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Pierre Wat

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REFERENCES

Eric Suchère, *Gasiorowski - Peinture - Fiction*, Clermont-Ferrand : Frac Auvergne ; Montbéliard : Le 19, Centre régional d'art contemporain, 2012

Molly Warnock, *Penser la peinture : Simon Hantaï*, Paris : Gallimard, 2012, (Art et artistes)

Sanejouand : rétrospectivement..., Paris : Skira Flammarion ; Carquefou : Frac des Pays de la Loire, 2012

Déplacer Déplier Découvrir : la peinture en actes, 1960-1999 : Simon Hantaï, Martin Barré, Marc Devade, Jean Degottex, Michel Parmentier : Villeneuve d'Ascq : LaM, Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne d'art contemporain et d'art brut, 2012

EDITOR'S NOTE

Traduit du français par Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods

- 1 What is to be done with contemporary artists, as they are known, when time has passed? Do we talk in the same way today about works produced in the 1960s as we did ten years ago? What is it—what time limit that is unstated yet felt by one and all—that has us suddenly casting an eye back on a given work as if it were from now on escaping the realm of art criticism, the better to be included in that of art history? These are all issues raised, each in its own way, by certain recent works whose diversity quite well expresses the variety of looks given to this line of thinking centered around what we might call the forms of the history of contemporary art.
- 2 On the one hand, then, we have a catalogue, *Déplacer Déplier Découvrir: la peinture en actes, 1960-1999*, accompanying the LaM exhibition held at Villeneuve d'Ascq in the spring of 2012, which brought together works by Simon Hantaï, Martin Barré, Marc Devade, Jean

Degottex and Michel Parmentier. At the same time arrived a book resulting from a thesis submitted by an American academic, Molly Warnock, *Penser la peinture: Simon Hantaï*. Of quite a different ilk, thirdly, is Eric Suchère's book, *Gasiorowski - Peinture - Fiction*, whose very title expresses the whole overall ambiguity imposed upon the author in order to conceive of Gérard Gasiorowski both as a creator and as a character (a hero?) playing a part in this fiction that is painting itself. As for the monograph published to mark the year of Jean-Michel Sanejouand in Pays de la Loire, here again it is by way of the title: *Jean-Michel Sanejouand: rétrospectivement...*—and note the three dots—that the book questions the very possibility of a way of looking at things "the other way round" to understand an open-ended work, oriented towards his future output.

- 3 If the LaM catalogue is making history, it is through its decision to reshuffle the cards by bringing together, in one and the same study, five artists whom, in all probability, time alone has made it possible to unite, where, not so very long ago, it was customary to separate them. This kind of combination is not totally novel. We should recall, here, that masterful exhibition organized by Alain Cueff and Béatrice Parent at the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, in 1999, called *La Peinture après l'abstraction: 1955-1975*, where there were confrontations between M. Barré, J. Degottex and S. Hantaï (as well as Jacques Villeglé and Raymond Hains on that particular occasion). One or two genealogies had already been drawn up: either to do with descendants, as in the case of S. Hantaï and M. Parmentier, or, in the less examined case, with the relations between J. Degottex and certain members of Supports/Surfaces; or with rivalry (J. Degottex/S. Hantaï), but the teaming-up, here, through its novel nature, makes it possible (and in the end of the day this is the right definition of art history as a way of looking at art that is both retrospective and critical) to shift certain lines. Starting with those that involve classic readings which would have us analyzing the praxes of the 1960s by starting with groups (BMPT, Supports/Surfaces), which leads to an assertion of the preponderance, for the period, of the crisis of the picture, and even of painting itself, where in fact the LaM show highlights the opposite. If a bond does link these five people, it is still helpful to have thought of their praxis in an ongoing relationship with the picture as history, but also as an object, at a time that was nevertheless reputed to have been the theatre of praxes going beyond, not to say abandoning, that particular terrain. "Déplacer/displace", "déplier/ disclose", "découvrir/discover", the three verbs under whose aegis the exhibition is set express a desire to rethink that recent period of art, based on attitudes and ways of doing things, in order to come up with a new writing of the history of art from the 1960s to the end of the 20th century.
- 4 The fact that the person who comes across as one of the lynchpins around which this history has played out—I am talking about Simon Hantaï (1922-2008)—is today the subject of a thesis submitted to an American university, while at the very same moment the Musée National d'Art Moderne is getting ready to put on his first retrospective since the artist's death, and also the fact that some of his canvases are beating auction records, is no coincidence, but rather proof that our relation to the 1960s is in the process of changing, and that this vague feeling that something is now going down in history is forcing those who question the past to question it differently. The fact that this revival should come from the other side of the Atlantic is a kind of nice switching around of common practices, since those who, as Hantaï's contemporaries, were for a long time his commentators, have looked at him in the light of American abstraction in general, and Jackson Pollock in particular. Indeed, it is precisely to a departure from this frozen

