

The Water Diviner and the Kangaroo

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In 1997 I invited a friend to play a game of chess with me on canvas. I painted the pieces in their starting position on the chessboard with acrylic paint. Then, as the game went on, I moved them by repainting the squares. Each new layer covered the previous one, with the paint getting thicker in places like a palimpsest. When my opponent withdrew, I submitted this unfinished game, *Chess*, for the Diplôme National d'Arts Plastiques. This piece put in place a modus operandi which can be found in all my work. It is at the meeting point between painting and chess.

I try to build bridges between disciplines and acting as a go-between suits me well. Venturing into entomology, literature or the new technologies enables me to find new forms but this cross-disciplinary approach also allows me to take advantage of art's porous nature, of its ability to move between different fields. For an exhibition on boxing, I make *Kangaroo*: I fought against a jigsaw puzzle, a solitary and autocratic game with only one solution, whose pieces I coerced into fitting together to construct an image. I feel an affinity with artists which offer another take on reality, with the strange worlds of Julio Cortázar, Witold Gombrowicz, Henry James (*The Figure in the Carpet*) or David Lynch.

With each painting, drawing, collage, installation or photograph I attempt to find the most accurate answer to a question. When is a piece of art finished? At what point do we start to see an image? How to rekindle an artwork's aura? In the beginning is inquisitiveness: attracted by a material, an object, I set up a challenge, I put in place a system which will guide me through a process of hypotheses and experimentation, without knowing in advance whether it will bear fruit or not. I relate to Jonathan Monk or Gérard Gasiorowski's conceptual yet playful approaches: the strategy comes before the art-making process.

I cannot imagine working without introducing some form of constraint, without game rules, hence my liking for pataphysics' bizarre and nonsensical connections. The rules are my art's DNA. I subject every artwork in the making to a series of controlled experiments. For example: painting the same image on both sides of a transparent surface and getting a third one where the two cross; connecting 6331 dots without any of the lines going over a number; drawing an image on erasers, then rubbing it off, re-drawing it and erasing it again until it looks worn; shuffling the six tiles making up a painting so that none ends up next to its rightful neighbour. I invite the viewer to play with me through enigmas, word and image games. How can s/he walk on the Moon? By painting the Moon's surface as a trompe l'oeil on the soles of *Chaussures*. My work is a playing field.

Surprising myself is the cornerstone of my system. To be surprised is to show a kind of innocence. I wipe the slate clean and enjoy the unexpected. In the *Zahorí* paintings for example, I go in search of images like a water diviner and let one stop me without knowing what the next one will be. I try to lose control over the artwork I produce. With modular pieces like #361 or *MAGA*, it is impossible to see everything at the same time. I am not able to grasp them in their entirety, something escapes me. What is at stake in my work is to achieve a vital, life-affirming tension.