

"Of the limits of my thoughts"

CAROLE BENZAKEN

GRÉGORY FORSTNER

THOMAS FOUGEIROL

HERVÉ IC

texts STÉPHANIE KATZ

OPENING Thursday March 17th 2011 from 6pm to 9pm
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Grégory Forstner, etching

"Of the limits of my thoughts"

The Dubois Friedland Gallery is happy to present in Brussels an exhibit of four artists joined around a thematic present throughout each artist's method of choice: time and memory.

Whether we are asked to consider the formatting and distancing of Carole Benzaken's motifs, or an intimate experience feeding the imaginary in Gregory Forstner's work, or a formal experience of painting's materiality in Thomas Fougeirol's, or the mental investigation that accompanies Hervé Ic's compositions; it is always a human consciousness giving the world's mechanisms an inquisitive look, all the way to the limits of Thought.

Thus, Carole Benzaken's work orchestrates a type of painting inherited from several disciplines, and constantly borrows from a work on Time. Acceleration, slow motion, remoteness and details, construction and disappearance of the very motif, constitute the vocabulary of a reminiscent and elementary image.

Gregory Forstner's works result from an encounter with personal, familial or historical archetypes, which gives his painting a fascinating dimension: secular permanence of violence and intimate strategies of struggles against alienation.

As for Thomas Fougeirol, painting is a constant experimentation that forces form to its most energetic, most vibrant expression, taking from Humanity's emblematic repertory (bed, house, skull, clothing). The painter's entire body is inscribed in the mastery of this alchemy: gesture, matter, paint.

To achieve his goals, Hervé Ic's is able to stretch time endlessly. The superimposition of complementary, antagonistic or anachronistic elements that compose his images forces the eye to see a type of painting full of multiple, precise and uncertain access.

The headline - "Of the limits of my thoughts" - is borrowed from Gérard Gasiorowski. It emphasizes the spirit of experimentation and deepening which characterizes the work of every artist of the exhibition, in a conviction of surpassing the image and the medium.

Reproductions of artists works and complete biographies upon e-mail or telephone request.

Dubois - Friedland gallery is pleased to thank:
Nathalie Obadia gallery (Paris-Brussels), Zink gallery (Munich), Praz-Delavallade gallery (Paris), Eric Mircher gallery (Paris)

Erased Memory. Cosmetic Memory. Re-woven Memory.

I'm often told the world in which we live today is supposedly a world saturated with images... For this very reason, we should be suffering from collective blindness. We can be surprised by this link between visible and blinding. On the contrary, the evidence should show that, living in an environment where the sense of sight is intensely solicited; we should be experiencing a strong intellectual and mnemonic excitement. However, one is forced to admit, we are experiencing daily the exact opposite. Today time, suspended in the eternal present of the all visible that is ours, robs us of a past and no longer produces memories. The eyes bring on forgetfulness.

What we see generates erasure.

This metamorphosis of the relation between sight and memory has the consequence of building, underneath our immersion into an amnesic present, a sort of hollowed memory that works as the mold of a recessed past. To live in the era of this memory "in absentia" forces to ask of the recent structural modifications of relation to images, that they produce or stop producing a visual heritage.

The tele-visual era was under the sign of an analogical project, marked by the dream of a veridical imprint of the Real. The encoded image never ceases to hurt and undo so many of these principles. The practice of the screen invents a visibility mechanism, carried by a numeric grammar backstage. However, the numeric code can contain infinitely more information than the screen can present to the human sight. A work of selection, elimination and re-presentation is done, contradicting the objective seizure project for the benefit of the lacunar image. A gap increases between the real and its restitution, integrally submitted to an arbitrary selection project. Because no other will, beside the one of an anonymous technology seems to preside at discourse organization, image composition and cosmetic management of representation. The produced imagery is no longer carried by a construction project of making sense. It only knows how to fascinate sight, without feeding the reflexive activity of seeing. With the slide of the mass media era towards mass multimedia, we are witnessing a shift of collective visual traumas towards individual micro-traumas. Isolation in front of the screen involves the