narrative (S. Hantaï responding by *pliage*—"folding as method"—to J. Pollock's drip painting and influencing, through the definitive character of this gesture, both BMPT and Supports/Surfaces) that we are invited by M. Warnock, who, well aware of the bedazzling power of such a legendary discourse, tries, over and above interplays of filiation, to explain the genesis and development of the folding method which would become the constant factor in this painting from 1960 on. In the face of this outstanding oeuvre, but also in the face of this man who was, in many ways, as intimidating as his work, M. Warnock sets herself up as a historian, interweaving conversations with the artist, archival work and extremely well-developed contextual studies. Where Georges Didi-Huberman's book *L'Etoilement* (Ed. De Minuit, 1998), neatly subtitled *Conversation avec Hantaï*, wavered between testimony and encounter of two particular things—this mesh of approaches enables her to produce an analytical work and, based on the production, draw forth some of the threads with which the artist freely fuelled his work: discourse of the Surrealists on psychic automatism, emergence of gestural abstraction, dissemination of a post-Hegelian line of philosophical thought. Precisely where art criticism, very early on (in the 1970s), had a tendency to liken S. Hantaï to the avant-gardes of the following generation, M. Warnock does exactly the opposite, turning her essay into a defence of looking at things with hindsight. Forgotten is the Hantaï seen as the father of BMPT and Supports/Surfaces, in order to better grasp what he is the son of or, to put it otherwise, on what he nurtured himself to actively fashion his pictorial method, which is also nothing less than a way thinking of and about painting.

- 5 If we had to choose just one quality in this most interesting book, it is probably its capacity to think both with and against S. Hantaï, meaning in a mood of very powerful empathy with the man who fascinated anyone who met him as much by his work as by what he had to say; but also with an ability to conserve the critical distance of someone who does not want to be the mere spokesperson for one or two authorized narratives. Exemplary, in this respect, is the analysis made by M. Warnock of S. Hantaï's links with Surrealism, relations about which all those who came close to the painter in the last twenty years of his life knew how much he did not like talking. Probably the fact that the artist died four years ago is not for nothing in this wholesome undertaking of re-reading, or even making a first reading, of the best hidden folds of this oeuvre, but, over and above the case of S. Hantaï, this observation reminds us that the historian needs time, above all else: time which has passed, so that the analysis can come after statements and declarations.
- 6 With a comparison that is far more surprising than those brought about by the LaM show—and yet it too produces meanings—, it is with Eric Suchère, with regard to Gasiorowski, that we find the words which hallmark the retrospective monographic investigation as practiced by M. Warnock in respect of S. Hantaï. Let us quote E. Suchère: "The answer given by Gasiorowski to this question of how and what to paint is not a formula but a special track thanks to which he finally manages to paint. [...] Gasiorowski's answer matters because his whole career involves exacting something from the oeuvre, and not oeuvre as entertainment. This answer matters, in the end, because of its singularity—even if this singularity involves genealogical connections. The singularity consists in the fact that he invents a fiction so as to be able to paint. A fiction which—almost—encompasses the whole history of painting in order to become free of it; and the fiction enables the oeuvre to free itself from many different metamorphoses of forms, media, and means".¹ This is a programmatic text (we should bear in mind here that E. Suchère is

