The Age of porno-History

Eric Darragon

Translator: Charles Penwarden

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2111>

DOI: 10.4000/critiquedart.2111

ISBN: 2265-9404

ISSN: 2265-9404

Publisher

Groupeement d'intérêt scientifique (GIS) Archives de la critique d'art

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 September 2001

ISBN: 1246-8258

ISSN: 1246-8258

Electronic reference

Eric Darragon, « The Age of porno-History », *Critique d'art* [Online], 18 | Automne 2001, Online since 29 February 2012, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/2111> ; DOI : 10.4000/critiquedart.2111

This text was automatically generated on 19 April 2019.

Archives de la critique d'art

The Age of porno-History

Eric Darragon

Translation : Charles Penwarden

REFERENCES

Chastel, André. *Le Geste dans l'art*, Paris : Ed. Liana Levi, 2001, (Opinion)
Ardenne, Paul. *L'Image corps : figures de l'humain dans l'art du XXe siècle*, Paris : Ed. du Regard, 2001
Dupuis-Labbé, Dominique. *Picasso érotique*, Paris : Gallimard, 2001, (Hors série / Découverte)
Pernoud, Emmanuel. *Le Bordel en peinture : l'art contre le goût*, Paris : Adam Biro, 2001
Roger, Alain. *Nus et paysages : essai sur la fonction de l'art*, Paris : Ed. Aubier, 2001
Erotique, esthétique, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2001, (Ouverture philosophique)
Picasso érotique, Paris : Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2001
Picasso : les "347", collection Jean Planque, Paris : Somogy, 2001
Sous-titrée X : la pornographie entre image et propos, Rennes : Presses universitaires, 2001, (Métiers de l'exposition)

- 1 The discourse on the body is not exactly new, but it has gained a kind of ascendancy in matters of aesthetics, especially where university art history and criticism are concerned. Hence the visible changes in methods and formulations. After much water under the bridge, the question of art is paradoxically back *in statu nascendi*, insofar as its principle is being extended without faltering to new approaches and objects.
- 2 When he explored the idea of the "artification" of experience in 1978, Alain Roger was in phase with a process that has since come on apace. The function of art remains problematic, even with all the mass of enquiry. The socio-transcendental gaze or method can grasp only that which complies with the idea of the system. Indeed, this method soon leads to a free-for-all pornography of landscapes, nudes and concepts that take on the guise of freedom. A porno-history crystallises works and discourses.

- 3 Even if it is stretching things a bit to group analyses stemming from differing competencies under this single heading, some of the convergences are nevertheless surprising. For example, *Sous-titrée X* explores a rhetoric located between image and discourse, a relation between communication and contemplation which extends what the historian André Chastel, writing about the gesture in art, sought to identify very closely with a visual order put forward in relation to the model of the human sciences. The silence of gesture—the gesture of silence, of prayer, the body shown, with or without an index—beyond the self-assigned limit of humanism, reveals, although without saying so, and well after Manet or Redon, a silent continent with uncertain borders. The Neo-Kantian history expounded by Panofsky and others had used all its authority in the attempt to hold back its emergence. The century of the artists has done its work and, as is shown by the book *Erotique, esthétique*, a dynamic has established itself in the fields of music, art and literature. The critical apparatus is well and truly destabilised.
- 4 Proof of this comes from Emmanuel Pernoud's eloquently titled book. The subject seems to have solid historical foundations and yet it still slips and drifts. One could even say that it goes awry, to such an extent that the question only seems to be properly broached with Clement Greenberg's 1939 article "Avant-garde and Kitsch".
- 5 Things start getting more serious for Eros when pornography, in its formidable historical efficiency, insisted on an avowal. Herein lies the interest of Picabia compared to Picasso who, for his part, has a bone to pick with Titian and Manet, precisely because he knows what pornography means. Speaking of which, here it is, shown at long last to minors. No one will complain, especially given their libertarian imperatives when confronted with a moral order that, according to the organisers of this party, has a lower profile here than it does back over the Atlantic. Perhaps, in passing, our ideas on all this are just a little too comfortable. But enough joking, the subject is too serious. The excess of the painter is with us, that of *Le Désir attrapé par la queue*. About the skilfully varied presentation texts, we could say that they too give notice of a change in ways of thinking and speaking. But what, though? We all agree with jubilation—celebration, with the more or less clear-cut feeling that the pleasure of words is only the obligatory bit. If Picasso is erotic, then the fact still has to be proved. This is all the more difficult because we come up against an obviousness that is threatened by the dangers of "trivialisation". Among the most burning questions, we could mention that famous synthesis of love and art that has us talking in the same breath about a painting and a woman. Picasso gave unstintingly here, but he makes a play of it—sometimes more than others. In any case, he never plies a convention that invokes only our finest moments. Busy with art, he says as much through Eros, that invention of artists. If he dominates his century, this is also because of his capacity to defy the commonplaces of exegesis. Sort yourself out, get mixed up, try your luck. The 347 suite? Yes, the aesthetic of 1968 is, there too, inviolable, inviolate, a non-event under the very nose of the ideologues. Several channels: a redeployment of motifs (their work including Duchamp, Apollinaire and Jarry), a more structured historicity of the different moments, a more distinct evaluation of concepts and, to dazzle a bit, writing. Between the temptation to name and spell out, and that of the supposedly learned master narrative, eroticising Picasso, if that is so much as possible, would mean, as Brigitte Baer does with the sculpture, admitting the infirmity of knowledge and plumbing what can be said and what is not known. Amidst the raging of words, sensitivity becomes a science that teaches love. And then what? It all starts again as if nothing had happened. Great art leaves no scraps. It all gets eaten.

- 6 The author of *L'Image Corps* takes us on a tour of inspection of the various figures of humanity produced by art in the 20th century. The value of this project is that it opens wide the field of works and approaches without locking itself into aesthetic categories. But the recurrent idea is that the body is the real product of normative effects and that, when faced with the mass of body images our response should be to sense that our encounter is constantly failing and being postponed. "The body has yet to divulge its secret in art". This failure is apparently due to the "body in itself", as distinct from the fictive and imaginary one. Hence a conclusion that sounds like a lesson: painting should serve to "form an artistic representation of the body that, at long last, is adult". Is this really wise? And if, just to speculate, the "lucid consciousness" invoked here turned out to look like an X-rated image, what should we think then?