

## Painters' Delight

Presented today in Geneva, this painting did not emerge out of nothing. It has the profile of a fascinating trajectory outlined since the 1980s already. It also acknowledges the expressive frontality of an irrefutable fact at a given creative moment. This 'painting' consists of a set of canvases painted by Yves Zurstrassen between 2013 and 2016. A lengthy tale that is specific to him and which 'weaves together the history of painting and the history of his painting', as Anne Pontégnie put it so nicely.

A 'work' essentially in black and white here – but not exclusively – that gradually takes shape in the studio. A work that does not exhaust the works that resulted from it which is exactly what renders the painted 'thing' so particular. Resembling only itself, each painting keeps intact its capacity to embody multiple possibilities, each taking advantage of the diversity of formats (sometimes impressive).

What do we see in it? Pasted papers and cut-out motifs are combined following pictorial matter's most prosaic 'modes of existence': background painting, intermediary coverings, gestural overloads, etc. – all appearing as necessary supports for the development of the painting. Indeed, the acknowledged phenomenological effect of this interlacing leads one to think that the elaboration of each painting is not what is at stake, even if it is the tool of its emergence. In other words, the painter uses a methodological 'digging' to create the 'presence' of a surface that does not require from the viewer to differentiate between a before and a after, a front and a back, a figure and a background.

No process comes to comfort the viewer, simply facing the 'risk' of what he sees. Innate, the abstraction is nevertheless, and with each reiteration – an allusion to jazz music... and there is some Eric Dolphy in Yves Zurstrassen! – an abstraction that is experienced immediately and which we, in turn, are invited to experience.

An abstraction that is at once emotional, present, creating without any superfluous proceeding the diversity of the senses, from one painting to the next. Reifications certainly, but which nevertheless preserve the enthusiasm and the fervour of the engagement that presided over their birth. For this painting is well and truly lyrical, precisely because it does not gamble on the individual overinvestment of its author which would lead to a form of expressionism, but invests on the instauration of a reciprocity of enthusiasm with the viewer. The trace, the stain, the spatter, the weaving of a value or of several colours, the condensation of a composition or the tension of a layout are our direct interlocutors. Together frontal and undemonstrative, Zurstrassen's paintings are able to both conjure the expressive excess of the gesture, and allow itself to flirt with a decorative use of the 'motif'.

For there are indeed a free and elevated form of exultation that cannot be confused with the formal demonstration of exaltation, itself propitious for forgetfulness. In a conversation with Andrew M. Goldstein on 26 September 2017 – published in *Artspace* – on what makes painting an urgent contemporary 'medium', Hans Ulrich Obrist observes: 'It's very interesting if you think about painting as memory, because in this age where we have more and more information, having more and more information

doesn't mean that we also have more memory. Amnesia is at the core of the digital age, so I think the continuous practice of painting is also a process against forgetting. But it's not the type of static memory that very often gets corrupted, it's the opposite – it's a dynamic memory, just like how our brain isn't the only locus for memory but is part of a broader process. So I think painting is very much a protest against forgetting.' And I have no doubt that the recent production of Yves Zurstrassen belongs to the individually 'situated' answers among the most active – ultimately less numerous than one would tend to believe – to this question involving 'memory' and lived experience: *what can we do collectively with our painters?*

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