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The Groupe Monceau is very fortunate to have met Noël Pasquier and to have been involved in the preparation and the publishing of this book dedicated to his works. There are many reasons for it.

All those who know this artist appreciate his rich personality, his goodness of heart, his open-mindedness.

Noël Pasquier's values are shared by all the elected representatives of the associated mutual benefit insurance companies of the Groupe Monceau and by their members.

They greatly value his talents as a colourist and a plastic artist, his sense of the volumes and rhythm, the sureness of his drawing; his colour range includes many shades of blue of an incomparable depth. Noël Pasquier does not belong to any school, he invents a universe full of inspiration, oscillating skilfully between figuration and abstraction. But he also has many other talents. He made powerful monumental sculptures, and he shares with his wife Clotilde the passion for transposing and imaging textile compositions made of warm materials and for designing jewels and items on the request of museums. Also a highly skilled musician, Pasquier could have performed miracles in this art too.

Having been chosen by Noël Pasquier to take part in the making of this book gives a rightful sense of pride to the Groupe Monceau.

OPERA APERTA

“in modern texts, the weaving of the codes, the references, the detached records, the anthological gestures, multiplies the written line, not because of some metaphysical appeal but through a combinatorics which opens up in the whole space of drama.”

Here and now, at the very beginning of the 21st century, we also, and perhaps above all, have to take into consideration the relationship we have with the new ways of thinking, feeling, seeing and understanding the world around us. The evolution of the society which goes along with the evolution of science and techniques implies other ways of being. Consequently, the way we consider our present and our future determines, in retrospect, a totally different way of understanding and thinking our history.

What strikes me when I look back at Noël Pasquier's works, which has become considerable, is the surprising and remarkable familiarity the artist fosters with the history of modern and contemporary arts, and consequently, with his art.

Noël Pasquier was born in 1941 and he did not waste time. His creative designs have reached their fullest development and maturity. And we have to take into account from this angle what he was in the last few years in order to understand what are the destiny and characteristics of his art, in order to understand what singularly his work tends to make us discover.

In spring 1995, I visited the exhibition dedicated to Noël Pasquier in the museum of the Navy. I was struck by the scope, the multiplicity and the rich diversity of his work. I do not think any visitor was then able to really assume the global journey of the remarkable set of works which was displayed in this exhibition. I do not mean that not all the visitors were not by turns stopped, seduced, fascinated by such and such painting, tapestry, drawing or sculpture, on the contrary. However, what qualified each piece of work in particular from the creative gesture of the collection (from the whole to the part), called for a knowledge and an open-mindedness towards this knowledge which was too vast to be apprehended during a single visit, however careful it was. And from this point of view, I must say I am greatly indebted to the

artist for accompanying me and enlightening me about all his works displayed there.

One might think it is only natural

that a retrospective or anthological exhibition might tend to disturb and confuse the visitors. But one should visit Noël Pasquier's studios taking into account the multiplicity and diversity of the artist's works in order to understand that, discretely but unquestionably, this

exhibition is different from all the others insofar as, first, I think, it tended to make all the artist's works be the “overture” (Opera aperta) of the creation in progress of a vast Studio. Studio is here to be understood in both literal and figurative meanings, a meaning this word had in the Renaissance (a Studio was the work-room of a painter, his students and his assistants) completed by the whole history of modern art in activity, Pasquier's studio being at any time his work, from the global interaction of spirit and forms of this history.

What is surprising and appealing when watching a collection of works from this artist is unquestionably the variety, the scope and the diversity of the forms, of the formal vocabulary which make up the score and the plastic keyboard of his artistic determination.

Critics (Geneviève Breerette in *Le Monde*) usually emphasised the movement which very naturally seems to drive Noël Pasquier's art from figuration to abstraction and vice versa. It already stresses how easily he considers and treats movements and aesthetic positions which for a long time were arbitrarily antagonistic. More recently, his surprising and non-exclusive familiarity with the Parisian school as well as with Informal art or the New York school were recognised. We must also add his ability to understand the spontaneity and the free opening of a gestural inspiration in the layout of a modular organisation. And, why not, an understanding of the geometric (and sculptural) structures able to assume the three-dimensional characteristic of pictures, of the pictorial technique.

I think in particular of this Sculpture of slate and limestone made at the very beginning of 1998. There is no reason not to suppose that sensitivity and the feeling of nature which have inspired him so many plastic compositions cannot, if I may say

so, convert to the most modern technologies. He readily declares that “the artist of today must be inspired by traditional materials as well as by modern technology”.

Therefore, it is important to emphasise the elements which belong to the culture and the history of modern and contemporary art that Noël Pasquier's work uses and frustrates. But it is also important to remember that his work can in no way be reduced to the various movements and attitudes which characterise this history. According to me, it is essential to note that it is precisely how this work is made up in its contemporaneity, in its time, in its singularity.

