

The exhibition of École du Magasin 1990-1991

The prelude to the exhibition basically had two themes. The first was a discussion about exhibitions and artists studios that we visited as a group. It was a debate on works and artistic attitudes where different points of view met ranging from relatively objective observations to more subjective matters of taste. The second was a discussion on three main ideas: painting seen as an enlarged concept that can encompass other disciplines, the resistance-factor of an art work and, thirdly, the notion of the private and public aspects of an art work. These ideas have a rich history, the concepts of resistance and the private and public being particularly related to important moments in art history. The idea of painting as an enlarged concept, as we see it, is however more directly linked with the current attitude of the artist-painter.

The question concerning the resistance-factor of a present-day art work - resistance seen as independence within a surrounding context, and as an opposing force against the passing of time - was an important criterion for the choice of the artists in the exhibition. Not that this question is easily answered. Historical examples show that the idea of resistance is in itself very complex. Obviously one should mention in this context Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades, the Arte Povera artists, Joseph Beuys, Andy Warhol. Yet, the point is here how a younger generation conceives the question.

The notion of the private and the public aspects of an art work can be analyzed by looking at recent art history. The succession of minimal art, conceptual art and today's so-called neo-conceptualism can be written in these terms. The idea is especially important when the artist chooses a collective experience, ranging from childhood memories to banal doily events, as the point of departure for his work. In so doing, the artist avoids an explicit personal statement and proposes instead the transformation of that collective experience. In the work, a fusion of private and public aspects takes place, permitting, and this is the crucial point, a direct invitation to the spectator.

The current attitude of the artist as a painter is first of all a mental attitude that seeks to transgress the physical boundaries of painting. In the 50's, Greenberg's argument concentrated solely on the physical aspects of painting - its flatness, its twodimensionality - meaning to arrive at a pure definition. In the 80's, taking into account the arrival of the 'new painting', the discussion was completely focused on content. Today the debate has taken on a radically different point of view: this year's prize for painting at the Venice Biennial was awarded to Giovanni Anselmo, whereas the prize for sculpture was given to Bernd and Hilla Becher. This possibly indicates a desire to seek an aperture within well-established categories, and it is here that the idea of painting as a mental concept is relevant. We think that the idea of an alternative concept of painting is important when discussing the work of Perejaume, Richard Venlet, Michel Aubry and Bernard Voïta.

Perejaume, who is concerned with questions on nature and its double - meaning art once described his attitude by referring to the traveller who, in his art, shows in vain

what he has just seen and lost. There is an element of nostalgia in his work but what interests us mostly is his idea of rich and extensive landscape painting that encompasses as many disciplines as possible. In fact Perejaume employs a collage-like concept of painting in which the top of a hill, crowned with a gilt frame, can become an image that competes with the views of Caspar David Friedrich's lonely wanderer.

Richard Venlet proposes a "wall-piece" for the "rue", that transforms the interior space of the Magasin. His work nowadays takes on a direct relationship with the architecture of the spaces where he works "in situ". The elements he uses amongst others are a particular grey paint, applied as a monochrome on the wall, and objects placed within this monochrome. The objects are to be seen as paintings of compressed space, leaving openings on the sides as entries to the real space of the object. As a fundamental inquiry into the relationship between painting and space, Venlet's work carries on from constructivist and minimalist traditions, transforming these through a contemporary proposition.

Michel Aubry's work uses different media that in their measurements have an interiorized mathematical systematization, based on a musical scale from the oral tradition of the Launeddas of Sardinia. This sonorous aspect has a very discreet presence in his work, for example in his "in situ" paintings for floors. A recent work in a courtyard in Paris consisted of several beeswax strips, placed horizontally on the walls. Each strip of wax contained a hole, leading from right to left and corresponding with a certain note, to be obtained from blowing through the mouth-pieces. This however wasn't possible, giving the work an aura of longing for an absent melody. For the exhibition, Aubry proposes a work that is the follow-up of a series of works paying homage to "le salon de musique", a film by Satyajit Ray.

Bernard Voïta makes photographs of real, physical constructions in space. He uses different objects to build these constructions in his studio: chairs, lamps, live-wires, pieces of wood and other small items. When viewing his work, impressions of a strangely sophisticated perspective compete with the idea of an abstract, formal image. In its investigation of perspective, and especially in its continuous ambiguity between two and three-dimensionality, the work of Voïta focuses on a classical theme in the history of painting: art as presentation or as representation.

The work of Jarg Geismar can be described as the transformation of collective experiences, placing his work within the

idea of the private and the public. Geismar is concerned with a topic that will always remain a subject of discussion: art and life. He chooses daily life, urban streetlife as the subject matter for his work. Decorative things, a recent exhibition in Cologne, was an installation of a hundred objects, wrapped in New York Times newspapers from different years, that were spread out on the walls and floor of the space. On each object, be it an ashtray, a phone, a hand mirror or a Marilyn Monroe postcard, several orange price stickers were attached, while an endless-tape produced the sound of price labeling machine: "klack, klack, klack" Focusing on the silly bonds we have with the daily objects that surround us, the installation had a somehow sentimental undertone that at the same time was made ironic by the slightly weird idea of decoration - and, of course, by the "klack, klack, klack".

Andreas Slominski considers his works as traps, ranging from real animal traps to works based on the metaphor of the trap. The idea of an art work as a trap is directly related to reflections on the resistance of a work of art. Slominski's intensely concentrated, seemingly unapproachable objects are in fact highly resistant to an overcurious gaze. Once under the spell one can however only speculate on the question of whether one hasn't been simply caught in a trap that was set with malice intent. Slominski's attitude towards his surroundings is both serious and absurd. On one of the evening walks that we took with him in Grenoble, he swapped over two heaps of recently fallen chestnuts from two different trees, taking care that the heaps remained "identical". Child's play of course, but also a confirmation of the second law of thermodynamics. This law states that with time there is always a dimension of destruction and waste, and nothing, however well organized, escapes from this: each creation involves entropy. Slominski's work is based on the tension between systematization - the surface of his objects is highly organized - and the entropy that is involved within the system of the work.

The concepts of an alternative painting, of resistance and of the private and the public, are to be considered as questions that one can ask when discussing the work of the artists above, and not as answers that already exist in one form or another. The exhibition aims to present six artists, emphasizing six different attitudes and we hope that it will succeed in providing an open and rich idea of their work.

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