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Introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition at the Stadler Gallery in Paris.

Antonio Saura

ROBERT SMITH

Few are recent works which succeed, as much as those of Robert Smith, in fixing a personal universe. In the constant objectification of forms specific to contemporary art, the appearance of a work, of such an extreme subjectivity and so freely produced, constitutes an unusual and encouraging phenomenon. This work was conceived within the framework of certain premises of contemporary art - precisely those where expressiveness and the unfinished dominate, implying the liberation from traditional systems of iconography and composition. Difficult to fit in and very far from the periodicity of fashions, this work offers us an unprecedented iconographic system strongly sensitized by some of the key myths of our time.

With a freshness of execution reminiscent of Kandinsky's first watercolors, Smith's paintings contain to start with similar possibilities of freedom: the surface of the work is seen as an empty space "that must be filled with something" and in which the captures "will be gradually deposited". The occupation of this two-dimensional surface - restored to an original state of purity which excludes any limit - implies in the case of Robert Smith, a rich variety of solutions. The elements composing the iconography of this personal occupation relate indiscriminately to the dreamlike universe, to immediate reality and to lived experience. These works belong to the world of "reflecting mirrors" rather than that of pictorial experiences.

In some works lines appear which create perspectives, suggest interiors and rectangular objects, composing structures which fix and center surfaces. Sumptuous beds, mirrors placed on the ground, empty swimming pools or platforms arranged for some ceremony constitute the furniture which occupies, unique and mysterious, these ascetic sanctuaries and gives rise to situations of absence and premonition. Generally, it is the centered perspective as well as the voluntary symmetry which dominates, without however the shadow of stiffness, in these works as well as in another set of paintings built with accumulations of geometric elements in their lower part or else conceived like geological sections. This fixation is not opposed to a constant which emerges in all these works: the presence of the world flowing from nature and the lightness of the dream. We would like to insist on this, because in these works of such a free style it is almost always the rectangle, the perspective indicated or the photographic cut that establishes a kind of base in the face of chaos and evanescence.

The entire production of this artist appears to be dominated by the obsession with the vegetal being and the fundamental dynamic of life: hatching, growth, metamorphosis. Some paintings show extreme oppositions between antagonistic elements, offering us a poetic and uninterrupted communication between harshness and morbidity between what is clear and

what blurs the fog. In others, the void of surfaces is populated with myriads of "vital" particles as if it were a question of a floating occupation of energetic possibilities. The cubes start to bloom strangely or appear invaded by snowflakes suspended as in the glass balls of children, or twigs or protozoa, A spell emanates from biological phenomena: a whole mysterious and underground world arises between the crevasses to fertilize, ferment, flow sap and proliferate, in a release of sweet energy. The presence of coats of grass on the floors or on the beds makes synthetic interiors disturbing, and the altars of the sanctuary remain solemnly veiled by beams of hairy vegetation erected like candelabra. A world of phallic plants is manifold in endless meadows and even "inside mirrors" rise marvelous grasses.

A set of recent works translates the abandonment of any static attitude to leave the path largely open to the dynamism of forms, disintegrated signs in a fluctuating and weightless world. As if it was the abandonment of the comfortable maternal sanctuary, perfect and elusive in search of the universe of opposing forces, in contrast; from the world of unlimited affectivity, to the "true landscape of the subconscious" where the mirages of reason are formed.

Complex and contradictory presences, of various origins - signs, objects, beings - float without weight, as if springing from an underground well shaken by a world in formation, mobile and without contours. Chance captures in the mysterious deposit, memorization of the vestiges of souvenirs, traces of the instant. The image brought to us by a good number of recent works is precisely that of a coherent and lucid arrangement of this material, progressively extracted and selected from lived experience, arrangements associated with elements due to chance caused by pictorial action. Accumulation similar to that of life itself, a process similar to the transformation of the inhabited place: a world of fragile things delicately and humorously populates the ethereal atmosphere of these paintings. sometimes built with materials of humble origin with various techniques applied with rigor and clarity.

Faced with the overwhelmed journey of the senses through a world of violence, imbalance and disharmony; in front of the crisis of imagination of current art, the work of Robert Smith, with its romantic and strong pantheist accent, represents above all an act of love and affirmation.

It is also a fruitful "retreat" towards the "primary mirror", as an adolescent vision, uncontaminated and affective, of a long walk around the subject's life. "Autobiography": such could be the title of the entire work of this artist who voluntarily remains on the fringes of the world where he was formed. Perhaps also "Journal": its pages retaining the imprint of the immediate reality, of resonances of what happens or of what is called, signs which are sufficient to suggest and to disturb.

A.S.

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