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Lost in translation...  
Interview with Cécile Marie, nov.2004

*You choose among hundreds of photographs taken during your trips, those that will become the subjects of your work.*

*This image transfer between photography and painting seems to be a way for you to show an aspect of our world filled with images, but which has lost its meaning.*

*Can you tell us how important images are in your work, what binds you to photography as a painter?*

The subject is as important as the painting itself. Without it, my work wouldn't exist, and without painting the subject would only be a souvenir from my vacations, an archive.

The relationship between the photographed subject (mechanical) and the painting (hand made) creates an ambiguity. At a distance, one wonders what those awkward photographs are, but once up close, one can appreciate the paintings all the more because of the odd situation at first.

It is precisely this coming and going choreography painting has to offer to amateurs that interests me.

In a way, I am able to attract the spectator towards my paintings (he can also pass by it without seeing it).

Photography - apparently the closest and most faithful to reality - is my raw material, so why should I invent things when reality offers an incalculable amount of information, often richer than fiction.

I enjoy working on the human representation, in all its states, in detail: whether he is present or absent of the canvas... one can always feel his presence. To me, the representation of an eye or a piece of grass is equally important.

The use of photographs allows me to be closer to my emotions and perceptions as well as being an element of memory. Photography gives me the capacity to travel with hindsight and paint an instant, a journey, as if I were there.

*When speaking of your work, you often use the term "blurred"...*

*When visiting your work studio, one discovers the particular mechanical and physical relationship you have with "reproduction". You have a conventional way of working when transferring methodically every point from the picture to your canvas, and at the same time you voluntarily contribute to the confusion by saturating the colours and global vision of the image... And nonetheless the painting always takes over...*

*How is it exactly that you work?*

My technique is rather simple: among the large choice of pictures I have, I choose a few and reproduce them. The use of a "photo-realistic" or "super-realistic" (call it what you want...) approach gives me the possibility to keep the "instant" of a photography and recreate something very close to reality. Reproduction is never only mechanical. My own relationship with the mechanical aspect of reproduction adds to the general confusion between painting and photography. However, I have the capacity to bring elements that will transform my work, which machines do not have. The delicate and controlled brushstroke, the sensuality found in painting are all elements questioning the spontaneity of my photos, which are far from zealous, even amateur.

What is important to me is to be able to tell things without having to write them. My only guide is the Spirit of painting!!...

I've studied painting in all its aspects. For 15 years now I've been playing with this medium... and naturally I've ended up where I am now.

From time to time my work may not seem realistic. This is due to my particular use of colour and the blurred aspect which lets me integrate form and content... which can at times make one think of LSD experiences... The vision I offer is disturbing.

To me, details are very important because they give the possibility of changing the vision of reality. Furthermore, I often associate detail to the “out of shot” of cinematography.

*“No, not only an image, but the right image” would say Godard. Could you tell us about your way of shooting and especially about the “out of shot” subjects that you are so fond of?*

Obviously these “out of shot” subjects are completely opposite of international politics which tend to hide them and pretend they do not exist. A cocktail of capitalism and negation is most certainly the worst... the most sickening... the most appalling?

Words are not sufficient... so I chose to paint!

I am quite fond of these subjects. I would like to show their inter connection with painting exists: in my work, one does not exist without the other.

*Travelling is an artistic tool in both the way you use these images and your relationship to the Studio. Can you tell us in what way travelling is part of the foundations of your work?*

Mobility is a founding element of my work because I am suddenly forced to abandon my daily routine. It transforms my way of thinking, my logic and therefore my vision of the world.

When I am in Paris, I usually look. When I travel, I see. I try to understand, appreciate every moment that is given to me. I fully live the moments I am in, before I paint them.

When I am in Paris it is not that I don't see, but I am more concentrated on my production than discovery... I re-live my trips. That way I am able to travel through my painting, since I cannot physically be in two places at the same time. Paris is my work studio... for now. Perhaps, after travelling thoroughly I'll be able to see Paris in a new way... I already have produced a few pieces inspired from my Parisian strolling.

*Can you tell us how you manage the time you spend travelling and the time you keep for painting?*

There are two moments to my painting.

The first is when I travel. During this time I take photographs in order to have a “road book” for consultation.

Afterwards I lock myself up in my studio to paint these past moments.

When I did not paint for three months (India), two months (Bosnia), one month (Mexico), I was somewhat frustrated. It was then that I invented a “mobile painting”: watercolour on tracing paper. It requires less space, less time and less material than oil painting.

I trace reality, newspaper cuttings, stickers, any kind of pictures or texts, and then paint them.

It's another kind of road book. One that shows the country's news.

When I paint on tracing paper, the image is out of context and loses its meaning. It is precisely this “out of context” situation that interests me for my mobile painting. This re-appropriation of images may induce a misinterpretation or a new interpretation. My approach is not so far from the way our society uses images and places them on a same level of importance: soccer and international conflicts for example.

My tracing paper paintings represent images that have been stolen and then reproduced. On the other hand, my oil paintings represent moments that have been lived and then reproduced. They are complementary.

*Last refuge of a manual activity, what does painting represent for you today? How do you place yourself as a subject within society?*

Nowadays, to choose painting in an art school can be considered as untrendy or rebellious, but I think it all depends on the point of view... I chose “photo realistic” painting as I finished school.

I stopped conceptualizing painting and started to paint. That way I freed myself from all constraints.

What I like is the gap between a somewhat conventional technique and society’s “out of shot” subjects.

I like beings, little things that remain unnoticed, may they be children, women, men, objects, architecture; I paint them with the same attention.

I am also fond of plants capable of growing in any environment, like in Bosnia, in the middle of the ruins some trees had grown back in a time which seemed very short to someone from elsewhere in Europe, but rather long for those who had endured the war... as if mother nature were the strongest after all...

I have very radical political beliefs, but when it comes to painting, I have a more poetic interpretation of things. I do not want to be imprisoned in any movement. I really like the idea of autonomy...

*Your work is very related to the Temporary Zone of Autonomy. Could you tell us what this represents for you, more specifically space related?*

The temporary zones of autonomy are the last bastions, which are not under State control. It is specifically this resistance – even temporary – which interests me. However, the State’s breaking up and perversion of their larger movements is diminishing their number.

Free spaces are becoming rare. In public spaces they are almost gone. That is why I try to recreate some of them in my paintings. It is a way for me to escape from control, and not only temporarily...

*Your painting is without compromise. What importance does narration have and what political dimension does the image have?*

My paintings are primarily zooms of the world as I see it. There is a certain ambiguity about the truthfulness of my subjects and it is emphasized by placing sequences of paintings from different sources. Furthermore, when subjects originating from the Czech Republic, Mexico, Bosnia, Spain and India are then reproduced on canvas, all space-time marks are lost and are replaced by geographical emotions.

Each painting has its specific borders, but is in constant evolution considering its mode of representation and relationship to others.

I always produce series in order to create a fictitious political/poetic narration. Inspired from photographs, all of my paintings are experienced before being painted, are enriched with history before being perfected. That is why the hanging is essential. Placing a particular painting next to one or another can change and create different meanings. What I absolutely refuse is to impose a unique level of interpretation. All must stay open.

I show what I have; people see what they want to see...