

Receipt / Might as well say anytime

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It's pitch dark. Or almost.

It's too much, too many colours, too much noise, too much movement, too much speed, almost chaos. Everywhere shapes are excited, intensities plough.

One seeks for an entrance, somewhere to land, so as to get a point of view.

There is none.

Sure, here starts the wick of a perspective, but one is immediately dislodged from it, there baits the drawing of a face, it turns into a liquid stain, one captures a figure or a scene, they move on to something else.

All is always interrupted, and perhaps what we discern is precisely this rocking moment, that of an event that we don't know what it is.

Perhaps the painting gathers its characters together, without putting them in relation to each other and into a narrative.

Of equal sizes, its figures have a local, absolute scale that applies only to them. Deprived of relative dimension, of perspective input, they never enter into connivance, but rub elbows with each other or impassively truncate themselves. Each one has its own colour, its tone, its rhythm, its treatment, its own history, its concerns. Within a same excessive, outrageous regime, everything is placed under the sign of separation and indifference.

Far from playing on the closeness and distance of the eye that contemplates it, on sensuality or secret geology, this painting, on the contrary, exposes itself entirely, shows off, but in competition.

Conflict is carried everywhere. It doesn't organize, it proliferates: one figure always moves forwards to the detriment of another, it allergizes the one with whom it spawns, stops it and makes it fall into indistinction. However virulent this conflict may be, one could almost say that it is without fervour and fever.

The picture grazes chaos but does not fall into it. It establishes it, measures itself against it, tries to administer it.

To do so, it proceeds like a trap: scattered on the canvas, the colour operates as a strange attractor that magnetizes up and down, the near and the afar.

The same colour plays on antagonistic planes and blurs them. But the alliance that they all form - let's say the primaries and, if need be, the complementary tones - casts a net and closes the trap.

If the painting is obviously not a window, it is not an extract either, it instructs by the frame and rests on it.

What cannot be seen can be quantified, each figure can be sampled with its plan, its scale, its colour, its graphic treatment. That there is a lot of material, that a tube has been pressed directly onto the canvas, this material thickness does not, however, cause sedimentation of pictorial strata, a superimposition of motifs, but the deposit of a phantasmagoria between wall and light : a bellyflop flat.

Subtracted from the original viscosity, each figure is sharp, without thickness.

It freezes, calling forth others that had not yet been discerned and which in turn become luminous.

The initial glow was a darkness where spectra now lighten, reach their place and deliver their coordinates. If the aplomb remains, if they still hold, they are often incomplete. This is how they are concerned by what is happening. Perhaps it could have been otherwise, but in the trials of painting, their outline was shortened and their line interrupted.

What we see, what literally takes place, what is not only possible but real, is what is left of it.

A remnant is also what the painting is when the entire surface has been charged, when the figure fences up and then vibrates, motionless, in its own tone.

Quotes proliferate. They do not all obey the same regime: some are sources, some named from-off - Piero's Dream of Constantine, the Hamelin Pied Piper or the Little Hunchback from the German nursery rhyme passed by Kafka & threaded by Benjamin - others fly back and retrace themselves with the obstinacy of a fact that cannot fail to be seen again and again: Mondrian, Guernica's lightbulb, Giacometti's staring head, the Venus de Milo and a hundred others. Reported on the canvas, deported, they are never extracts or some montage of references, but rather a recapitulation of the painting, in its history, of the only thing that remains and holds, namely the work.

Everything is contemporary through emotion, but we won't say a word about it. Everything rubs shoulders along a constant availability to what comes, an efficiency, a game, some strange courtesy that reflects the unheard-of. ... then pins Caesar with a spiral of liquorice.

Encryption is not deciphering, everything has always been there, caught in an interference between two lines of resonance: the constant shift that we see and feel, the pictorial gesture instruments, and the painting itself - namely the vibration that these instruments accomplish on the pictorial matter.

Considered apart from the offset and the instrumental transformation, the first line of resonance is meaningless, without interest, it disintegrates into a cultural quizz, sticks to taxonomy, to the play of lineages - in short, where the painting explains and absents itself.

