



Sophie  
Lauwers

## Introduction

*Thing* Jorge Luis Borges

*My cane, my pocket change, this ring of keys,  
The obedient lock, the belated notes  
The few days left to me will not find time  
To read, the deck of cards, the tabletop,*

*A book, and crushed in its pages the withered  
Violet, monument to an afternoon  
Undoubtedly unforgettable, now forgotten,  
The mirror in the west where a red sunrise*

*Blazes its illusion. How many things,  
Files, doorsills, atlases, wine glasses, nails,  
Serve us like slaves who never say a word,*

*Blind and so mysteriously reserved.  
They will endure beyond our vanishing;  
And they will never know that we have gone.*

—  
Translated from the Spanish  
by Stephen Kessler

YVES ZURSTRASSEN

Standing before a work by Yves Zurstrassen transports us to a rich, symbolic world that unmasks how surprising and intriguing the art of painting can be. Zurstrassen composes his canvasses by using multiple layers, all comprising diverse characteristics. He blindfolds us to the virginal white of the canvas, while that white of the unsullied surface is kept tangible, thanks to a suggestive game of open cut-outs, of surface and depth. We feel our way to what today — in our mercilessly accelerating time, so subject to change — passes us by: our indelible bond to the process of creation that can no longer be reconstructed. The ongoing quest to discover how implicit forms relate to their concrete forms of existence: this is the field of tension that steps to the fore, together with an illuminated awakening of the canvas.

Yves Zurstrassen inspires and stimulates. His unmoving tableaux are filled with motion, repetitive and so synchronized that, as if tricking the senses, they characterize silence itself. Zurstrassen's oeuvre is a collection of series of dialogues between reproductive patterns of collages and techniques that converse with paint, or better said, challenge the art of painting. Does the one (the collage, the form, the cut-out) want to convince the other (the paint, the pigment, the pallet) that its rhetoric is the only correct one? The repetitive process of layer upon layer, of interweaving, weaving and reweaving again, is crucial to this oeuvre. Time and again, this forward-moving repetition perpetuates the power of what went before. Each work is, in a manner of speaking, connected by an umbilical cord to the work that preceded it. The consequences of every sequence are once again made concrete, an eternally recurring energy.



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Oil on canvas, 210 x 195 cm

YVES ZURSTRASSEN

Entering Yves Zurstrassen's studio is to arrive in a magical universe, where everything breathes tranquil structure. The atmosphere is as fascinating as it is compelling: the quiet before the storm. His preparatory working process is the most labour-intensive that can exist from a routine, almost obsessive succession of manoeuvres. Zurstrassen's creating technique is comprised of a series of fundamental phases and classifications. He collects, cuts up, photographs, draws and selects, after which he takes possession of all these elements and begins to compose. In this sense, the studio itself is an inherent part of the work. It is a world in which colour pigment and ingenious techniques are experienced as a well-ordered coherency: where words are colours, where music — more specifically jazz — determines the rhythm of the composition of the colour palette. It is in fact a working space where patterns are invented in order to then be embedded in a painstaking and controlled process. Yves Zurstrassen is master of his working material the way an orchestra conductor is. But in between this mastered instrumentation, the action and the final result, there rises a suspicion that, somehow, an act of madness has taken place, a moment of loss of control that has nonetheless been quickly reined in — like a counterpoint, a contrast that overlaps the preceding statement and once again, briefly, brings silence.

Vincent van Gogh wrote that his painting drove him mad, but he could not identify exactly why. Yves Klein later gave him a reply: he said that colour had to be freed from its narrowly limited lines, had to come out from behind the bars of its cage. Per Kirkeby, who was very interested in geology, which can also be seen as a succession of lines and layers which reveals a history in the same way that Zurstrassen's work does, sometimes applied palisades — again those bars — to his paintings, as a wink of the eye to the conceptual installation art that left no room for (his) painting. Yves Zurstrassen embraces that liberation. He is a bit like a gypsy who meanders through the history of art. He understands that art historical references are unavoidable, and is very aware of the associations that people encounter in his work. They are there, but this is not his real story: they are sooner intuitively associative. The wrestling match between Abstract Expressionism, geometric abstraction and Conceptual Art is unavoidable, but here, this interaction is both abstracted and made concrete. They meet one another in a single gesture.

Yves Zurstrassen's is an oeuvre of paradoxes, but strangely enough, these paradoxes become invisible when the paintings are squared up and hung on a museum wall — and this is just as the artist has in mind. Still, once you have an insight into Zurstrassen's vocabulary, you begin to construct sentences. Each geometric form has its own identity. The different forms are characters, and the templates recur endlessly, like a painter's models. Each line suggests; each form corresponds. Each colour has its form — and these are all subject to the rules, the instructions of the master who designs the circulation.

Yves Zurstrassen treasures his forms and templates. They are meticulously cut out, and the 'mould' is preserved for rebirth in new ideas to follow. For decades now, Zurstrassen has worked in this way on an oeuvre that endures endlessly as an existential statement of faith that links the past to the future, where being is a free port of call.

This is the alternative option given to us by Yves Zurstrassen: a unique approach of the atonal or polytonal contrapuntal proposition, in which he allows tones to migrate in circulating structures, a manufacturing of wandering nostalgic characters that navigate in the physiognomy of his world. It is a world of the imagination that is inspired by the desire to cut right across styles to arrive at an inner landscape of expression of form and organized chaos. It is a feast for the eye.