

Oops, i did it again

Towards the end of the nineties, Bret Easton Ellis poured a shower of radioactive confetti onto the fashion crowd with *Glamorama*. In a satirical and bitter roar of laughter, the novel killed the fame and luxury fantasy. Victor Ward, crazy hero, mediocre fashion model, amnesic lover, improbable spy and manipulated terrorist, hangs around in limousines and VIP lounges. Does the round of Versace fashion shows. Avoids Lauren to meet Alison and vice versa. No longer knows what he's talking about. Sinks feverishly into his "pseudo-reality" until the story lapses into macabre and sadistic farce through an accumulation of references, proper nouns, brand names, disjointed conversations between party-goers who've lost the plot, and sweet nothings tossed into the air by exhausted lovers. *Glamorama* is one of those novels where initiation rhymes with intoxication. Ellis slides his characters over a well-oiled but overpopulated and noxious surface that further deepens this surrealist-like and acrobatic writing.

Now, since 1998, Emmanuelle Villard's paintings have been set against this same backdrop. Struck by eccentric droplets and overloaded with colours with glossy reflections, they evoke the tantalising style of the showcases of the entertainment society. This is however a rather ambiguous borrowing. For the cultural industry itself has taken a considerable amount of its showy imagery from the Pop art and Op art repertoire. The shifting geometry of the kings of optical illusion was indeed very quickly taken up by couturiers, fashion designers or graphic designers. To such an extent that all of these are credited with a visual landscape that actually comes from elsewhere. With no hard feelings, contemporary artists cultivate abstraction without claiming to recover its initial, original aspect. Rather they pick up the lines and chromatic ranges, where they are (have got to), where they have infiltrated into the urban, commercial or cultural landscape under the influence of TV, marketing and advertising. They reappropriate this abstraction *part two*, out of it, out of its frame, decked out.

Behind the scenes, the few snaps hurriedly taken by Emmanuelle Villard prove this fairly well: as an amateur photographer, she flirts in the shadow of neon signs, or shoots (into) the confetti that piles up on the pavements around fun fairs at closing time. In short, somewhat crazy motifs, overexposed or out of focus images that are of no interest to the artist other than that they are traces of the mutation of painting. Abstraction is thus widely located outside of its privileged pictorial and historical terrain. It suddenly ventures to put on cruder, saucier, freer airs. As if it had just upped and left, frolicsome and hippyish. In other words, Emmanuelle Villard's painting is fairly "on the road". It's off-

frame painting, changing and eventful. So much so that moving around has become both the artist's work method and aesthetic: the paint is not attached to anything. It drips over the canvas, overflows, unstable and sticky, travelling quickly beyond the edges of the frame. A culture of excess, really *too much*, but nothing very serious either. Neither tormented nor desecrated, the paint simply feigns to miss its target here, like a teenage girl pretending to drop something so she can turn on the charm. A sort of *Oops, i did it again...*

No question indeed of manly materism, but no question either of turning smug and being duped by a Britney Spears, which others might call womanly know-how. Through a surface and mirror effect, Emmanuelle Villard projects a distorted, over-condensed image of the entertainment industry. Her paintings have more to do with grotesque than Abstract Expressionism. Even their size, often compact, likens them to small, cruel caricatures of sequined worlds, saturated with colour. So, one had better cruise camp for this bad taste aesthetic cultivated in the sixties by all the New York and London gay-punk scenes till they just couldn't take any more. Simultaneously a parody of show business and its overdevelopment, simultaneously active soliciting and a big slap in the face, nice and loud, for moderates of all sorts.

So much so that Emmanuelle Villard's painting is not always very beautiful to see. Especially when it leaves the flat space of the canvas to end up bulkily folded or crumpled. And that is where it really shows its pikes, or its claws, or its hackles, one no longer knows just what exactly. After all, it is indeed a question of metamorphosis: the painting transformed into waste, into *Alien*, even if, oddly enough, it's the ghost of Grace Jones in *Frantic*, rather than Sigourney Weaver, that is evoked by the large pink painting bristling with pellets. Because of the pink of course. And the hairdo.

Emmanuelle Villard is therefore on an outrageous slope. A spectacular slope or, why not, since we talk of hyperpower, a hyperspectacular slope. Painting is an art of *mise en scène* and not really an art of composition any more. As a result, Emmanuelle Villard keeps a close watch as to how her painting is exhibited. With a fairly tell-tale habit: she inverts the order of things. The trails that accumulate on her studio floor are suspended at a great height. The graceful bulbs hang high up. When the paint comes down, or seems to run, one's eye should look upwards therefore. The surprise, the interval of a moment, situated no doubt at the intersection of the two, between the top and bottom. But there is something more than just a cunning signposting for the eye in these *mis en scène*: the paintings are hung more

sparsely. By hanging them too high or too few of them, too off-centre or, on the contrary, too in the centre (an entire wall for a tiny painting), one simply emphasises the surrounding empty space, indeed one shows the way to the painting. Which seems to suck in the space and living beings around it, like a black hole. Bringing us back to *Alien*. Or there again to Bret Easton Ellis and the recurring maxim of his first novel, *Less Than Zero*: "*Disappear here*". Same old masochistic story of a whole generation in a state of crisis during the eighties, decadent and wild, retold by the author in *Glamorama*. And fuelled somewhat by Emmanuelle Villard: a skilled vamp, she really gives her painting a hard time and remains haunted by the ghost of its disappearance. All the more reason to lay it on thick?

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