

Grands Formats: beaume d'éthère

AN INTERVIEW WITH NATHALIE REGARD BY PIERRE DURIEU

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The exhibition "Cher Peintre" (« Dear Painter ») that took place at the Centre Georges Pompidou as well as the exhibition "Urgent Painting" that was held at the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, were, each in its own way, an attempt for restoring to favor or revaluing today's pictorial practice : one, under Francis Picabia's protection, the other one, through the concept of the urgency to show international reactivity against the new media's omnipresence in the field of creation. And yet, I, on the contrary, feel that both exhibitions, beyond the intentions they display, are ratifying a kind of loss of interest in painting, a way of keeping the medium in a ghetto. How do you place yourself in relation to this debate and these approaches concerning painting's status today?

As Claude Lévêque says: "you're all going to die". Life is short and original minds build up through facing constraint. I am convinced that inventiveness is here and now, at the heart of creation itself. A specific medium can't alone express this creation and circumvent it. This would be a pretty superficial vision of progress! Yet, fashion phenomena do exist, who would deny that. It is true that to be a painter today may consist in being the embodiment of a form of resistance against contemporary art's establishment but I can't see why it should be necessary to be in favor or against painting. Things should be considered differently. To me, to talk about "the death of painting" is inconsistent. Daily news impose a continuous flood of overwhelming pictures on us, and this will get worse. On the other hand, painting knows how to impose a quality of silence that is constituent of its essence. What is interesting in painting today is an original attempt to get a grasp of everyday life which keeps crumbling. The painter has both the tools and the necessary

abilities to produce, even in despair, a useful work which can't come down to a chair, a table or any kind of object, but to something that is intelligible. With a vague hope of reaching something right and meaningful. Painting is a new language that permanently needs to be reinvented. Its predicted death is really a way of reinforcing its rebirth. This new start is the answer. In this dialectics between painting's birth and death lies its advent, its roaming and also its future.

Would you define yourself as a realist painter?

Yes and no, for it all depends on what you mean by realist. My paintings often are empty of characters, and it's when I'm lonely that I really feel myself at the heart of my painting. And I like to work in this profound solitude from which I communicate, though. What my work expresses is a form of realism of human solitude, an ode to the industrial world, and at the same time, a denouncement of social myths such as isolation for a social well-being that doesn't exist... One may also find in it the image of the light at the far end of the corridor, the archetype of death, which one has never lived. I pay much attention to the emergence of what is logical. A real, human event, that comes within its own temporality, interests me when it is topical and subversive while having something that refers to timelessness. My strategy of different shots, cuts, reconstitutions, is fundamentally baroque. There's no doubt that the anxiety that rises from these empty spaces, mixing what's real and what comes from hallucination, is connected to surrealism. Photography allows me to keep the illusion, without which there would be no dream... It allows the creation of another myth. Photography allows me to document an unknown reality. The transfer of a photo on the canvas, using a projector, allows me to draw the outlines, a process that I undertake with as much distance as possible, free from any conscious intention, without identifying myself to the photo. What I then draw is neither a prejudice nor a judgement. What is unintentional gets the upper hand through the brushstrokes. Actually, when I'm painting, I'm painting abstract paintings. One could say that my work is close to informal art though I'm not trying to identify myself to this movement. My pictures are blurred and yet they remain pretty precise.

What do you use as points of reference for your work : cinema, photography, urban environment, monumental architecture?

Different forms of expression interact my work. I like the idea of a pictorial form of art that cares about the impact of different disciplines just like the city stems from a complex form of interdisciplinarity. I see the pictures of foundries that I have chosen to work on as a great urbanistic metaphor with these notions of skeleton, terracing, verticality and monumentality. In this sense, I see my paintings as a stage background, film shots juxtaposed, that undifferentiated flows, such as urban space, cross over. The audience then find themselves immersed in the work and experience something private. The gigantic sizes are part of an important appeal to the eyes. The fact that the spectator is moving implies a connection with filming and gives life to the sequence of paintings displayed. Ideally, I would like to show my work in airports or railway stations, where space is vast and where passing people stroll through, with this euphoria and energy specific to that kind of place: this would be favorable to the perception of my canvasses. I believe that this idea of moving is essential. The spectator act the painting, in the literal sense. The painting takes its full meaning from the one who's watching. The impact of the photography also seems strong to me, for this form of expression, with its way of telling an event, of catching an atmosphere, constitute the example, the drawing par excellence. The paintings' atmosphere comes through the fuzziness of the photos I take myself. One may doubt while watching my work, and the size accentuate the doubt. From a distance, one may find it as convincing as a photo, but if one gets closer , the very visible impasto destroys any illusion. The brushstrokes' materiality is there. Without ambiguity.

