

It is at l'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, where all the antique dealers are and where he now spends part of the year, that Frédéric Pollet, thinking ahead of a nearby exhibition, made a series of intriguing, vaporous still lifes. The French “natures mortes”, literally “dead natures”, is not as befitting to the project as the English term, as the artist's chosen title for the series, “Vies sereines”, “Serene Lives”, tends to illustrate.

The “Serene Lives” of an unquiet soul,

On recent works by Frédéric Pollet.

...pastel requires from he that uses it a tyrannical attention, a full and taut presence, a particular knack, a concentration of the being that may be compared to that of the archer.

Jean Clair, *Considérations sur l'état des Beaux-Arts [Considerations of the State of the Fine Arts]*.

Almost a year ago, I had commented on a large-scale project by Frédéric Pollet on jellyfish, oils, watercolours, pastels. Overlooking their whitish transparency, he had mostly focused on their figures, although then, certain close-ups and high-angles, as if by some imaginary diving, conferred to those malignant creatures an unexpected, somewhat abstract, presence.

The exhibition, currently running at the Chapelle des Pénitents at Gordes, features photographs and pastels. In both cases, the artist draws very close to nebulous things. Frédéric Pollet treats the objects that attracted him as a photographer, as if he were handling watercolour. His is a very gracefully aerial approach which is curiously reminiscent of a bee's vision. According to Karl von Frisch, a pionnier in ethology and Nobel Prize laureate, bees detect the colour of the flowers they forage more than their shape. The objects are hard to identify as they are immersed in a milky mist of sorts, and so their colours, their intensity made softer by the blurred contours, are what caught the artist's whole attention. At first, I thought of psychedelic variations on still lifes by Giorgio Morandi, an Italian artist (1890-1964) who spent most of his life painting plain accessories taken from everyday life in grey and beige shades: jugs, bowls, bottles, etc., simply placed on a table. But I was wrong: Frédéric Pollet is not too prone to quoting or paying tribute, more or less openly, to great predecessors. Above all, he relies on intuition, circumstances, immediate impressions. In truth, the work sessions must have taken place in the morning and in a bathroom. Behind the gleaming spots and haloes, glass vials, medicine packs, toothpaste tubes seem to appear, as well as multicoloured soap bars. I picture Frédéric Pollet walking out of the shower. But instead of fetching a bathrobe or some perfume, struck as he is with the view that offers to him, he goes for his camera. The small mirrored door of the cabinet must be covered in condensation, as well, no doubt, as the lens of the camera. Unable to step back for lack of room, his fingers still damp, he clicks nonetheless, on guesswork, several times...

Considering the numerous variations, the operation must be repeated on a daily basis, compulsively. I wouldn't be surprised if the artist, who knows Japan very well – he is a black belt in judo and was once a resident artist at the Villa Kujoyama – had made his own this piece of advice received from a Japanese master: “Do not aim, let the arrow find its target.”¹ Well the tenets of this philosophy must have found their way.

Frédéric Pollet, who is also a video-artist, has travelled a lot, in Europe, in America, in Asia; there, he made stunning encounters, as his videos prove it.² He also faced many perils, endangered his health, both physical and mental, even his life, in keeping with his degree of carefreeness, but most importantly with his personality and the radicalism of his commitments. These “Serene Lives” neither attest to timorous or wise giving up on remote shores nor to a decisive turn in his artistic career. I rather see in them the sign of a necessary and soothing break, after enthusiastic and tiring peregrinations, which the aloof calm of these magnificent pastels associated to the photographs only confirm.

Compared to the large prints, whose shiny and spectacular aspect inevitably catches the eye – which is totally legitimate – their inferior size and the matt quality of their surface may let people believe that pastels are the poor relation, the modest, quite anachronistic, foils of the exhibited photographs, all the more so as their topic and their composition prove so close to those of the prints. But it's quite the opposite, for if the pigments are absorbed, or rather eaten, by the material, the colours that survive the paper's appetite are conversely granted a major force and impact. Thrifty as to their means, these creations, which owe their existence to the fervor and the inventiveness of the hand and thus seem to look back to a long-gone past, to a neglected tradition, boldly stand up to their counterparts settled in a pretty uncomfortable modernity by the artist.

Gilbert Pons,

La Blanquié, end of August 2015

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¹ Cartier-Bresson had been overwhelmed while reading Eugene Herrigel's *Le Zen dans l'art chevalresque du tir à l'arc* [*Zen in the Chivalric art of Archery*] he had received as a gift from Georges Braque, who had himself received it from Jean Paulhan.

² I wrote about them in several issues of the journal entitled *Turbulences* when it was still a paper edition: “Les déambulations d'un vidéaste” [“A video-artist's rambles”], *Turbulences* 29, October 2000; “Les échoués de Frédéric Pollet” [“Frédéric Pollet's beached creatures”], *Turbulences* 30, January 2001; “Drôle de jeu et jeu de rôles, la fin d'une aventure à la Pommerie” [“Weird play, role play, endgame at la Pommerie”], *Turbulences* 57, July 2007.