If one considers the series of movements, schools and styles, which are unquestionably taken into consideration by Noël Pasquier though he does not remain attached to them (Figuration / Abstract Art / School of New York, etc.), one cannot fail to remark that each of them, no matter how important it is – and even proportionally to its importance – tends to close up more or less dogmatically on itself. But, obviously, according to Noël Pasquier, to “move with times” and to be present, to take place in this early stage of the 21st century, is opening the time to the infinite variety of its possible, to the infinite variety of cultures (national, regional), of images (close and distant), of languages (colloquial and foreign), of worlds (real, virtual and imaginary) which, from now on, constitute the universe of time on the

planetary scale.

And if such a description seems too abstract and too far apart from the naturally playful character of this artist's art, one only has to refer to his work to see how this opening on the virtualities of his own time

becomes clear.

Making monumental and decorative (in the best meaning of the term) works, such as the giant marble mural of the Tour Montparnasse, the 4000sq.m frescoes, the vast painted wall in the TGV station of Rennes, or such-and-such considerable amount of sculptures, indicate an esoteric and dynamic conscience of a man involved in concrete terms in the poetic opening of the display of his universe, of his city. Similarly, the rich and huge collection of tapestries he made, and the paintings which were inspired by an existential experience of the coastal landscape, of the border between land and water, indicate a sensitivity more irritated but not less open, of the same man, towards life and the daily nature of beings and things in their withdrawal.

From one to the other, from the most monumental to the most common, from the public to the private, the work spreads out in an impressive and swarming creativity on the keyboard of the figures, the forms, the styles and the matters (the materials). The warm welcoming, spontaneously kind, it saves for the diversity of the world without any distinction costs it, one may say naturally, to attract and draw forth the sleepy qualities and the imaginative strength of the materials and the techniques which constitute the work, opening to it as it opens to them.

Thus, from the whole to the part (from the whole works to this sculpture Séquence (Sequence), engraved slates, 22x75 cm, 1998, to this painting Les Îles (Islands), mixed technique on canvas, 100x100 cm, 1993, to this textile Enjeu (Stake), 95x143 cm, 1990..., Noël Pasquier's art is inhabited by a source of happiness, a mood and a charm which welcome very spontaneously whoever is willing to welcome it.

“Pasquier, I love the dominating blue – my colour – and the subtle architecture of your compositions. Your work is brilliant. It belongs in silence. I admire it, with no further commentary.”

AN ART IN SEARCH OF THE UNIVERSALITY

Painting is made of dualities, which are both antagonistic and connivent: the light and shade, closeness and remoteness, inside and outside... Pasquier's works are like that, with a dialogue between the sky and the water for instance, or the sea and the sand (it is the name of a tapestry made in 1994) or the leaves and the sun. In that way, the artist comes very naturally within the quattrocentist tradition: the masters had invented

a system based on the alliance/opposition between the sacred and the profane, clarity and mystery, the flesh and the spirit... He comes within it with modern means: there is no need to be an expert to recognise in his work in particular the legacy of lyrical abstraction and abstract landscaping. But Noël Pasquier never was and doubtless never will be a purely abstract painter: even the monumental compositions he excels in, and the ornamental aim of which is clearly assumed, are deep-rooted in reality: above all in that of the shores of Finistère he likes to pace ever since his childhood.

Brittany is his land of origin. His first exhibition took place in Brest in 1965. He regularly goes back there to collect the visions and the creations that nourish his creation. However, Noël Pasquier is not a regionalist painter: a land, an ocean, a culture, a people of the European

far west certainly determine his inspiration, but his painting seems to attain very easily the universality of the world of art.

The artist himself says he enjoyed and struggled drawing and having more than 200 tapestries made, of which some were displayed all over the world. He is not afraid of the monumental and the new technologies either. He painted a whole area of Suresnes (4000 sq.m) on his own, including the roof of a monumental covered street. His signature is engraved on a huge marble mural in the Tour Montparnasse, on two of the very big sculptures planted along the motorways in the French Riviera and in the new TGV train station of Rennes. “I think that the artist of today must be as excited by traditional materials than by modern technology, such as the multimedia and interactive terminals”, he says. Indeed, because it comes within universality, Noël Pasquier’s work has the power to talk to everyone. Now, it is up to us to see it and hear it.

A VITAL GESTURE

We know Noël Pasquier’s characteristics, which are the technical characteristics of talent, that is line and colour. But he also has the affective typology, the feeling, the sentimentality and the great vital energy of emotion. Actually, this is what gives his work a fundamental, an essential, and I would even say a vitalistic diversity.

Let us talk about line in Pasquier’s work: an element of writing, the essential, fundamental and basic support of images. His line has similarities to a basic notion, that of gestural structure.

I do not like to use this term of “line” about Pasquier’s work, because, really, his graphical intervention – his mode of writing, precisely – occurs in a state of mind, in a mood, if I may say so, totally different from that of standard pictorial writing, by a standard drawer.

