

Jean Portante

Who lets the hand know when the eye, the soul and the body are waiting in front of a blank surface? Or perhaps it would be better to call it the 'volume'? That the moment for the first gesture has arrived? That to keep waiting will deaden any spontaneity, just as going in too soon will not leave enough time to gather one's thoughts. That it's now or never?

The life of the painting, for Marek Szczęsny, begins there, a bit before the actual start, halfway between origin and destination, when in one spark, the whole universe brings together its stories. For, whether canvas or paper, it is a blank part of the universe, which will go and seek refuge under colour and form. To say to the eye that takes in the geography of the visible surface, that it is not an ambush but a trap, that leads, as it does in the novels of Henry James, to the subterranean levels of creativity, there where fiction and reality are only a blur, there where everything is chaos, waiting for the artist to fit it together, concoct it, give it drama through personal experience of north and south, darkness and light, form and colour.

Is that first gesture the last one, or will it go and bury itself under the second, forever tempted to return to the surface yet participating in the density, the depth, the web. And the second gesture, is that not the first of many interventions to come, governed by the same expectation of this indomitable spontaneity, the painting or drawing gaining in drama, layer by layer, as if that first act had to be hidden away, under a movement of colour, a piece of blank paper, wood or sheet metal. A fugue, to use musical terminology. A melody running over the surface of the work, then a second coming in, blending with the first, disappearing under it, coming up to breathe, waiting for a third, both visible and hidden, all of it layering when suddenly a fourth layer comes in and confuses the issue in an unending polyphony, where beginning and end are assumed, then subsumed, then rubbed out by one another.

And it is out of this obliteration that colour and form are born. Or rather out of a pretend obliteration, an obliteration that doesn't obliterate anything, which hides things in order to reveal them, forever remembering that the hand has already travelled that way, that every passage of paint has memory, that colour and form remember. On the other side of the surface, the universe swells. The thick texture like modelling clay under the colours, is like a doorway with a crowd of memories behind it, jostling with impatience, ready to return, in vain, breaking in and through towards the light. In vain, because when the work is finished the painting itself is only just beginning. Or, to return to the fugue, where a melody buried deep in the labyrinth of the painting may well disappear, at least in that painting, to reappear elsewhere, much later, as if a tunnel linked the works of this artist, in another drawing or another painting, as if it had been sleeping during the whole interval that separated the making of one work from the making of another, as if the space and time that elapsed between works form a kind of repository for memories. As if, in that space in-between, all the forgotten gestures were silently watching, piled up, interlaced, stuck in the void, like a permanent sense of anguish.

Is it not from this store cupboard then, inscribed in personal paint, that is born, as Pessoa would say it, that unsettling feeling, which, at every turn, challenges the artist, commanding

him to stop and continue at the same time, to stop here and continue there, to stop there because over here nothing is finished yet? Everything returns to that interminably re-beginnable fact. The thread? the melody? which seemed to be lost, reappears when one least expects it. Ultimately, it's almost as if Marek Szczęśny has only made one work, inexhaustibly open, that the completion of a painting or a drawing is just a pause, a moment to get one's breath back. Just as it is also a pause or a moment to catch one's breath, in the brief or not so brief interruption of one intervention on another, within the same composition. Every piece of work then becomes the totality of all the work. And conversely, that sum of all the compositions is detectable in each one, taken individually.

A limitless space opens itself up from there, into which slip doubts, those doubts called into being by life and also those that the work summons up. Is that perhaps why certain parts of the canvases and papers sometimes don't want to show themselves, preferring to sleep, like the 'inside of the soul', under the bits of wood or sheet metal, when it is not simply the feather weight of paper or even the transparency of plastic? Desire torments the eye of the viewer, it wants to lift up these hidden parts, open the traps, but holds back, because it knows that without this disguise the work would destroy itself. The eye, suddenly, is Orpheus who, returning from the underworld, knowing that Eurydice is behind him dares not turn around for fear of wiping her out.