a poet as much as an art critic) for anyone wishing to write about art, or, perhaps we should rather say, anyone wishing to write on the basis of art. Because it is said therein that to redraw, against the grain, the itinerary of an oeuvre, it is necessary not only to unravel the maze of connections, but, because what is involved is works of art, also to think ceaselessly of the work both as making and as fiction. In two quite different ways, it is these fictions about "being able to paint" that both E. Suchère and M. Warnock deal with, and if M. Warnock's talent is that she knows how to analyze S. Hantaï with and in spite of the fictions that he has scattered before, in and around his oeuvre, Suchère's is that he follows the current of G. Gasiorowski's fictions, as if what were involved were the flow of a river, the better to give visibility to the whirlpools, oxbows, tributaries and quick sands which are, through their complex sum, the work of G. Gasiorowski.

- 7 Fragmentation, which contrasts essentially with the all-encompassing scope which floats beneath any attempt at a retrospective glance, lies at the heart of Eric Suchère's method, like that of the designers of the monograph devoted to more than fifty years of Jean-Michel Sanejouand's work. This is a prudent approach for dealing with an artist who only moves forward by way of doubt, difference and renewal. "Making disorder", says Julie Portier's essay, like a command.² In fact the whole difficulty for anyone who, instead of focusing on a moment in the oeuvre, tries, as here, to grasp it in its longer time-frame, consists in not confusing adopting a critical remove with the retrospective imposition of a form of order on what has always defied logic. "With hindsight... I probably wasn't wrong in doing exactly what I pleased", says the artist. It is perhaps through its very form that this monograph finds the right attitude which, well removed from any temptation to forge a mimetic object from what it talks about, compares two logical systems (or one logical system and its opposite) in a subtle way. So on the one hand we have two essays, by J. Portier and Anne Tronche,³ who once again take up J-M. Sanejouand's work from the 1960s to the present day and then, not on the other hand, but at the same time, running through the whole book to the point of coming across like a second argument which at times interrupts the first, the choice of about 100 works, spawning more than 150 reproductions, which, against the order of the arguments, call to mind, in quite a joyous way, the unbelievable illogical force which rules in a work which seems to poke fun at any fantasy to do with backward-looking reading. The fact that many of these images, far from being simple photographs of works, are views of these works in exhibitions, rather well describes the changeability at the heart of this praxis, where each object, improbable by nature, can become something else through new interplays of comparison.
- 8 So this book does nothing less than cock a snook at art historians, seeming to say that henceforth there is a retrospective viewpoint, there is disorder, and that the more time passes, the less one is capable of grasping what creates the oneness of what ends up by representing—or seemingly...—an ensemble. Cocking a snook, or at least a call to order, so that those who claim to be making art history their craft do not forget that the hardest thing, but also the most apt thing, is, under the pretext of hindsight and the passage of time, not to impose on unusual works an overall logic, nor eyes looking backwards on works that are forward-looking.

NOTES

1. Suchère, Eric. *Gasiorowski - Peinture - Fiction*, Clermont-Ferrand : Frac Auvergne ; Montbéliard : Le 19, Centre régional d'art contemporain, 2012, pp. 8-9
2. Portier, Julie. "Faire désordre : 'rétrospectivement'", *Sanejouand : rétrospectivement...*, Paris : Skira Flammarion ; Carquefou : Frac des Pays de la Loire, 2012, pp. 111-124
3. Tronche, Anne. "Jean-Michel Sanejouand : leçons de choses", *Sanejouand : rétrospectivement...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-192