

Oculus

Don't depend on the dreamer's eye having a whit of sense. As Arthur Rimbaud pointed out, the artist becomes a seer through an immense and rational derangement of all the senses. Imagine then a circle which will not turn round. The directionless way he suggests to us fails to show anything visible. Rather it intimates something unfathomable. For our ancestors the eye was the symbol of light. It wasn't merely a receptive organ but a commanding, creative transmitter. In India one of the Sanskrit words used to define it is *locana*, meaning "that which illuminates". In his collection of verse *Les Contemplations* Victor Hugo invites us to become "the great eye open to the great whole". Under that condition only is it possible for us to solve the enigma in which being dissolves. Comprehending at last what is born, lives, walks on or knuckles under. The eye of the artist is the agency of a redemptive intersection. It leaves the stars within reach of those who only dream as they sleep. The richness of the oculus goes far beyond its merely anatomical meaning. It is also a small circular window at the top of a dome or in a wall. It thus becomes the astronomic evidence of an "intermundia". As Amedeo Modigliani pointed out one should observe the external world with one eye while looking inside ourselves.

For Dominique Van den Bergh "Oculus" is no mere set of Pandora's boxes, wash drawings or ceramics. It is an experience of the sense, a ritual journey in which the gaze becomes penetrating in order to make us see better. In those dark boxes with their initiator humours, forests, stars or mists are hiding. The hole in the box is clearly an invitation to look inside. A first indiscretion which leads us to imagine what affects us in order to conceive more clearly what eludes us. A first invitation also to materialise the limits of memory. Memory lapses, key holes or black holes, Dominique's wash drawings probe all our secrets without revealing anything. Her drawings are the circles of mystery. You come across volatile, ethereal presences. Characters in search of being. They have the transparency of deep dreams, they have nothing to say, nothing to do, nothing to declare. They are consubstantial with the veils of mystery, and you can only see through them, as you could not imagine that they are real. These spectres turn their back to us with the melancholy elegance of lost souls. When they are in profile they shut eyes that open on to the depth of dreams. Occasionally they disappear completely after they have talked noiselessly to trees or stars. The circles within which they are bound invite us to imagine that they are so many thoughts inside us. These explorers of the inner realms invite us to divest ourselves of the utilitarian, to relive ourselves of the reasonable.

And now surprise encounters occur in some woods. The trees are criminal wardens of desire. Then clearings and copses suddenly turn into favourite spots for initiatory journeys. An esoteric impression does indeed prevail in these non places where the vegetation does its utmost to

remind us that nature absolutely exceeds us. Forests are the perfect setting for all rites. And in particular for rites of passage. They are deeply oneiric explorations of all the mysteries of being, with their desires, their urges, but also their helplessness. Thus forests rustle silently to the rhythm of strange apparitions. If trees were “states of mind” as Gaston Bachelard once wrote, we could paraphrase Karl Kraus in stating that the imagination becomes intoxicated in the shade of yew trees, seeing them as a forest. Vegetation is fashioned out of stars, it is bathed in mist. They convey the power of feelings, as with lady-in-a-bath, a gorgeous plant whose flowers are only limned by passion. In this world where silence is the rule, only stars do any talking. The stars in the firmament are like the letters in a huge book. They show the way to go, that of milky ways and constellations paved with desire. Dominique’s dreams are always star-studded. She never forgets the words of Paul Éluard for whom “a dream without stars is a forgotten dream” or those of Victor Hugo when he points out that all our passions reflect them.

The denizens of that imaginary country shut their eyes, the better to see. That is when does appear, and birds, skulls, tables or periscopes. Thus nature, death and the cosmos interfere in the unquiet quiet of wash drawings and ceramics. Seeing differently is only a matter of viewpoint. It remains for clouds to confuse the issue. Dominique makes billowing clouds the pathway to all perdition. Clouds are an invitation to the voyage, they condense mystery and make a philosophy out of it. They undermine the basis of verisimilitude and open up the ways of the possible. Though thoughts usually come from the soul, and clouds from the air, here it all gets topsy-turvy. Clouds are the wind screens of our wanderings. They even go so far as to give body to feelings. However, the importance of clouds verges on metaphysics. We should not forget the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, for whom God himself would not be “without the cloud that protects and covers him.”

As for the ceramics, they are like so many little china planets. They gravitate round our imaginary realms. Split as they are, they evince intimately the eloquence of a voiceless theatre. They are the scenographic echoes of the wash drawings whose oracles they share. Which makes them resemble their own riddles. White and dark, theirs is the coruscating light of darkness. They share with dreams the force of emergence. To quote the title of an engraving by Redon, we could say that the eye of the poet reminds one of “an odd balloon heading for the infinite”. But a journey to the brink of the doors of perception is not without risk. As Shakespeare points up, it only takes a mote “to trouble the mind’s eye”. The journey which Dominique presents demands the experience of the cloud before that of Ether. The imagination is our guide. It is to quote the words of moralist Joseph Joubert, “the eye of the soul”. But its evanescence is redeeming, it makes out of the uncertain the key that opens all doors. What remains is deceptive, only inconstancy remains permanent.

Traduction par Philippe Hunt du texte de Olivier Duquenne