



Christopher Le Brun
Landscapes

Wilfried Dickhoff

“On the Viewless Wings of Poesy”

Christopher Le Brun’s new watercolours are a beautiful surprise. Simple, complicated landscapes with unfashionable painterly quality. Far removed from spontaneity tinged with expression and postconceptual self-censorship, they give to sight a logic of sensation drawing the gaze into a poetic space.

Le Brun’s interest is in the accumulation of ideas in watercolour painting, compositions of perception and sensation which stand for themselves. Not for him, those clichés of simplic-ity, fragmentation and collages. Instead, he strives to create an image differentiated in it-self, not illustrating an idea but offering a “radiant node or cluster” (Ezra Pound) evoking associations, memories, narratives and possible meanings. Here, the beholder is neither confronted with stereotypes of disillusionment, nor with conventions of destruction. Rather than disappointing expectations, these watercolours invite the viewer to take a journey of sensation. Everything is open and welcoming, everything encourages the beholder to ap-proach. Every nuance harbours references and allusions to tales and emotions, partially familiar, partially unfamiliar. Le Brun is interested in representation in the specific sense he terms “the associative re-presentation of “reality”” (CLB). But the evocative texture of this re-representation, both materially and iconographically multi-layered, is founded in Le Brun’s painterly model - the constellation of drawing (will) and colour (magic), the ensem-ble of lines and zones, the image’s a-significant and non-representative outlines and sur-faces, which Gilles Deleuze calls *diagram*. The diagram is the consti-tutive break with every kind of figuration, and a catastrophe for every representation. However, it can self-generate figures and figuration that realise re-presentation. It can also refrain from doing so, remaining self-referential. It may also reveal innumerable other vectors capable of indi-cating an endowment of meaning (Sinn) even in the meaningless. But nothing works in painting without this self-willed syntax, the image’s a-significant body. In his watercolours, Le Brun’s distinct syntax encompasses contradictory forms. He varies figuration and non-figuration, form the non-representational object to a figure just visible in the diagram as such to an illustrative figuration, and he does this both in harsh contrasts and subtle nu-ances. In this way, abstract barricades obscure an illusion of nature or abstract towers plead for an art insisting on autonomy, or impossible architectures appear interwoven with illusions of trees. In these virtuoso formations, the diagram shines so brilliantly in the de-pic-tion that it appears to reflect itself. Here, there are traits of a meta-representation that, as in Poussin, presents itself. Le Brun is interested in symbols and, for this reason, he re-reads the traditions of Poussin, Lorrain, Böcklin, Von Marees, Watts, Turner, Guston or De Chirico. But he is not concerned with restoring illustrative inscrip-tions of meaning and sub-stantively ordering pictorial space, but with the paradoxical presumption of the “potential innocence of complicated layered composition” (CLB)

- in the full awareness of decon-struction's achievement. Le Brun's watercolours are abstract re-presentations whose virtu-oso nuanced form sounds correspondences of a *muta poesis*, a mute poesy: "Who heareth, seeth not form, but is led by its emanation" (Ezra Pound).

Le Brun's watercolours are figurative formulations of an affective intellectual landscape, lyrical images of an impossible vista whose possibilities he heard in Claud Debussy's "Pelléas et Mélisande" and Arnold Schönberg's "Gurre-Lieder". It is home to a palace of art, described by Alfred Lord Tennyson in his eponymous poem as the architecture of a self-equilibrium precariously misplaced between art and society. And this is itself not dis-similar to the enchanted castle where Cupid's love drives him to hold prisoner the un-bearably beautiful Psyche. Claude Lorrain's "Landscape with Psyche outside the Palace of Cupid (The Enchanted Castle)" is a work recounting the tragedy of every encounter be-tween love and beauty. Here, the heart of the poetic reference may echo most profoundly in John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819), an evocation of the paradoxical nature of all emotions - "on the viewless wings of poesy" (JK); this phrase, in turn, is probably drawn from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1818 lecture "On Poesy or Art" where he argues for the freedom of art in repressive times.

All of that is involved here and much more besides. In the masterly watercoloured guise of abstract symbolism, Le Brun's watercolours evoke thoughts and feelings that somehow affect all of us at some time. Le Brun pursues a dangerous thinking in sensations, follow-ing a course where false feelings, kitsch and sentimentality also beckon. He accepts that challenge, takes it on and parries it by giving to sight, in lived experience and with its am-bivalence critically dissected, the inexplicable art of (ir-)real presences. These works re-veal something still unredeemed, a primeval long-ing, "something that shines in everyone's childhood but a place no one has yet been: Heimat" (Ernst Bloch).

"The purpose of art is undefined", Paul Valéry said. If it were defined, there would certainly be many beautiful works of art in the world fulfilling that purpose, "but none that were inex-plicably beautiful, and there would be none of those images one can never explain." But they are precisely the interesting ones. And isn't this quality of non-identity essentially the interesting aspect of art? Interesting art is an immanent difference whose flesh is its spirit. Rather than expressing a certain something, it is the pressure of thought itself, physical movement of the body as conceptual sensation. It is an "intimate impression" (Jean-Luc Nancy), an animated embossing of a surface that ends with an image as fascination. But, as Maurice Blanchot says, isn't fascination, the attraction of the image as passion and suf-fering, this moment in which what one sees seizes the gaze and the gaze becomes light, the gaze of solitude? Fascination as the gaze of solitude is the interesting core looking out at us from Christopher Le Brun's watercolours.

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