spectator as solitary accomplice of the scene in play to the point of guilt. It then becomes difficult, impossible even, to externalize the pain through verbalization, visual micro-traumas unties the bonds of the community of looks, atomizes and fragmentizes the imaginary, and deconstructs the collective reactions capacities. One can perhaps look into this "untying" of the community of seeing, induced by a difficulty to share in the language of visual pains, the origin of production of this "forgetfulness by the eyes" that we question. For, where the project of an analogical image offered a dynamic of potentially shared memory, the preeminence given to a traumatic, cosmetic imagery forbids the constitution of a collective memory.

The contemporary artists interested in these mutations will work on this neutralization of seeing of which they're already witnesses. Immersed in the current practices that demultiply all kinds of visual apparitions they are, just like the rest of us, excited by the solicitations of sight, but seasoned against the hypnotic traps that drown the exercising of seeing. Some work on re-weaving the rug of this recessed memory, which is erased by contemporary hypnosis. A transversality dynamic attempts to undo the heritage of an auto centric heritage, that displays the figurative by cutting it from its context of emergence, and insists on the illusionistic precision of the "everything-should-be-shown". Because it maintains with the image a relation that authorizes a transversal, nomadic, stratified and combinatory reinvestment of our disaffected memories, this contemporary research produces "documents" of a new sort, metamorphosing our hollowed heritage into active energies.

Crossings of appearances or games of transparencies in Ic's work, nomadism of braided visions, transports of memories or trans-sites in Benzaken's, trans-genre mixing of references in Forstner's, or the figurative mutation into transfigurations through imprint in Fougeirol's... Transversal mechanisms are multiplying, abandoning the primacy given to the circumscribed Visible, distancing themselves with an eye out for mastery, thwarting the frontal exhibitions for the benefit of combinatory and lateral visions. Through this esthetic of transference, memory works at reconstituting itself in a sort of relic, attempting to reinvest the hollow of our fossilized heritage.

Stéphanie Katz, Octobre 2010

"Of the limits of my thoughts"
For Carole Benzaken: "A non-native look".

Already foretold in the programmatic work that is the "Plane" video and confirmed by the grids in "Tulips", the fake plants in "Lost Paradise", the charred desert trees, the mineralized blossoming of the Ecclesiastes all the way to the translucent fibers of Ezekiel's last visions, germination is the structuring power of Carole Benzaken's work. A germinative power that is to be understood as the invention of a new modality of seeing as much as the promotion of seeing that transgresses the hierarchies of time and space, that mocks the ambiguities of the clear and uncertain. From the grid to the weft, from the translucent extinguished to the luminous opaque, from the screen to the membrane, Benzaken maps out for the spectator's eye an unprecedented course that learns to transport itself into foliation of evocations, of peculiar recollections and of collective memory. Something of the underground force of the rhizome that resuscitates in each of its fragments, transforms the progress of the work into a transversal braiding able to confront the film's past to the future's invisible projection and the consciousness of our disasters to the imaginative force of tomorrow.

Because, from time immemorial, but in an increasingly condensed way, Carole Benzaken works on the memory transhumance effects, which won't stop from migrating between past and future, to finally weave the frail rug of an unpredictable present.

It is within this spirit that one has to experience the light boxes of the "Ecclesiastes" series, pictures of light that were not to be seen, but were projecting onto us their artificial luminosity: like as many visual vectors, climbing back from a narrated past to divine a projectable future. Because this sentence from the Ecclesiastes "That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out?" precisely articulates the stakes of depth versus the ones of the emergence of time within the Visible. If the past can be imagined, the future is invisible, but projectable. Past and future are bound within the transversal dimension of the imagination. Only the present escapes us.

Stratified, germinative, carbonized, projecting their light towards the future, the light boxes "Inhabited" of a stratified garden in black and white from the Ecclesiastes' series conjugate together the remnants of the past with the imagination of the future, to project towards the spectator a recessed temporality, opened to all present's inventions.

