

## EMMANUELLE LEBLANC

### A melancholy for the here and now

Space and time are the two dimensions that allow us to embrace the world. No world, nor any experience and knowledge of it, can exist in our conscience without them. Emmanuelle Leblanc invites us to a singular experience through space and time, as well as through the light that crosses them to make the image appear. Embracing the world doesn't mean passively accepting outer realities. On the contrary, it means subjecting them to the rules of our perceptions and our judgments. Therefore Emmanuelle Leblanc proposes new ways of seeing, an attempt to capture something in the deep roots of the world we know. She is searching for the rising of an *aletheia*, a kind of truth hidden under a media flow that is more and more ephemeral. To be simple, we can say that Emmanuelle Leblanc makes "freeze frames", that she's catching a truth in the picture but hidden from our attention. But actually, the reality of Emmanuelle Leblanc's paintings is more complex than this.

Like for many painters of her generation, whose sensibility has been brought up on the omnipresence of the image (television, film, print advertising) and the prominent place of technology, it all began with photography. "I have always liked photography, but I have always loved painting". The esteem given this ancestral medium probably comes from her interest for the History of Art as well as from the other part of truth that is contained in painting. Her work proceeds as a "pictorial rendering" of the photographic image. Here, one way or another, by purging the impure residues or by keeping them, she wants to reveal something uncluttered and essential.

Let's look at the works belonging to the "Ligne de Peinture" series, real-life photos taken with a mobile phone. The subjects are ordinary, without specific qualities, hierarchy or logic. This kind of neutrality, in an apparently casually-shot image, is finally counterbalanced by the aesthetic obviousness (forms and colours) of the image : a bright stain of colour above a dark background, a nearly classical landscape, girls' legs, sometimes abstract and fugitive composings, some windows perhaps, the outline of a classical marble statue in a museum, a nearly romantic chiaroscuro in a Caspar David Friedrich way, a Rothko, a constructivist façade... Wilde said that life imitates art. Here, Emmanuelle Leblanc captures and recreates the unexpected appearance of the history of art rising up from the trivialities of everyday life. She implicitly suggests how art is constantly nurtured by reality.

At the same time, the places, the moments, the spaces are deliberately anonymous. Our perception is pulled out of these places, moments and spaces, and sucked up in a breach opened by the artist. This set of modular paintings, that constitutes a "pictorial sentence", built with intuition and harmonic forms, doesn't tell a story but rather potentialities. This can be understood as a series of experiments, of tests and trials, a kind of laboratory of picture ideas saved by the artist. Doing this, she tries to rescue them from the necessary oblivion of the surging temporal and media flow. She is concerned with setting these pictures in "pictorial models", putting every pictorial genre on an equal footing: landscapes, still lives, figures, as well as abstract forms or near monochromes. For this series of little, equally-sized paintings states nothing fictional or narrative. The viewer could perhaps introduce a fictional logic, to create some links, some possible stories... but it's still about the subject, and subjectivity. Inside the preserved secret of the otherness, as Merleau-Ponty might say, it is from the bottom of his subjectivity that everyone projects his own world. Every individual's experiences are unique. Emmanuelle Leblanc knows that a "shared project" is impossible, especially regarding the perception of the image. So, she doesn't enforce any specific vision, doesn't impose anything on our eyes. There are "dasein". They are the fleeting foam of the world phenomenon, the pieces of reality wrested from reality and ambiguously shown in their rough neutrality and in the fact she chooses them to be in or out of frame, broken down, reconstituted, repainted, even or especially if the picture is mediocre (visible pixels, blur, camera shake...). These small paintings sometimes lead to bigger ones. These pictures, according to the artist, obey their own rules and have a larger "narrative unity". With their fuzzy shapes, the sometimes harsh colours, we will perhaps recognize – or not, but is it so important? – the pleats of a statue of the virgin or a personal interpretation of Saint George, or any kind of subjects belonging to the History of Art.

Her portraits, as well as the "Peintures sur table" series, question timelessness and also the historical superimposition of ways and means. Timelessness: despite some signs – a bluish glint that might come from a computer screen and would refer us to our modernity – the figure, painted at human scale, might come from a Dutch painting or a Hopper, with its chiaroscuro and its meditative posture, giving a strange feeling of silence to the work. The backgrounds are spare, with dull colour blocks. It builds a sensation of putting aside the

objective world, as if the link of the subject with real life was suspended, in a kind of époque, out of conscious time, in the uncertain time of meditation, of withdrawal... So, the portrait at a scale of 1:1 becomes paradoxical, because it is naturally tempting to consider it like a mirror of ourselves, but at the same time, this scale puts us face to face with someone who “conceals himself from view” as the artist says, someone who stands back, inscrutable, unapproachable. In addition, the opening out of some works, in diptych or triptych, increases the possible views, the relationships between the images, and makes them more complex. The processes are superimposed. The subject, foreground, stands out against a minimal background decontextualized by a colour field that simplifies our relationship with the image. The monochrome, or subtle polychrome, tint areas suggest abstract or conceptual art, but at the same time the figures are dealt with according to the classical art of portraiture. For the artist, this reconciles two moments of the history of art in the same painting. Moreover, she uses editing software to retouch freeze frames captured from video to repose the model to use as a template, then proceeds to painting with oils in a to-and-fro encounter rather than a confrontation, between modern and classical techniques. In this way, painting can cause emotions to emerge in a way that photography alone isn't capable of, that also brings the ephemeral original idea to life in a tactile way. This link to time that seems so essential to Emmanuelle Leblanc's work is also present in the time taken to create the paintings and deal with the materials of creation. Even if she works from photographs or video her work is not as immaterial. She has to prepare the canvas, to paint with oil, to recompose the pictures. These tasks open to a connection with the flow of the time as well as with the history of art, in depiction and savoir-faire.

Seen from outside or with knowledge of her ideas, Emmanuelle Leblanc's work hovers between two camps. It doesn't affirm any particular vision of the world, but doesn't deny it either. She subjectively tries to catch its fugitive, evanescent and shifting nature, then release it, like two possible moments of an unresolved quest.

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