Asserting his writing is, in this artist, truly a matter of free and structural gestuality. All his work determines itself from this all-out gestural freedom; and this diversity reflects precisely the huge variety and the very wide scope of formal possibilities.

In Pasquier, the gesture is pulling out, and rubbing, too, like in the series of dynamic tar tracks on a plastic sheet which characterises the speed of the hand on the surface of the sheet.

In works that look more complex, works that we may call more “constructed” canvasses, this basic and fundamental gestuality occurs in the horizontal stratification of the coloured surfaces, which is characterised precisely by a juxtaposition of different horizons inside the same pictorial space.

Another element of this structural gestuality: a whole series of Pasquier’s works appear a real scattering of modular elements. To use a more simple or vernacular metaphor, the horizontal stratification works have similarities to the builder’s gesture, whereas the disseminated works remind us of the sower’s.

Pasquier casts the free gestuality, which is the main characteristic of the Paris informal and the American action-painting in the 1950’s, into its pictorial context and into works that offer a more built and fuller area. This free gestuality performs precisely like an action phenomenon, that is in the meaning of de-construction and de-structuring of the volumes.

Pasquier’s work illustrates this poetic vitality of the pictorial gesture which is equivalent in painting to automatic writing in surrealist literature.

I do not mean that Pasquier refers to the surrealists’ imagination: his imagination is more basic and fundamental, it is essential, referring to natural elements – the sea, the sky, the

water, in Brittany in particular – but also to the vitality of the earth, its vehemence, to the dreams of immensity and the dreams of the will.

And this affective and sentimental panorama certainly determines the artist's chromatic range.

There are two main areas of chromatic sensitivity in Pasquier: on the one hand, there is the sentimental blue, the blue of liberty in a free space, the blue of the sea, of the infinite in the light; and on the other hand, obviously a much more tectonic reference, there are the colours of the earth, the different shades of ochre, orange, black, which tangibly represent the idea of the rooting of the vital impulse in the created form, the "Vulcanian forges" for instance or the great metaphor of poetry in the will of the creative act.

Pasquier's sculpture comes within the scope of the inside logic and the direct extension of his pictorial gestuality. His sculptures, which are made of various materials, ranging from stone to mosaic or metal, appear as real carved volumes made of assembled and structured elements.

In fact, Pasquier's sculptures and arrangements are like gestures, or an assembly of gestures in three dimensions. And it is precisely this structural and fundamental importance of gestuality which is to be found in Pasquier's public works of art.

In Pasquier, monumentality is of gestural origin and essence. In his big sculpture called *Le Roi des poissons* (The King of the Fish), in Sanary, which is made of stone and mosaic, the structure of the fish and of the other elements appears like the fixing of a gesture in the impetus of the fish, and this sculpture holds the charm of a giant Provençal Christmas figurine.

This sort of stoppage of time on a dynamic position creates the internal monumentality of Pasquier's works of public art, and we remain in the logical result of the operational structure of his language.

Other examples of his art refer to the same gestuality. In particular, the *Totems*, in Bagneux, a row of cylindrical pillars in enamelled metal, the repetitive setting of which creates a real animation both physical and visual.

In another example of public art, the *Cigale* (The Cicada), in Saint-Maximin, installed along the northern part of the motorway to the Riviera, the problem is quite different. This giant insect seems to be treated with the maximum descriptive realism. In fact, the volumes seem more dynamic owing to the linear structure that surrounds them: the threadlike elytra, which are meant to animate with the wind and emit the famous chirr of the cicadas. We still remain in the scope of the gestuality of the artist's writing.

This writing of the free gesture explains the ease and the variety of the materials used by Pasquier. In the two-dimensional domain, he uses canvas, paper, plastic, fabric and enamel, always with this form of facility in the making and the feeling of the message which is certainly due to an enormous vital power.

A great number of various materials are used to make the sculptures too, and this diversity reflects once again the idea of volumes engraved in the scope of gestural writing. Pasquier uses slate, marble, mosaic, brass, bronze, and all sorts of metal.

We have seen in his work a sort of panorama of an expressive approach linked to the vital intensity of the physical gesture, a gesture which cannot be codified into a writing form but which expresses itself impulsively and expansively.

Pasquier's writing is naturally and spontaneously structural. This explains how his painted forms are expressed very intensely in textile art or tapestry. Instead of losing their vital strength in the textile transposition, very often his images are implied by the own substance of the material and they express all its physical possibilities.

I think that Noël Pasquier's exhibition at the Hôtel de la Monnaie in Paris represents very precisely, indisputably and I am tempted to say almost systematically this fundamental element of diversification, diversity, variety, change in the poetic activity of the painter. This change and this diversity in the supports express a great love of life.

And Pasquier loves life, he loves it like a primordial and essential reference which motivates and justifies the extent of his creative vigour.

Pasquier's gesture is the signature of his love for life.