The vegetal metaphor is confirmed with the work around Ezekiel's Prophecy.

But now, beyond the sole image of a flower or a tree, it is the very mechanism of the image that sends back to the birth and death biological cycle, each regenerating the other. Baked inside the sheets of sanded glass, the vegetal stratification drawing evokes a rhizome that would move around at different degrees of depth, between burying and gentle stroking. Roots or branches, floating on a sky or water background, make the looks' axis uncertain, opened towards the Heavens or closed towards the earth. By installing this suspension between the above and the below of the Visible, the series reminds us of the Japanese sheet of water. True category of immanence, the in-between waters allow us to see, free of hierarchy, the real, the shadow, and the reflection or all the occurrences of the Visible. Three levels of representation, the secret, the real and the hope, for just one single patch of color.

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "Sovereign LORD, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, "Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life."(Ezekiel 37).

So, this work confirms the stakes of black and white. Thanks to a tight palette, Carole Benzaken creates a country where the memory works

forms in the palette of fire, of what is consumed or of carbon, in other words diamonds. Because color, come to think of it, belongs in the foreground of the present, in the time of surprise effects carried by the flow of instants. This is because, like the explosion of the colored specter provoked by the diamonds' facets, these glass pictures suggest a heart of color sleeping in the background, ready to loom up to the surface at any moment, like as many shards from the past climbing ahead of time. It is as if there was a volcano of history asleep under the velvety skin of its translucent membranes.

These pictures of light and shadows function like as many memory workbenches straightened back into canvasses. Because what does the Ezekiel prophecy tell us? It affirms that beyond the collapses, and against memory's denials, a breath always revives dry bones to make them speak again. Ezekiel teaches us that wounds don't keep their secret for eternity. Like these branches-roots caught between gel-like sheets of glass reaching for the sky as much as for below the earth, what is held petrified in carbon's ultra-color will find through the work the breath of the encased color.

"Forget me Not"

In French it is "myosotis" but the English name is "Forget me not", so one will understand how the germinative program of the work can go from carbon branch to spring bloom. As if Carole Benzaken could move about the world, grabbing in flight the perfume of cataclysm survivals, of identity collapses that eventually, generating new hybrid communities,

failed in their annihilation project. The years spent in the tough neighborhoods of Los Angeles, next to the best Jazzmen of the 90s, were already the opportunity to build an imaginary territory around the stakes of these notes that bloom on the stratified ruins of the African American memory. Small flowers of deterritorialization, these "Forget me not" speak to us of the rebuilding of a community on "non-native soil"; on the basis of an aptitude for in-the-moment musical invention that suspends the work above collapse. Since those years, spent meeting other internal exile identities, the "Forget me not" function within Carole Benzaken's work like as many talismanic pictures, that bring back to the ordinary avalanches' surface an energy of the eternal Living. Works to be appreciated according to a de-doubled axis, in the sparkling depth of a fragmentary photo album, which weaves our reminiscences of an America of legends, first and foremost. But also, within the translucent horizontality of a floating floor, that suspends rhythm in flight, and forces the eye to hang over collective memory cartography, potentially opened on the infinity of identity wounds and their rebuilding.

From Ezekiel's ossuary tree to "non-native" Jazz, Carole Benzaken lays mirrors in front of our memories, which implode common time's specter. We are left with a gallery of nomadic energy that weaves to infinity the album of the past and the future's projection to open onto the present's imagination.

Stéphanie Katz, Décembre 2010

Carole Benzaken was born in 1964 in Grenoble (France). She lives and works in Paris. She succeeded Fine Arts High School (ENSBA) of Paris in 1990. Since 1993 she frequently exhibited at Nathalie Obadia gallery in Paris and in Brussels. She exhibited at Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art in Paris in 1994, at Museum for contemporary Art (CAPC) of Bordeaux in 1999. She won Marcel Duchamp Prize in 2004. Some of her works were exhibited at the Museum for Modern Art of New York (MOMA) in 2006, at the Museum for Modern Art (MNAM) at Pompidou Center in Paris in 2002, 2004, 2009. She has some works in the MOMA Collections in New York and MNAM in Paris.

