

CAROLINE LE MÉHAUTÉ

in the middle, amongst, with, between, beyond, after¹

“The imagination finds more reality in what is hidden than what is already revealed.”
 (Gaston Bachelard, *La terre et les rêveries de la volonté*, 1948)

Each of us has the ability to create monsters within our own self, for these monsters are ourselves.*

What gradually comes out of the ‘encounter’ in its early stages is ‘an authentic sensitivity’. Ironically, our presence in this non-anthropocentric world has effects that are intended for the human body, causing us to be in a constantly shifting but controlled tension between movement and immobility. Whether with reference to Caroline Le Méhauté’s sculptures or installations, the human being is omnipresent (though never in a direct or even applied manner) as a sensory or architectonic referent, like some kind of subliminal presence. Sensitive material is not enough for the sensitive person and vice versa. The twofold gaze of Janus must be used here – he was the god of travel and exploration who gazed out in two directions from his one face, one looking out beyond and the other, this side of the object of perception. The subjective effects felt at the sight of these works is complemented by an impression of fragile equilibrium hovering between mystery and total clarity, something disturbing and unquiet, “an impression of reality and dream”.² The visitor³ is beginning to explore a zone of fragile lyricism, where the dominant idiom is one of unmistakable “baroque beauty”⁴, though it also reveals an unconventional beauty as seductive as it is repulsive, with its paradoxical affinity to the monstrous, its strength and vulnerability, terrifying and familiar at the same time – the fecundity of strangeness.

Everyone takes a deep breath before letting it out onto the ink-soaked sponges on the wall of *Prendre l’air [Négociation 31]* (2011), as many individual breaths as they can absorb in a small ballet of natural forms (sometimes formless) in suspense. Thus each work summons up the mode of its own identity, the interpretation it requires, and this always goes beyond words and formulae – it is an enigma with no *a priori* responses. What is discovered here is something typical of an OOPArt – Out of Place Artefact, “an object made off-site” – a term that designates an archaeological or historical artefact whose characteristics are different from those expected of an object belonging to the geographical or time zone of the site where it was discovered or where it is on show, so much so that it is quite impossible to recognise it as being part of the culture of that particular site. The “periscopes” of *Latitude 43°17’51N, longitude 5°22’38E*⁵ [*Négociation 36*] (2011) embody a paradoxical view of this vision “as far as the eye can see”. It’s a totem-like piece that can be played and replayed, and consists of a pair of pvc water pipes crowned by a curved, female-female joint at 87°30, covered with powdered coconut peat, a dry, exotic, waterless humus, itself “out of place”; the pipes serve as food for the imagination, literally rising out of the ground as if to put the viewer at the mercy of a deep gaze from somewhere else. Only a few of the materials used in the artist’s work can serve as references here, they are some sort of traces of constructions that belong to our own present⁶. If you literally know where you are on the map, then you are also on the borders of the civilisation from which Caroline Le Méhauté’s work seems to be emancipating itself.

Caroline Le Méhauté asserts her legitimate place in art by her repeated use of the word ‘Négociation’; she is in the direct line of an artistic continuum, whilst the term also throws light onto all the entrances and exits so inherent to her work. Her pieces form the different elements of an ontology, a singular metaphysics offering the story of their unpoetic realisation as art objects and representations. The *Négociation* is in some way giving its name to its culture, in turn based on a mythology without roots whose proposition is a game of active agreements. It gives form to dialectics in action that does not, however, function on any classical binary opposition but according to so-called heterodox kinetics⁷. The *Négociation* represents an encyclopaedia of the forms, materials and gestures available for use. Limits and frontiers fade according to a principle of ‘passability’ and a law of discontinuity: mass/ fragile, man-made/natural, substance/dreamlike, construction/ beyond physical reality, account/beyond physical appearance, figuration/free, formalism/immaterial, object/abstract, dualism/mental, mannerism/allegorical, hole/ phallic, body/surreal...

The piece *S’extraire/ [Négociation 25]* (2010) is remarkable in this respect, for the visitor is in a sort of limbo that puts him or her between the form and its source, here/ a good distance away⁸, somewhere OOPART. At first sight, what is visible is a wall in the middle of a garden. This wall, of bare, untreated earth covered with grass lawn on top, is like part of a 3D drawing pulled from the ground and makes a screen for the body but allows the visitor’s gaze to go beyond it. You can easily walk round the construction, just as you would a sculpture. So we’re dealing with a mental barrier rather than a physical one or one limited by our senses; and

this barrier is erected in a piece of cadastral fiction we cannot get the measure of: the ground has been elevated, a slice has been cut out of the landscape, a layer of short-lived fiction, a mythology of the everyday, a horizon cut short frontally, the different typology of some kind of entropic nature...

In Caroline Le Mehauté's works, then, the main issue is not about establishing the realist structures of a belief in a new version of a new or virtual world with which Man could identify. The drawings – they belong to the portrait genre – in the *La descendance* series fill the void of the human figure in their own way with the vision of an irreducible alterity – something completely other – where one has the feeling the fantastical scene that marks the absence of the reassuring supremacy of humans, is prophetic in nature. Man is not directly represented, he can see his reflection in a mirror* constructed by the artist, but he can't recognise himself.

There is always the question of translating the many possibilities of an elegant imagery of nature, but an ill-defined, rootless, chimerical nature deprived of its real character – it is profane, wooded and industrial. The work shown here makes the different kingdoms blend into each other in a world whose traces are scattered in a huge variety of 'elsewheres', and where each work of art opens onto a representation both this side of and beyond reference to human presence; for if we take the apparitions in chronological order, the last human of the myth is the artist herself, immersed in a sort of "méhautheism", after which comes the first human, the visitor, "In the depths of the unknown to find something new."⁹

Luc Jeand'heur

-
1. Definition of the Greek prefix **μετά** (meta)
 2. Descartes
 3. The idea of 'visitor' as a pose to 'viewer', is in my opinion, more appropriate to Caroline Le Méhauté's works, for everything, including whoever is looking at them, is constantly moving.
 4. Dave Hickey
 5. Latitude and longitude of the work at the exhibition *Cocotrope*, held in 2011 at the Château de Servières gallery/ exhibition space of the City of Marseille Artists' Workshops.
 6. No ultra-modern technologies, no images generated by the current epoch, no overt references to current events, no overt, unabridged representation of our present. This question about the contemporary moment is to be read in the context of the nebulous reality of the ephemeral 'hic et nunc' of *être là [Négociation 24]* (2010), 'here and now': this rhetoric of contemporary art in vulgar Latin tells us the present is an artificial construction. The genetic rule of contemporary art is a semiotic whim, an idiom, an artwork designed for a place in a nature that has been created over again. After that, each person can read (into) it and give it the resonance he or she has understood. This 'here and now' is asserting its own space-time directly. Its message and its experience, both reflections of the desire-filled liberty Caroline Le Mehauté's work proposes, refuse the culture of immediacy and its dictatorial hold over real time.
 7. In negotiation terms, this would be called a win-win agreement.
 8. A near-paraphrase of the slogan for Chris Carter's *X-Files* TV series, "The truth is out/(t)here
 9. Baudelaire, *Le voyage*, a poem from *Les Fleurs du Mal*, first published in 1857.

ARCHIRAAR GALLERY

WHITE CUBE - Rue de la Tulipe 31A Tulpstraat - 1050 Brussels - Belgium
BLACK CUBE - Rue de la Tulipe 35A Tulpstraat - 1050 Brussels - Belgium

Thursday > Saturday - 1 > 6 pm
And by appointment

+32 479 58 46 60 - info@archiraar.com - www.archiraar.com