Your recent canvasses are drawn up like a sequence shot, work like a collage of points of view that could have been caught by cameras arranged in different angles. These sequences make an integral, dynamic whole one can't easily grasp at a single glance. Where is the "watcher" faced with this work? Are you not trying to destabilize the spectator?

These canvasses you're mentioning are imposing wholes, from 7.5 meters to more than 10 meters. I wanted to investigate space dissolution, and to make a dislocated painting up. Everything in the layout of these canvasses contributes to give a feeling of continuity. I am aware that they have an aggressive feel about them, but this strong feeling of a specific space stems from this roughness. The specific space is the result of an interaction between the representation, the document of a real space and the pictorial space. The view of the factory is fragmented via a new organization that is brighter than in reality. The photography becomes a source of identification of the painting's picture, and the pictorial material depicts the photographic picture level by level. These large paintings are meant to be active and reactive. Any notion of rest is ruled out, and I dare say that they are meant to be noisy. In an organized mess, the walls, the windows, the roofs remain identifiable. The spectator doesn't know anymore at which level of reality he/she is. The directing lines that give them their structure should arouse relevant associations while inspiring continuous doubt.

I would define myself as an intuitive artist having difficulties in her approach of the rational world. My work allows me to create my own environment. If tensions, opposites are detectable, aggressiveness is ruled out and a form of harmony and relief that is peculiar to me, reveals itself. I like to be the lonely organizer of my relation to the world, to take permanent risk, the only attitudes that allow a form of consciousness that requires surpassing the limits. At the risk of oversimplifying, I could say that my work falls within the scope of the sometimes conflictual point of articulation between the notions of reason and intuition. I don't much like the feeling of security, and I like urgency, this urgency that is imperative when painting, organizing and preparing one of my exhibitions. There is no limit between my life and my work, no border, sometimes I do things which I consider utterly irrational, but then later on, I realize that I was right to follow my intuition.

You studied at Mexico City's INBA. Do Mexican fresco and mural painters influence your work?

I can relate to Mexican mural painting on several accounts. At the technical level, the way Siquieros uses industrial materials for his painting and his frescos has inspired me in my research of silicate. This medium based on silica, which characteristic is that it is porous, gives outside paintings quite an exceptional durability and therefore particularly interests me. This technique has also been used by Orozco in a large fresco made outside the National School for Teachers. But of course, what holds my full attention is the way these artists appropriate urban space. This idea of adapting to the architectural space runs through my work, and is a recurrent, almost obsessive, concern. Of course it is no longer the political propaganda that these paintings conveyed that fascinate me, but this activism for the conquest of painting's autonomous space. Finally, I also like the collective aspect of this type of work for it allows constructive exchanges between people with different centers of interest. I find all this in a 200 square meters work I carried out in Valparaiso in 1995. "Los Banistas" was carried out outside, for a public place, a park that joins the entrance of a graveyard and a popular sea resort, Torpederas. The choice of a mural fresco was the obvious solution to create a true contact between people coming to this place, through this work, which is very much like the mural movement's concerns when it began. Moreover, to me, this work, by integrating the art into a public and popular place, was allowing me to claim a true wish to escape galleries' closed art and to mix art with daily life. It was an attempt for some "heroic" monumental art that was aiming at integrating painted bodies to the painted wall, in this case bulky women laid on the beach's sand, in an environment that immediately referred to painting, in a kind of carnal, willful, magnified redundancy.

What part does color play in your paintings?

A painter practices color on a daily, ceaseless basis. It is an endless struggle to organize the canvas's space. Without ever completely succeeding. Each experimental mixing of colors aims at a unique intention: to find the perfect color that suits what one wants to make people see on the canvas, to confirm via an ideal replica what our eyes have seen in reality. The pleasure of the one watching lies in the crack between what the painting makes one see and the reality of what one identifies as existing in the tangible world. This

approach of color is fundamental for me. In the case of my giant size project, color expresses itself via the stains, a gesture's sedimentation and run-offs that are superimposed on the projected photography. One can then only rely upon the ever-changing nature of a stain, that one can never fully grasp. Shadow and light are indissociable. I have therefore become interested to the various shades of gray, a color that gives the picture additional blur. In some paintings, there is almost no difference between the light and shade, which magnifies the picture's roughness.