"Of the limits of my thoughts"
 To Gregory Forstner: "Visual Memories Decomposed"

We must admit: beyond his covering humor style, Gregory Forster's visual vocabulary doesn't leave us alone. Even if we indeed seem to guess a wide range of references mixed in a disjointed and anachronistic way, it is even deeper that his paintings leave inside us an impression that is both durable and painful. Everything happens as if it bore the secret energy of our intimate barbarity, the one we don't exactly want to see emerge.

One of the most startling plastic traits of Gregory Forster's painting holds in its ability to hybridize radically heterogeneous visual references inside one painting. This plastic graft strategy allows him to effectuate comparisons that are transgressive enough to worm his way into the back-shop of the spectator's imaginary, almost without his knowing. In so doing, the artist obtains a real raising of the visually repressed, and gets the association process moving again, even if it is painful.

In a first movement, we notice a touch that, while reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, suggests as well the luminous eroticism of Matisse, the matter of Rembrandt, the roundness of Rubens or even the organic faces of Bacon. They are the "Dogs" or the "Flight Attendants" that weave together diverse "Images d'Epinal", cruel caricatures from calendars, grotesque family portraits, or a la Hogarth engravings pertaining to the vices of a decadent society. If the fairytale isn't far, it is always for its reference to the Ogre, the Witch, or the child devouring Wolf, as underscores the thinly veiled portrait of the "Beast" by Cocteau under the guise of a good-natured guard dog. Progressively, the animal, the coquette, or the ribald actions of some puppets draw in secret increasingly weighty lines that the spectator balks at letting them climb to the surface of his imagination. Close to the uncomfortable effect produced by the nightmarish carnivals of Ensor, Gregory Forster's universe lets resonate an exaggerated laugh that bursts under the animal's mask, aimed at our terrors. The

most unprecedented result resides in a new possibility to articulate a contemporary barbarism up to now only held back in the limbo of an intra-figurable. So, resurfacing brutally in the spectacularly contemporary indigence, we suddenly recognize the panoply of close-ups, high angles, low angles and "surcadrages", by which photojournalists look to impose an improbable personal style to the news. In an insidious and efficient way, mixing plastic climax with the obscenity of precision and detail, Gregory Forster introduces in the History of painting the realistic constraints of a photojournalism camera that doesn't know how to invent an imaginary space. With the result that, where the freedom of touch takes the spectator inside sharp memory of painting, the mediatic framing violently brings the scenes and faces into the realm of the spectacular. Both liberated and constrained, the spectator is forced to refer himself to the contents represented in order to be able to organize this first contradiction.

The stupefying series of the "Flight Attendants" is the first to point us in this direction. Indeed a wide array of hypotheses clashes in our mind, which tries to decode what it sees. Since the 19th century disfiguration of Society women due to syphilis, to the taxonomic inventory of post-Chernobyl genetic monstrosities, along with the severe facial injuries suffered by the soldiers of WWI, these coiffed coquettes seem to belong to the monster family nestled inside the collective memory, a cross between "Elephant Man" and the Fair freaks.

The sociological investigation confirms it even more with the "Dogs" series that disguise their violence under transformed individualities to get even closer to our contemporary inhibitions. What terrible anniversary are they celebrating, here skewing their peers, over there raising the bets around a peepshow scene, and there collectively eviscerating an open body? Hesitating between Marquis de Sade descriptions, the S.A. orgies shown in post-WWII

cinema, or the everything-goes St Jean masked nights, the Gregory Forster works' analyst is literally abandoned at the gate of a sort of barbarism that hasn't yet invented its visual memory.

