

CAMILLE LEHERPEUR

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of mediums he explores, Camille Leherpeur yields an exceptionally coherent oeuvre. It does not coalesce into a single tale revolving around his personal myth – hereby differing from many contemporary artists despite an extensive use of his own image – but rather into a multicolor web not unlike the one that adorns the fabric conjured in [his work] *The Cloth Tale* (2014). According to the text attached to the performance, it unfolds from the top of a high tower right down to the ground and the workshops that embroidered it. This work is important since it proceeds from a device the artist uses frequently : he resorts to networking his works inside installations and performances that renew their meaning and coherence. In *The Cloth Tale* he mingles ironwork, calligraphy and recitation. Setting the piece into motion will activate several elements that can also function in an independent way : a costume composed of many artefacts the artist forged with his own hands (an iron mask, a scepter and a crown), a tale recorded on an ancient vellum scroll and finally a performance that, devoid of any concept as it may be, unfolds with lyricism the simple and yet baffling metaphors of collective life and its relationship with art. The performance, a genre where Camille Leherpeur excels, allows us to discover him in his most fascinating colours ; a Harlequin who "wears the many colours of the planet" as Apollinaire put it, and who bestows upon himself the possibility of becoming its mere expression.

Another pivotal aspect of his work is his endeavour to deconstruct myths that can be found in some of his latest paintings (*Saint Denis* and *Mona Lisa*, 2015) and his videos (*Techniques de l'Amour*, 2013 or *Commune*, 2015). They often mix primitive forms (childlike figures, onomatopoeias, gesticulations) with sounds and colours compressed together. Compression loses data ; it hollows images out until their most hideous aspects get the upper hand but it also reveals convergence lines that lead to an original yearning for shape. Therefore Camille's work functions like a genuine factory of the representation of power – and the parallel is all the truer as he is very keen on the solar figures of royalty. This is where his true radicality emerges : not in the works which explore collective fantasies without any fake prudery or any consideration whatsoever for his own image – always king and jester at once – but in less impressive works such as his lithographs and paintings. The latter allow us to see with sharpness a miniature world where human power is on the brink of being swallowed up by colour. *Stable Figure in a Storm* (2015) and *The Sirens* (2015) which show Odyssean figures face to face with a centrifugal multicoloured universe count as some of his most beautiful recent artworks.

"In representation which is power, in power which is representation, reality – if by reality we mean the forever postponed accomplishment of desire – is none other than the fantastic image where power would see itself as absolute" Louis Marin wrote in *Le Portrait du Roi* in 1981. And this is how we must understand the refinement, the meticulousness Camille Leherpeur uses to create objects that he will mischievously "unbox" (*Madness Altarpiece*, 2015) ; not unlike a subtle staging of the way art plays nowadays with our desire for these objects. Fortunately, the secret concealed in the box is always a hint of a something else we can cherish and dream about : antique, never forgotten pulsions which leave us spellbound. This is how Camille Leherpeur diverges strongly from the new academicism of contemporary art which is fond of industrial duplications. And if he ever happens to play with the codes of the art market (*Cheap as*, 2015), he nevertheless never compromises for his works and their deep backdrop rather put him under the patronage of Picasso and Doré, his masters.

Angelo Careri - Décembre 2015
 Translation Sylvie Le Bour - 2016

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