

The Combat of Alexandra Maurer – A Fascinating Ambiguity

If Alexandra Maurer's artistic expression is derived from animation drawing, and more precisely from painting animation, it is through immediate expression that she seeks to capture the spectator. Animation seems an appropriate tool to resolve questions linked to the direct perception of our environment; a perception inevitably determined by the sentient experience of space and time. She plays on the reading of a text repeated over and over again, tirelessly, and invites the viewer to question not only the logic but above all the movements and the associations which the animated images can introduce. First of all, she films the subjects. Then, with three images to the second, she breaks up their gestures and movements to create a number of video stills, and then finally paints acrylics on paper which she reassembles as painting animation or presents as a series of "paintings". Retracing the different stages of a film which she deconstructs into stills, translating and reinvesting them with painting and painting animation, the artist thus underlines the ephemeral, even precarious and fleeting nature of filmed sequences. And if she seeks to harmonize fiction and reality, it is also to reunite the qualities of painting, photography and video in a single medium – painting animation. She mixes the genres and poses the question of time within a space in equilibrium. The time to paint. The time to be. She develops modern life environments and situations, reflecting not without irony our human condition and that of being a woman. Her language here is that of the painter; it becomes a gesture, affirming naturally the colors, its intensities and its forms. Chance lines, accidents, overlapping, the use of blurring and distinctness, gloss or matt, the absorption or reflective qualities of the pictorial matter, the grain or the smoothness of the paper's surface, made denser by additions of heterogeneous layers, produce an interplay of incessant movements which have a striking, resounding presence. The artist manipulates the image or images; she improvises them with virtuosity, combining pure impression with an analytical and digital mode. This see-saw motion between the present and the time of creation is shown and creates not only an autonomous composition, but also the ideal scenario of an improbable film; a film with neither beginning, nor end.

La Chute (The Fall, 2005) comprises 60 paintings. It is also the first piece in which the artist worked with a dancer. The sixty images show a fragmented female body which lets itself be carried away by the law of gravity. The physical interaction is represented with violence, the body is left cut to pieces, dismembered and fetishized. The painting is figurative, the frames photographic, while the details confer a savagely abstract aspect to the acid colours. Its narrative content is emotional and feminizing. Its fluid painting flows as if carried away by the force of terrestrial attraction. The dancer's body is a body no longer and seems to dissolve into the surface of the paper.

The same is true for Muro (2006) with its one hundred and twenty paintings, representing the difficulty of a man and a woman to communicate and to interact. Separated by a virtual wall, the dancers strive to meet and conquer each other in an amorous combat. The images flick joltingly by with a staccato rhythm. They seem to stutter with the click of the camera which sets the rhythm for the passing, randomly varying images.

Im Ring (2008) relates the story of a lovers' encounter linked to childhood memories. In it, the paintings are linked to a film made in Super 8 by the filmmaker, Elvira Isenring. As the title Im Ring suggests, it is a narrative which takes place not only in the Berlin metro system (from the German, Ringbahn), but also in a ring (from the German, Im Ring) where fights are held (from the German, ringen um). With its highly charged history, the city of Berlin remains an equivocal place. Urban wandering, sentimental confusion and the proliferation of no-places are still fertile ground for the imagination and become a biotope which the protagonist, a female boxer, seeks to control, marrying its reality with her memories, her desires and her pain. The black and white images and the coloured paintings pass by and collide. They give a rhythm to a mental journey through a succession of shots that the metro stations echo in their turn. They are impressionist situations of the digital age. A voice-over relates and plays with the words, the images, a past emptied of its

meaning, while Alexandra Maurer's painting portrays a scenario which repeats itself and in which the present has irreversibly replaced the past.

SWIM (2008) with its one hundred and thirty paintings was designed for the Loge of the Stadtgalerie in Bern. This immersive space was suited to an aquatic theme, that of the swimming pool. Here one finds a pictorial fluidity which retraces a landscape of origins, exploring through this an experience common to that of the human being, and perhaps expressing its birth and its deliverance.

As for Jump (2007), this work decomposes the movements of an actress jumping on a trampoline. In Espace (2007) – a work integral to a performance by Sandra Amodio entitled Manifestazione and staged the same year at the Théâtre de l'Usine – another actress tries to escape from the stage, but her flight becomes the actual subject of the scenario. The artist seeks to target her protagonists with her camera or to capture them on the surface of the paper, but they all constantly extend beyond their frames. They end up liquefied as though partially excluded from the field of vision. Whether they are perpetually limited like Sisyphean characters or whether they are like projected, visible or invisible objects, they reach an unstable point of equilibrium, creating a sensation of floating and of suspension. Their condition is a combat which oscillates between liberation and existential doubt, between deliverance and imprisonment.

If the question of temporality is unavoidable in Alexandra Maurer's work, her relation to space is equally so, most particularly in her work in situ. She invests the space, places her works into a situation. Her installations – three monitors piled on top of each other for La Chute (The Fall, 2005), an immersive space with three projections for SWIM (2008), or Escape (2007) integrated into a performance entitled Manifestazione – are therefore crucial to an understanding of the work of Alexandra Maurer. They evoke and endlessly reflect an imprisonment and an oppression of the female condition in its relation to the other. Alexandra Maurer seems to dissect, to fetishize and to model her heroines as if she linked them to the archaic fear in the unconsciousness of the patriarchal society. Are the women illustrated by the artist threatened subjects, seeking unrelentingly and tirelessly to extract themselves from a given situation? Or are they merely objects to be looked at, offered as a fetish for visual pleasure, confronting the original anxiety represented by the female body? Is it this highly fascinating ambiguity and this imprisonment of the woman in Jump, Escape, La Chute, SWIM and Im Ring that the artist tries to render in order to deliver her more successfully from this combat?

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