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- 1 Even the most absent-minded readers of *Art press* have long been acquainted with Robert Storr (born in 1949). Ever since his first article which appeared in no.77 in January 1984, about Suzanne Rothenberg, an American artist representing the new figurative tendency of the 1980s, you can regularly read his “From New York” reports.
- 2 Plurality is the keyword for describing his viewpoints as an involved onlooker of the American art scene. Far from aspiring to a single discourse, he lays claim rather to disparate positions, which may at times seem difficult to reconcile in the eyes of an observer focusing on just the appearance of aesthetic coherence.¹ Based on his inclination to be polemical, it might be tempting to suggest that he is a representative of a critical style based on the period of formalist “doctrinal bluff”,² if, that is, we have altogether escaped from it. In tangible terms, this means giving primacy to the empirical approach and the ideas of artists themselves, whence the impressive number of interviews conducted from the 1980s onward.
- 3 Since his essay *No Joy in Mudville: Greenberg’s Modernism Then and Now*,³ his target is easily identifiable: “the wizard of Oz of formalism”⁴ and his various lesser imitators subscribing to an intellectualist and monolithic discourse⁵, sterilizing, for example, the base, the obscene and the visual grotesque,⁶ using the now well-worn categories of the “carnival” (Mikhail Bakhtin) and the “formless” (Georges Bataille).
- 4 Introduced to the art world by his aunt, the collector Elisabeth Chapman *alias* Bobsy, Robert Storr became involved in it in more ways than one, because he amassed various functions, some of which required him to wear a tie, something which he so wittily objected to in one his reports:⁷ a teacher, an art critic for several American publications (including *Art in America*), as well as a curator—without any sartorial offhandedness—in MoMA’s prestigious department of paintings and sculptures from 1990 to 2002, he also directed the highly controversial 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007.⁸ And then, as he

occasionally mentions in his writings, he is also a painter, in a Minimalist vein, emotionally inherited from Robert Ryman and Piet Mondrian.

- 5 As a well-informed reader of Blaise Pascal,⁹ Robert Storr reckons that a real liking for art disregards artistic imperatives and that it is as well to always make a distinction between knowledge based on reason and knowledge based on the heart. So in an essay about Peter Saul, he is not afraid of laying himself bare to a compromising confession revealing “cracks” in his sensibility and “incoherences” in his articles of faith.¹⁰
- 6 Experienced without any metaphysical dramatization, this lucidity about aesthetic ubiquity has certainly mattered in his special vigilance as to the unexpected surprises of recent art history. The re-emergence of Louise Bourgeois’ work¹¹ favouring the rise of feminism in the 1970s, the revival of history painting with Gerhard Richter’s *Oktober 18, 1977* series,¹² and total installations producing, like those of Ilya Kabakov,¹³ a worrying disorganization of space (*Dislocations*¹⁴) certainly caught his attention as a critic and curator. His meandering line of conduct can, in a word, be summed up in the words that Bruce Naumann whispered to him one day: “Think with your senses, feel with your sense of reason”.

NOTES

1. *Interviews on Art*, London: HENI Publishing, 2017, p. 29. Ed. by Francesca Pietropaolo
2. R. Storr’s expression in “No Joy in Mudville : Greenberg’s Modernism Then and Now”, *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low*, New York : MoMA, Harry Abrams, inc., 1990, p. 161.
3. Written at the request of Kirk Varnedoe, joint curator of the exhibition *High and Low: Modern Art & Popular Culture* (New York: MoMA, 7 October 1990-5 January 1991).
4. *Ibid.*
5. The exhibition *Modern Art Despite Modernism* (New York: MoMA, 16 March-26 July 2000) proposed an anti-modernist re-reading of art from the 1920s to the 1940s.
6. *Disparities and Deformations: Our Grotesque* (Santa Fe : SITE, 5^e International Biennial, 18 July 2004-9 January 2005). About the grotesque, see also: “Le Principe de Peter”, in *Peter Saul*, Paris : Somogy ; Les Sables d’Olonne : Musée de l’Abbaye Sainte Croix, 1999, p. 18.
7. “Schadenfreude”, *Art press*, no.154, January 1991, p. 80
8. For a summary of the controversy surrounding the Africa pavilion, see the interview with Alfred Pacquement with the slightly jaded title: “Travailler avec les artistes plutôt qu’avec le monde de l’art”, *Robert Storr*, Paris : IMEC éditeur : artpress, 2017, p. 90-95, (Les Grands entretiens d’artpress)
9. See *Interviews on Art*, *Op.cit.*, p. 18-19.
10. “Le Principe de Peter”, *Ibid.*, p. 26
11. After the essay “A sketch for a portrait: Louise Bourgeois” published by Phaidon (2003), he devoted a monumental book to her work based on some 20 interviews and many meetings much helped by the fact that he spoke French: *Géométries intimes*, Paris : Hazan, 2016.
12. Storr, Robert. *Gerhard Richter Oktober 18, 1977*, New York: MoMA ; Henry N. Abrams, 2000

13. Storr, Robert. "A Table of content", in *Ilya Kabakov : peintures, 1957-2008*, Wiesbaden : Museum Wiesbaden, 2008, vol. I

14. *Dislocations* (with Ilya Kabakov, Louise Bourgeois, Sophie Calle, David Hammons, Chris Burden, Bruce Nauman, and Adrian Piper), New York: MoMA, 20 October 1991-7 January 1992