that occasion, I understood the value of the uniqueness of a piece as opposed to media that can be reproduced: when a painting or a sculpture is destroyed, it really is destroyed. So, there is something irreversible, with no way back, it's over, as they would say.

And so, I felt I was standing in front of something I was attached to and that I was destroying, with all the ambiguity of the word "attached". It had a liberating effect.

Since I don't have a house, maybe these paintings acted as such, which is when the image of the house came to me. If I'm honest, another image came to me, which was that of a pirate book from when I was a child. The leader of the pirates (I think it was Red Rackham) destroyed his own ship, which was actually a small boat, in order to force himself to attack Spanish galleons. I thought it was incredibly efficient and a very good idea.

The funniest thing was the face his companions were making, they were rather

brave guys who were wondering whether their pal was going a bit too far when he sunk their own ship.

Ok, I wasn't overconfident, just like the pals of the pirate leader, so I kept the best ones.

Lastly, I think that this title also resonates in the paintings. Whether you want it or not, for an artist, an exhibition is also a moment, a sequence of life; I think the next one will be about building a bridge...