But Groom is a painter, that is to say that he is an instrumentalist that operates as a strategist. Seizing the image in its midst and modifying the bet, opposing the mechanical gaze, thwarting it: that's what painters do. He makes it his method, escapes the middle - the context, the centre - where habit nests the meaning, contracts the whole and pours the evidence into the case.

Skulls, skeletons, humans and human Döppelgangers that are both familiar and repulsive animals - rats, pigs, invertebrates -, inscriptions, circles of wheel, of horn, the seal or the halo or the front sun - and their rays - form the background of Orsten Groom's graphic repertoire. A macabre vocabulary therefore, that mixes fatality with satire, like the eponymous dances of the Middle Ages - of all carnival. Satira is a variant of *Satura* (mixture) (and is influenced by *Satyra* (satyr)).

Doubling, playing, laughing at what haunts, is also naming violence, abjection and insanity as a stunned witness.

Obsessively, Orsten Groom investigates the fascisms, totalitarianisms and collaborations of the European 20th century, in Yiddishkeit, traveling through Poland, the East, the Slavic world - accumulates the stories of History.

It is no longer simply a heritage, a biographical datum, a familiarity - one could show some reluctance to look for an explanation and the origin of a work - it has become a territory. It is still possible to take up the precision that Piotr Rawicz brings in the afterword to *Blood from the sky*:

«This book is not a historical document.

If the notion of chance, (like most notions) did not seem absurd to the author, he would say that any reference to a particular era, territory or ethnic group is fortuitous.

The events recounted could arise anywhere and at any time in the soul of any man, planet, mineral... »

In this cursed kingdom, human or animal, it doesn't matter, Rat = Rat, the metaphor is folded back onto literality, the subject refracts, becomes impersonal, and at the same time assumes and defers to the facts. Constantly Orsten Groom takes the word - or takes the image as one takes the word, literally -, doubles the painting process of its procedural degradation.

The tautology, the rhetorical processes, the various associations, the good faith as well as the bad one, even the kinky schoolhouse jokes, everything is useful when it comes to lifting and bringing figures.

Dirtying, slandering, diminishing, afflicting become pictorial operations.

Far from being enterprises of a bad giggle, they are, on the contrary, the enterprises of an ethical laugh.

In the same way that chaos had to be circumscribed and meshed to make the figure purge back, what tightens with its shoelace the very opportunism of the procedure, might well be probity.

1. Synoptic Night

There is the glow and then there is the night.

The rutilance is the confused clarity of an exuberant palus, where one perceives above all else the multiplicity of excitations, the dissimilarity coupled with speed.

A power-up.

It is before spotting anything, when the unseen ensemble is like an unwatchable whole, a flap of totality where nothing is discerned and which exceeds the very possibility of its order.

Has this happened, or is it because the gaze begins as expelled into the fragmentary?

We enter anywhere in the painting, we go through it, discovering one figure and then another.

Before, we couldn't see it. It was not secret, however, nothing hidden, but each one makes the other capable of impotence, they are all equally incapable of self.

The gaze passes from one to the other in attraction, called by the same colour or the chord it forms with its complement, by a contiguity, an incongruity or perhaps chance.

At the same time it is always dislodged, forced to move, to record what was already there, just as exposed, but which it did not see.

The tension of continuity and disparity, which never fails, highlights a paradoxical mode of continuity that involves division, hiatus, and spasm.

The permanent is also brought to subsist.

From grip to grip the screen can expand.

When everything has been distinguished, when what has been sampled has been memorized, one realizes that the initial glow is a darkness, and the viscosity the dish of a phantasmagoria.

Seized in the flash of a synoptic vision, the figures have the sharpness of spectra.

They have now delivered their coordinates, the canvas is as if mapped.

The speed of the swamp has distributed itself in the delineations of the sieve and has contracted in the vibration of the figures that populate and vertebrate it.

2. The Zero-Sum Rule

The painting is a machine for dividing space, creating events of light and producing a zero sum: it poses divisions and contradictions, exacerbates them and denies them a driving force.

The figures stand side by side, impassive.

If one passes in front by the line, it roams behind by the light.

Of equivalent dimensions or occupation, they are not put into perspective, are not situated in an oriented space. Each one raises a plane - translucent, longitudinal, without any coordinate in the axis of depth.