With the engraving series, Gregory Forster seems to seek to broadside the whole of the scenography we've already visited, around micro-scenes of genres, family or work scenes, of guilty complicities, always just at the edge of what is permissible to tell. An uncertain narrative, protagonists coming from heterogeneous horizons, a collective activity that evolves around a scapegoat, come to work the collective repressed in depth, from dissections of insects by children to archaic traditions of torture, with narratives of state of the world revealing news items in between. But mostly, in a strange reversal that divides the engraving artist's tool and the blade of the torturer, these engravings ask what the missions of images are, from yesteryear to today. Since the dawn of engraving that has given birth to a multiplication of militant caricatures, to photojournalism, images have often adopted a revealing posture, eager to display the untold. With Gregory Forster,

the point and the blade come together to scratch under appearances, to lift the veil and expose untellable truths. By doing so, he lifts the floodgates of an un-sharable inheritance, to initiate a new work of memory around collective culpabilities.

Embracing like that the representation of unacknowledgeable History, in order to build a new dictionary of images capable of replaying the opaque zones of our collective memory, is not the lesser of the stakes for contemporary creation. Indeed it bears this polysemy that can braid heterogeneous evocations, to shake up memories. In point of fact, today we lack an original vocabulary, a vocabulary that could incarnate the unrepresentable part of modern barbarism, by restoring the triangulation of the observer's glances, of the victim and the spectator. This is the challenge Gregory Forster tries to meet, when forces his spectator to compose for himself a visual draft of Human catastrophe, in favor of a displacement towards the universe of disguise, of caricature and dissimulations of flourish.

Stéphanie Katz, December 2010

Grégory Forstner was born in 1975 in Douala (Cameroun). He lives and works in New York. He succeeded National High School for Fine Arts at Villa Arson in Nice in 1999, then National High School for Fine Arts in Paris (ENSBA) in 2000. Since 2008 he frequently exhibited at Zink Gallery in Munich (Germany). He had an exhibition at the Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art (MAMAC) in Nice (France) in 2007, at the Museum of Grenoble (France) in 2009. Some of his works are in the collection of the Paris Art Museum (ARC), in the Museum for Modern and contemporary Art (MAMAC) of Nice, in the Museum of Grenoble, in the National Foundation for Contemporary Art (FNAC) of Paris, and in the Sammlung Goetz in Munich (Germany).

"Of the limits of my thoughts"
 For Thomas Fougeirol : "A re-cessed vision"

At the source of images, there are several scenes dating from the very beginning. Any artistic adventure intuitively chooses one or the other.

Hanging out in Thomas Fougeirol's studio, one will quickly understand the question of seeing is asked in an unusual way. Something like a memory of the archaic origins of images dominates here, something that could weave a link between the first outline of a hand reserved on the walls of caves, the Holy Face, the first photosensitive media, the anthropometry of contemporary art, and the shadow impacts on the walls of Hiroshima. Something that insists more on the remains of a contact and its stakes, on the recessed of what used to be there, than on resemblance and reflection. Everything then is in place to alter the expected course of the strategies of the visible, while announcing a more subversive and clandestine heritage.

The strangeness is confirmed when time comes to confront the radiographic effect of the large works to the description of the techniques Thomas Fougeirol uses. Even though a strange "restitution in absentia" of the motifs is akin to a powerful phantomatic presence, we understand however that the work of representation has given way to an impressive mastery of the "imprint". Female clothing, doors, chandeliers, confessionals, drapes, beds, loom up like apparitions risen from a pictorial matter that could have kept "a good memory" of their passage. On the model of the "Holy Face", built on the logic of the imprint that inverses and fragilizes the representation, Thomas Fougeirol's ghostly faces insist more on the soft medium that welcomes them than on the precision of their own restitution. These motifs all evoke, from near or afar, the idea of the threshold between the visible and the untrappable, yet they aren't represented here, but rather "presented in absentia".

