Painting again

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RÉFÉRENCE

Lelong, Guy. *Daniel Buren*, Paris : Flammarion, 2001, (La Création contemporaine)

Wat, Pierre. *Pierre Buraglio*, Paris : Flammarion, Le Centre national des arts plastiques, 2001, (La Création contemporaine)

Peinture pratique théorique. Bruxelles : La Part de l'œil, 2001, (La Part de l'œil, 17-18)

- 1 The intent of the thick issue *Peinture pratique théorique* is praiseworthy. It involves prompting a “conversation” about the painting medium and its hold “within modernism”, once reputedly predominant but subsequently waning. The range of contributions discourages *a priori* any attempt to standardize a set of hypotheses that are as serried as they are complex, and defines any temptation to wax conclusive.
- 2 Philip Armstrong’s essay, which introduces the volume, broaches the issue of knowing “what happens in *painting* after Minimalism”, so between the 1960s and 1970s. Based on an observation made by Rosalind Krauss, whereby “aporia” is a “model” in LeWitt’s work, the author, who is keen to challenge so-called “serial” practices, embarks upon a lengthy commentary on the work and thought of Christian Bonnefoi. Backed up by Kant, Andrew Ryman comments in relation to Ryman on the “attempt, by painting *per se*, to explore his own connection with sculpture”. A slightly sarcastic article by Yve-Alain Bois shows that Twombly’s work opens onto “a parataxic world” (oddly, *Untitled*, 1961, with its “collection of details which must be savoured one by one”). There are then two sizeable sections devoted to Pollock and Richter. T.J.Clark’s study (“Le petit chez Pollock”/“Smallness in Pollock”, dealing with the work’s impact through the variety of formats, is convincing; likewise, the stress that Briony Fer lays on the importance of “anomaly” which forms the mysterious *Out of the Web*, a drip painting which Pollock first cut out then scratched down to the actual texture of the fibreboard: a flop for some, a “rip” that literally “shakes” the

onlooker's visual field for others. Faithful to his defence of Greenberg's writings on Pollock, Michael Fried asserts that the essential factor with this painter lies in his "determination to achieve pictorial *intensity*, come what may."

- 3 Among the various writings coming before the Richter section, let us mention Jean-Luc Nancy's pertinent reflection on "the image" perceived as something that is separate from all marks: "The image must touch the invisible presence of the distinct, and the distinctness of its presence." The articles on Richter's work don't shed any new light in terms of its emergence in the 1970s, even if Michael Newman's piece does present a fair treatment of the painter's relationship to photography. Richter's own notes, to which Newman makes plentiful reference, are, it is true, dazzlingly clear ("How could the colour on the canvas be blurred?").
- 4 After many an anecdote explaining how and why Giacometti did his utmost to refute Bourdelle's teaching, an essay brimming with platitudes makes short work of the matter of composition (or of the "effects of non-composition") in the praxis of artists in the very early 1970s. The issue ends with some quite odd considerations put forward by the philosopher François Wahl. It's a pity that the initially intended "conversation" simply fizzles out. The two monographs devoted respectively to Daniel Buren by Guy Lelong and Pierre Buraglio by Pierre Wat are, by comparison, gems.
- 5 From the opening gambit of his essay onward, Guy Lelong puts forward a novel and stimulating analogy between the place secured by Buren in the artistic arena, and the on-going place occupied by Stéphane Mallarmé in the contemporary literary arena. The "NOTHING WILL TAKE PLACE BUT THE PLACE" of *The Throw of Dice* actually strictly applies to Buren's position in the relentless exercise of the perceptive work developed by his *in situ* works for the past 30 years. There was cause to re-situate the specific status of the 8.7 cm-wide stripes (not "objects", but an "arrangement of *properties*") and differentiate the function of this visual tool by separating it from the formidable "screen" formed, it is true, by Marcel Duchamp's readymade. Lelong pulls out the stops, painstakingly. The conception, in 1971, of the huge *Peinture/Sculpture* for the Guggenheim, and the factors that caused it to be withdrawn (the reasons behind Judd's "especially virulent" attitude) are clearly expounded. The commentary then strives to pinpoint the conditions in which the most emblematic pieces were made. The crux lies here, and the impact of Buren's approach appears within an open horizon. In discussing Mallarmé's famous poem *Salut/Salvation*, Lucette Finas observes that "instead of being itself analysed, [this text] analyses it..." This inside-out effect of reversal may be applied to ourselves, onlookers and witnesses of a work that has so far-reachingly altered our view of art and the framework in which it comes across.
- 6 Pierre Wat's piece is likewise conceived in close proximity to the meaning and range of the work in question—Pierre Buraglio's. The chapter headings attest to the stern sobriety that informs the author's intentions: "*Peindre ?/ Painting ?*", "*Relever/ Recording*", "*Recouvrir/ Covering*", "*Faire avec/ Making Do*", "*Figurer/ Depicting*". These are so many "operations in action" (to use Gilles Aillaud's term), which will stake out an itinerary in which a "logic of sensation" makes itself more felt than "chronology". The text and the interview that acts as an extension of it are written with a similar rigour, that is at once spare and generous. Pierre Wat clarifies one of the issues raised in *Peinture pratique théorique* ("How to paint in the 1960s?") and is at pains not to answer it, but rather to show how Buraglio—a painter renowned for being "brushless"—has tackled this questioning at every stage of his *œuvre*. The point of departure of the painter's approach

and the context are referred to quite straightforwardly: “Buraglio got into painting just when painting was an enclosed space”. From then on his “story [...] is one of looking for another way: neither clean slate nor perpetuation of the old.” The painter’s career (like his art, doesn’t it waver between “relief and fall”?) is described with a keen eye on accuracy and moderation. The study shows a patient determination to clarify the peculiar stance of an *œuvre* built up on a “constructive paradox which means that [the artist] cannot be assimilated to any movement, because he cannot be scaled down to anything that can be identified as modern postulates.” Pierre Wat relevantly notes: “If Buraglio proceeds masked, this is not in order to vanish, but to become purely pictorial: in order to do away with anything psychological, any biographical temptation, in favour of a dissemination of being in all those bits and pieces which go to make the work. So it is that he can produce works which, like the painter of the Chapel of the Rosary, “are free and leave us free”. Seen in this light, painters may lay claim to an open and joyous future for their activity.