

PAINTING UNDER THE SKIN / THE SKIN IN PAINTING

Cinematographic imagery which takes advantage of its framing plays a big role in the way that Charlotte Beaudry works on her canvases; her motifs and her initial lines are first fixed by means of the projection of photographic transparencies. Rather, it is this reflection on the field and outside the field of the image that is at the heart of the dialogue that her painting conducts with the history of art. Beginning with modernity of which a typical feature after realistic painters like Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, is - need one recall it - to have made use of a photographie close-up and to have isolated the subject on a monochrome background...

The isolation of the motif practised by Charlotte Beaudry allows the eye to focus on the craftsmanship of the picture and to notably enjoy the treatment of surfaces, and in particular, the skins, which, in her work, almost function as a pictorial metaphor. Taking inspiration from Joris-Karl Huysmans and his remarks concerning the famous altarpiece of Issenheim, which shows skins ravaged by St Anthony's fire, one might say that her painting often takes on an epidermal or even symptomatic value in a frankly dermatological sense, where the canvas, like the skin of some hysterics, becomes a locus of expression beyond the word; the screen on which rise to the surface mute signs of an expression which would otherwise remain buried. When it is not covered by clothes or hair, the skin functions as a recording surface where the symptoms, if not of illness or morbidity at least of a repressed energy, are contained or on the point of being released. This is the case with an extraordinary "head", painted in reddish, or rather glowing tones betraying on the face a cry on the point of bursting out, or, on the contrary, the silence that has followed it and is in process of fading from red to white passing through pink, the colour of the symptom that had announced it.

Finally Charlotte Beaudry's general iconography confirms this impression of work dealing with a certain disquiet or malaise and its various manifestations. If we quickly leaf through the catalogue of the objects painted, we note that it is frequently deserted places, lost objects, people who are masked or who have even disappeared that she has chosen to represent, which indicates a rather hard relationship to the world where silence and solitude bear down with their whole weight, where undischarged violence shows through only superficially. It is thus rather a tension also in the sense of suspense that is the vehicle for an iconography made up especially of objects that are fastened or "buckled" (belts, padlocks, helmets, masks, etc) or of characters subject to or submitting themselves to games of tension and prohibition.

But what's best is that Charlotte Beaudry's painting, at the same time as it tells us through the image what it is doing, that is putting the figures under physical and psychological pressure, achieves what it tells us by means that are her own, which for her are the stretching of the colour and the confinement (or partitioning) of the lines. The most striking example of this dialectical coherence is the large portrait of a girl with a hidden face who is stretching her pullover to the point at which it covers almost the whole surface of the canvas. As we see, this brief description of the picture is enough to understand the equivalence which is cleverly established between the subject and the painting, between the "painted" subject and the "painting" subject, between "pullover" and "ail over", the stretching of the colour or of the canvas, standing for the stretching of the garment or the skin. All of this allows us to express the hypothesis that Charlotte Beaudry's painting is, after all, a figurative metaphor for the act of painting itself.

Denis Gielen, august 2006 (extract).

Text published in "Pushing the Canvas" exhibition catalog (curated by Koen Leemans), Cultuurcentrum, Mechelen. © Denis Gielen.
ISBN 9789077193167

About the author :

Denis Gielen is a critic, writer and curator at Mac's (Contemporary Art Museum), Grand Hornu (B).

More about Charlotte Beaudry : <http://www.charlottebeaudry.net/>