The time has come to remember how, in the great adventure of images, this imprint strategy once was one of the most powerful weapons against idolatry on the one hand and against the destruction of images on the other. Indeed, Christ's face, under the modalities of the miraculous imprint left on a cloth, brings a double assurance. Through its uncertain precision, the imprint says the stake of the image is not its realism. But even more so, by

the particularity of the recessed contact, it confirms that under no circumstance can the image contain its model. So it is out of the question to worship the image for what it represents, nor is it possible to destroy it for it would have the insolence of wanting to contain its referent. An imprint is a suggestion of what escapes the image. It imposes itself as the most efficient tool to remember what can't be represented.

It is in this spirit of subversive efficacy against the image offered for worship to the contemporary ravenous appetite that Thomas Fougeirol's posture must be understood. Beginning with the chandelier that, just like the confessional, coming to wound the painting's pictorial flesh, designates for the spectator the incandescent dimension of its snuffed out flame. Beyond the chandelier itself and beyond its image, it works as a memory reminder directed towards a burning, luminous, untamable intensity, that is however at the source of the visible. The painting like the chandelier is akin to a desacralized cult tool: that suggests to the eye the interrogation of an internal shadow, without containing anything within itself. The painting presents itself as a vector, an induction to see further, towards the direction of what has withdrawn. There is no sacrality of the painted work.

Even more so, the red beds series...

This series imposes itself on the spectator through several spectacular characteristics: the impressive formats, the motif's spectral value and the projected power of color. Adding to the question of the nature of the painted image, we recognize here an affirmed heritage of a certain American painting that has interrogated the different modalities of "outside the frame" and of suggestion of a pictorial environment. A posture that brings another way to lead one beyond representation, looking to immerse the spectator more into the imaginary space of the painting rather than offering a full frontal face.

As we have already noted, one of the powerful, formal charges of Thomas Fougeirol's works, holds in their pictorial masses. By working at the frontier of the spectator's appropriation capacities, the very large formats and the mass of the matter seize power on representation. In a first move, these paintings impose themselves as surfaces to test, before being images to look at. Everything happens as if

the painting brought from the beginning the modalities of the exchange of glances, demanding of the spectator that he accepts to scale back his predatory intentions. In front of these works, it is the painting that imposes the control of the apparatus, by inverting the directions of the looks: it is no longer the spectator who scrutinizes but the painting that observes its public from the totality of its surface. A surface just like an eye...

Little by little, as if coming back up from an uncertain bottom, this painting that holds us under its control finally lets what it wanted to suggest emerge. A bed, then another, single bed, double bed, ornate or severe, conjugal or solitary... so many possible beds, coming to deploy the hypothesis of a nocturnal scene, a scene that is played eyes shut or drapes drawn. Because this bed is heavy with a multiplicity of evocations. True receptacle of dream or nightmare, it could be like the site of the sleep that welcomes its imprint. In this case better than ever, the stake of a recessed face works as an induction mode, incarnating by the sheet's contact into the pictorial matter the uncatchable imaginary. But, in painting's adventure, the bed and its sheets are also evocations of shrouds and tombs. Sheets often red stained, they deploy a whole theatre of Christ related shrouds that evoke the stakes of a first image conceived once more by contact. The image of Christ, itself being a symbol of undoubling between visible flesh and "First Principle" outside of the figural, it is traditionally put into an abyss in scenes of Descent from the Cross or Representation of the Entombment. Incarnation of the Invisible, laid onto the sheet of the imprint, it is the painting itself that exposes to us its project, its strategies and its hopes.

All well examined, the Lascaux painters who descended into earth's shadows to art direct the first images, long before Christian symbolization, didn't proceed any differently. Here, already it was about getting away from the sun that lets you believe that all is visible to, on the contrary, return to a telluric shadow, the only one capable of waking up the imaginary. One can't dream well in the sunlight...

True emblem of the gesture of imprint, the outlined hands that the Lascaux painters laid on the walls are like many calls towards an impossible image, towards the limits of hand techniques, for a crossing through the yet to be painted wall.

