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A corps perdu
Corinne Rondeau

Claire Chesnier's works are very strange.

You approach them, sure you'll recognize paint. These are colored inks. There's no thickness, no discernible variations in surface treatment. The tones are warm and cold, luminous and dark, but the word "gradient" cannot be applied. They are like close-ups of landscapes without any visible detail. Misty morning or evening skies; vaporous faraway places conjure up memories of Romantic painting that has lost its subject while retaining its sensibility. Or perhaps the memory of Monet's Water Lilies, with only an expanse of water remaining. What is given is what is lost, and in the first moment, nothing can be qualified or named. When the horizon, the shore and the illusion are removed, the temptation to say - to say what it is - is also suspended.

On the very large sheet, no traces of water or brushstrokes. The hand that has passed over and over again, dozens of times in fact, is set back, as in the art of glazing. By taking possession of the vertically laid paper, the artist gives way to color. Through subtle interventions, she lets it choose to spread, mingle, intensify, fade, illuminate or darken, "waiting" for it to (un)finish its gesture.

The retreating body controls the water leaking from the bottom of the sheet. The color stops either at the immaculate edges of the paper, which we perceive as a cutout of form, or, as in the latest works, at the material limit of the sheet, with no further reserve of white. This transition from the application of fragmentary color to the totality of the sheet is a way of abandoning the desire for a circumscribing gesture, leaving full power to the mysterious invisible aggregates, abandoning everything to the support, opening up the surface: there is nothing but "extended" color. A second moment, and a paradox, in which the disrupted will withdraws the last gesture of composition visible in the cut: where what is lost is the site of the production of a gesture.

Sometimes, at the bottom of the sheet, the concentration and sedimentation of pigments appears dark, with such intensity that the gaze in turn falls away, like laying down one's arms. No need to look beyond. By working with trickles of water, in a silent struggle against gravity, without ostensible effort, without letting the technique show, the artist reveals his virtue: discretion.

What has fallen to the bottom of the sheet is the time deposit of the gaze. A time that silently makes colors. The gaze doesn't run aground, it drowns in the obscure margin of dispersions and mixtures. Sensitivity either passes through or does not pass through, collects itself or not, it depends. Nothing is done to retain it, and we could easily forget these works if we didn't linger on them, indications of a temporality that imposes itself without authority. What insists and retains then is a rhythm, and in the repetition of formats, the unity of each. These leaves have the effect of foggy windows or veils, with no gesture summoned to unmask or tear out any depth behind them. By spreading out, as a puddle spreads over the ground, the surface reaches the height of the ancient lesson that there is nothing behind appearances, that we must renounce things that are fleeting and seductive. When the eye finally reaches the limits of color, the surface becomes a question.

What did you want to see in the time of a verticalized gaze, as ink slips into water, and you in this gravitational descent where you regain height, the concrete height of your standing body? The third moment, when the lost gesture rises up, the superb presence of absence, a few more contrasting lines, discreet verticals held firm by the horizontal movements of the brush.

One look is enough to convince oneself that, between works hung on picture rails and those on horizontal pedestals, Claire Chesnier asks little more than to raise and lower one's eyes: to accept surfaces that unfold in the time of a pause. And if all we're doing is gliding over the images of an era of

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indefatigable proliferation, the very surface of these works plays host to an interruption, offering up the question of desire and illusions in glossy, satin-finished reflections that have the matt presence of mirrors that no longer return an image.

What did you want to see? Perhaps the lost subject of these magnified details of absent landscapes is the viewer. It's as if depth lay before the works, lodged in the unfathomable expectation of seeing. The question arises again with two works lying horizontally, deep as if bent over a well. As deep as a grave. And this immense sleeping people invites us not only to contemplate its immobility, but to take in its silence. Why do we continue to look where there is nothing to see? To reconnect with a vigilant attention that would tear apart the inexhaustible vanity of words, and what remains of our lost bodies. To be the time for a look at what doesn't lie about being only here.

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