



Michel MOUFFE (°1957, Brussels)

Grand Détachement, 2014

Mixed media on canvas

366 x 183 cm

Exhibition

2017: *Michel Mouffe*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, Wijnegem, Belgium, 18 May - 19 August.

Publication

J. Benzakin, M. Mouffe, *Michel Mouffe - Alphabet*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery and AsaMer, Wijnegem, Belgium, 2017, p. 120-121.

Michel Mouffe (Brussels, 1957) explores the foundations of painting by challenging its limits. As he uses space to establish a dialogue, Mouffe's paintings are not just flat. An iron frame underneath the canvas shapes the surface, giving the work a sculptural character. Through a contrast of surfaces, the background becomes the foreground. The subtle protuberances emerging from behind introduce the curve as a new element in the space of the canvas. The mystery of the abstract, rounded shape attracts the eye, and becomes the motif. A result of the integration of sculpture in the surface is that Mouffe's works become an in-between. This duality of depth versus flatness is repeated in his use of paint. A lot of different colours can be distinguished in each work, but only from up close. The coloured surface is at once opaque and transparent due to the artist's technique. Several layers of diluted paint are applied while the canvas is horizontal, making for a translucent surface that gives a fragility that relates to life, and that reminds us that Mouffe sees painting as a theatre for the *condition humaine*.

***Michel Mouffe - Alphabet* is the artist's first comprehensive monograph. Conceived as the sequence of letters in the alphabet, this book gives an insight into Michel Mouffe's body of work through a series of writings and conversations he shared with independent curator Joel Benzakin.**

Excerpt from the book *Michel Mouffe - Alphabet*, p 182:

What happens on the hidden side of the canvas? Does the stretcher have a hidden meaning?

Above all, it's a presence that could be considered the subject (in the traditional sense) of the painting,

the element of drawing in the painting.

Initially, I made the stretchers myself. In doing so, a certain consciousness of the materiality of the object painting appeared: a canvas and a frame - themselves supported by a cross in the centre that stiffens the whole. With these first stretchers, it became clear to me that this wooden cross could help me create the motif of my painting.

From the very start, I took into account a certain number of specific peculiarities of painting, because painting was the domain I wanted to explore - though at the time the dominant view was that painting was close to death or dead already.

I believed, on the contrary, that painting was possible, especially if one departed from its specific characteristics. I thought there were no more spaces to be conquered in the flatness of the painting, unless one took a more conceptual approach... I felt it was fundamental to proceed differently by involving the stretcher - the hidden side of the painting. It was also crucial to rethink that which had fascinated me in the Flemish Primitives, namely the transparency of the glaze, the way in which the background can return to the surface and illuminate the colours. I wanted to draw inspiration from them, not figuratively, or by trying to tell a story, but departing from the codes of the paintings themselves, from that which may loom up from the pigments and the construction of the support.

These tensions, specific to my work, are never present as such, but they are a part of the play of the colours and the different layers that are superposed on the surface of my paintings. They both affirm and deny what the surface of the canvas suggests. These processes help to achieve the result that makes it possible to project the painting towards the gaze of the spectator, while at the same time, it attains a centrifugal and centripetal effect. It allows the eye to fix on these tensions or to wander towards the edges of the canvas, like a wave that moves back and forth.

Everything in the composition of my paintings relates to their back and their front - it's the result of opposite movements.

Where there's red, I put green; where there's green, I put red; where there's a grid, I fill the holes, and when they're filled, I open them... It's this combination of opposites that helps to unveil the intrinsic qualities of these "objects".

It's true that these "protuberances" might be interpreted as allusions to sensual forms, but to me, they are a far-off expression, a horizon lost in the whole and an integral part of it.

It's often said that I am a monochrome painter, whereas on closer inspection, it's obvious that the opposite is true.

Selected Bibliography

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