Again, it is by insisting on the color red that the bed series occupies a singular place in Thomas Fougeirol's universe, which usually concentrates on a palette of blacks, greys or silver. But this red evokes an unseen before dimension in his register of representation. Everything happens as if it weren't a natural red but rather a sort of translucent veil or some kind of filter. A red to see through rather than a red to look at. Membrane, screen, median, this red underlines that the painting doesn't represent a bed but designates it, beyond the image or underneath it. It is in this spirit that, in the totality of the signifying stakes of the color red, blood, glory, fire, this one rather chooses the theatrical red of the stage curtain. As this veil, both sanguineous and "infra-thin", works as the confirmation that the image-imprint articulates the shown to the withdrawn, the narrative to the elusive, the virtual to the incarnate. This undoubling of the scene of seeing is underlined by the series effect, that opens the figurative of the bed-imprint onto an infinite variation of possible figurative, both always different and always similar. In the manner of a Warhol who, the day after the suicide of the star, multiplies the Marilyn Monroe's face under infinity of colored screens, the series effect unties the morbid dimension of the closure of representation, to benefit a repetition that breaks the limits of the frame. In so doing, the bed-imprints under their red screens work as many "tools of memory" capable of going beyond the neutralization of loss, or transcending bereavement. This is when the stakes of the image in its entirety connect into a project of reminiscence: beyond the theatre of the world, an imaginary field spreads beyond the horizon indefinitely that allows us all the weaving between mourning, memory and invention, to the limits of the unthinkable.

Stéphanie Katz, December 2010

Thomas Fougeirol was born in 1965 in France. He lives and works in Paris and New York. He succeeded Fine Arts High School (ENSBA) of Paris in 1992. Since 2008 he frequently exhibited his works at Praz-Delavallade in Paris and Berlin. He had an exhibition at FRAC Normandy in France in 2004 and at Fred Lanzenberg Gallery in Brussel in 2002. Some of his works are in the collections of Modern Art Museum (MAM) of Paris, the National Foundation for Contemporary Art (FRAC) of Paris and in the collections of Regional Foundation of Normandy in Rouen (France).

"Of the limits of my thoughts"
For Hervé Ic: "For a radiographic look"

If it was possible to embrace the whole landscape presented in painting by Hervé Ic in one glance, we would have to acknowledge that a tenacious energy is at work in the image, which forces the spectator into an uncomfortable one on one with memory.

Everything happens as if Hervé Ic, something of a new breed of Historian of the Contemporary, had been working for several years on preparing some kind of inventory of implicit contexts that have built our present in secret. Just like our immediate memories' cartographer, he elaborates an almost forensic investigation that shapes up around typical genre scenes. Using the 60s and 70s as an arbitrary point of origin, which corresponds to his own birth date, Ic offers us to come along on his progressive visual decrypting. This process leads him to rebuild a sort of a common album that braids together the sociological codes of locatable standard situations, memories that today can't be told in a family setting, and the cultural references that function as implicit explicative legends. From the "Naval Battle" series and "Putti" which dove into the ambivalences of official culture's good and bad taste, to the last "Freaks", which hide the caricatures of his contemporaries under the swellings of time, or the scenes of swingers taken from 70s' porn magazines, or the portraits of today's rave-going teens, Ic lays markers for an intimate process. If this process looks for causes asleep under its effects, it is because it is not satisfied with a factual and jaded acknowledgment of the Contemporary. So, Hervé Ic positions himself as being a part of a generation that inherits a coded memory, full of denials and renunciations and that it needs to be recognized by each in order to be able to neutralize its morbid effects. Caught inside a generational flux, Ic tries to understand its provenance in order to get ahead of the strangeness towards which he leads us.

But the breadth of Hervé Ic's project can't be solely measured against this immediate memory support program. It is necessary to add both the means

and methods he allows himself, to reach his goals.