Having a background, a horizon is not their business.

They are concerned only with themselves.

The stain also works in an ambivalent way, participating in the drawing of the figure and leaving it as a flatness.

The colours are worth for their comparable chromatic intensity, not for their own tonality.

The light, monochromatic, passes from one colour to another, reddens or turns green, without any red or green weather

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Their distribution works like a trap:

the same colour scattered on the canvas attracts antagonistic planes and blurs them.

The passage from one to the other casts a net and shuts the mesh.

As for the black and white, it seems to take the scene in charge, playing at the same time the fixed frame and the axis of an annulled depth like, say, the lead of a stained glass window.

Of course, the paintings are built from dominant colours or chord, which nevertheless give them a tone like the basso continuo of a reference :

Yellow-red + Byzantine green, a pair of complements in the colour-matter system used by painters, primaries in this same system or in that of the colour-light of the screen, or the black and white of the printing press.

Orsten Groom's painting is a combinatorial system that allows proliferation without repeating a structure. What does not change are the four corners of the painting, the Quadrat (that virtual square where the Egyptian hieroglyphic character is inscribed), and the centre, the cardinal point and fifth corner of the painting (hence the spasm), the breach around which paths and symmetries are decided.

And frontality.

From painting to painting, the zero-sum rule once again informs, undertakes to reach equilibrium.

Each decision is a division that must be rectified, an error to be weighted, until the table rests, equal to itself.

3. The Knowing Body of the Painting

Each canvas is a series of pictorial convocations that rubs with everything with which a syntonic contact could have been made.

Orsten Groom gladly evokes his etymological passion and the investigation that goes into the creation of each painting.

The corpus is built up from extremely volatile metonymic relationships which, linked together in an irrational but not arbitrary way, operate as a cut through the disparate.

Diverse iconographies but also opposing registers resonate, integrating the metabolism of the painting.

The inscription of these jumps between different iconographies, languages, texts, registers, produces a shaping of knowledge at the same time as a process that can be seen.

The painting is a scholarly (and knowing) sorcerer, which manifests a specific space-time: far away brought back as within reach, ready to be met, alert for presence.

It is a space of the surface of things, of the leap, of the interval, of the gap, without any anchoring, a point of view or even a passage.

Each painting is more like a courtroom than it deals with a subject: it equates a fragment or something from an immensely well-known work with an everyday object, in a way that they both exist, and it is possible to meander between them.

Thus, every figure acts with one side and reacts with another.

It appears on the canvas as torn from its context, re-connected during the investigation, then transformed by its montage according to the rule of the painting.

With Picasso, Mondrian, Kafka, others who pass by and come back on the canvases, it is perhaps something else again, like what the painting debate with, sources and mirrors that surround its reason, its issues, and allow to establish a back and forth of the commentary.

4. Mundus

Divisions, contradictions, overkill allow the possible union of haunting and play, caricatured distortion and rigidity, stain and maze.

Grotesque figures mix with skeletons, tortures, oboes and trumpets.

Human history in all its nightmarish aspects is exposed to facetiousness.

But it is a paradoxical transparency that makes it possible to read the signs of impenetrability. The Etruscan rite sets up a *Mundus*, a circular foundation pit dedicated to the Manes (the souls of the dead), the mouth of hell that establishes a link between the surface and the underground world.

Are the figures poured into the painting as memorial traces, taken from the event, drained into the present, as the remains of what has been shattered?

Caught in a fabric of extended relationships, they are often incomplete.

The ordeal of painting works and oppresses them, shortens their outline, encloses them in a promiscuity where they are foreign powers to each other, while they manifest a solidarity with the nowhere they spawn in.

This is how they are concerned by what is happening.

Without the suffering the world inflicts them, they would not express themselves.

Neither do they make the world speak, it is the world that never stops pouring out, representing itself, manifesting itself to the point of saturation.

The power to affect, if it is local - in the sense that it is not global - remains non-localizable and diffuse. It is not exercised on individuals.

Affliction is not a state of mind, it is a relationship, both burning and icy, which produces fact (i.e. absurdity), the consequence of a decision.

That is to say the decision has no foundation, but only effects,
- of which the gesture of painting here achieves the equidistance.