Firstly, it is as a painter that Ic takes cognizance of the fact that we have definitely entered the screen era. A screen is an optical apparatus that, among other characteristics, reverses the looks' energetics by projecting towards the spectator a neutralizing spectral luminosity. As a result, where painting requires an inquisitive, sometimes predatory look from a spectator who follows the image's stakes, the screen inversely scrutinizes its public by projecting a vector of light towards the outside. In trying to answer this new formatting that produces inactive looks, inert receptacles of a visible offered to consumption, Ic is betting on a strategy that doubles down in painting this dynamic inversion. As a result, through an aesthetics of mastered transparency, he manages to relaunch the inverted energy of the screens, by bringing back up from the bottom of the image a multitude of evocations, apparitions, suggestions that are like as many gaping holes and opened uncertainties in the rigidity of representation. Another light, this time the one of the paint, reveals the previous layers of the image, lifts the successive tracings of the memory, to build a kind of radiography of the contemporary implicits. Using paint in a true act of dissection of the collective memories, Hervé Ic's stylistics questions the transversal heritages and maps out original equivalences between the attainments of the past and the stakes of the future. Therefore, this aesthetics of the translucent graft allows all the against-nature mixings and covers up all unacceptable proximities. From the symbolism of children's tales to the verist nightmares of the adult world, some paintings build a multi-directional journey, in a landscape where the worst hugs the best, where brutality feeds affection and where sweetness broods over aggression. The plastic proposition adds to the symbolic hybridizations, the spectator's eye labors to distinguish the shadow emanating from the mud, from the brightness of the rainbow, or the monstrous drawing of the set's line. Within this register, even more than the

"Landscapes" series, the "De Profondis" push to the limit the spectator's assimilation capacity. Mixing the current genre scene, the reference to painting History and the cannibalistic morbidity of our societies in a bath of visual sugary treats worthy of all the well-being conditionings and of the contemporary amnesia, this series presents itself in front of the spectator like an uncomfortable mirror. Nothing left to observe or admire here that would lighten the spectator's malaise, if perhaps a certain technical virtuosity that offers to share its enjoyment of execution. The reflection effect, which projects beyond the shadow part of time, surpasses any other acknowledgment while involving the observer in a plastic complicity and a formal gluttony of surface. It is always with an ambivalent difficulty that the observer manages to shed the nightmare's glamorous slopes then turn away from multiple evocations that had been stirred in the implicit of the Visible. As is the case with some films, Hervé Ic's paintings

are capable of sweeping in depth the spectator's imaginary, to the point of looming back up unexpectedly at the bend of a meeting, desire or hatred.

This painting's strategy related to the screen somehow allows for some ports of rest. Just as we can turn off our computers, TVs or mobile phones, it is possible to hit the snooze button on the stratified imaginary that comes back from the bottom of Hervé Ic's pictures as well. Only the screen of painting is left, bright vector looking to cool down, revealed as a pure projection device. Hervé Ic's imaginary gallery is punctuated by all these paintings of light, frames without edges or backgrounds, waiting to reminisce. Faced with these offerings of light, the spectator can, if he wishes, attempt to work on his own implicit stratifications and transversal memories. A project in the form of a radiographic tool... offered to the community of glances...

Stéphanie Katz, December 2010

Hervé Ic was born in 1970 in Paris. He lives and works in Brussels. He studied image technology and artificial intelligence applied on images (DEA IRFA) at Paris VIII and Paris VI university till 1996. He had an exhibition at Paul Ricard's Space in Paris in 1998, at the "Creux de l'Enfer" (Contemporary art center) in Thiers (France) in 2007, at Iragui Gallery in Moscow in 2009 and at Mircher Gallery in Paris in 2010. Some of his works have been presented at the Fine Arts Museum in Tourcoing in France in 2004, at the Art Museum of Sao Paulo (MASP) and Porto Alegre (MARGS) in Brazil in 2009, at Center for Arts and Photography (ROSPHOT) in St Petersburg in Russia in 2010.