

2020

Christian Bonnefoi, June 2020

When Light Sees the Light of Day

Light, its radiance and its movement, had long since imposed itself as the subject of painting. It ran along the edges of Delft ceramic vases, passed through glasses of transparent drinks, seemed to take pleasure in lingering in the hollows of shining fish scales before falling onto a tiled floor to dilute itself in the water that a maid was pouring out to polish the ground; from the energetic rubbing it regained vigour to shake itself off and rejoin the sky through the opening of a window, never closed to it since the glass is like its flesh.

That was the main subject of Flemish painting, but one could also say that it was the whole of painting, the all of painting, its very reality, which is crossed through, transparency and above all movement, the movement that tirelessly shifts the lines, with apologies to the poet.

This light, after giving itself up to the endless play of mirrors; after multiplying the brilliance, reflections and sparkle that its oil glaze contained within it, an entirely new technique; after so well modulating the forms and colours of objects that painting no longer needed to resort to great battles and religious dramas, since its substance, made wholly of diaphanous air, was sufficient unto itself, a spectacle entirely devoted to the tale of its own adventures, fulfilling with its movement alone the desire to see; after crossing the frame of the window and plunging into the infinite blue, seeming to lose itself there, forgetful and leaving behind the universe of painting that it had nevertheless created so magnificently; this light then remains as if suspended above history until the astonishing conversion and mutation which, from Cézanne to Mondrian, will allow it to acquire a new body, new functions, and to wander this time in the thickness of the pictorial plane, vaster than the old skies.

At the risk of bordering on tautology, I would say that at that moment light came into the day — light seeing the light of day, one might say — forgetting its former glory as a dispenser of effects, to incarnate itself in the pictorial matter itself and in the deep knowledge of the devices and procedures that it tirelessly invents in order to hold off what gesture, talent and virtuosity alone do not allow one to attain.

Marc Renard belongs to this history.

His large, strongly structured formats, with powerful colours, are not the result of an artistic “expression”, of a spontaneity that would entrust the fate of his paintings to labour and know-how alone. They are the product of a strange crossing of different approaches and different techniques, managed, certainly, by a subject, but one so involved in the movement that his place and his authority are constantly called into question: the painter is also a material of his own painting, the equal of a gesture or a patch of colour, once he has decided to let light take the lead, pass through the layers to reach a ground – which one? – that is never the last; then come back from the verso to the recto, bringing to the surface a part of the obscure, mixing day with night, for the brief time of a glance, like the one once cast on a windowpane where the mist on the inside forms a magnifying glass or, like milky hoarfrost, blurs the landscape on the other side, on the side of exteriority.

For the painted thing is terribly alive. It took a long time to trick the eye in order to find the reality of what lies underneath.

This is what Marc Renard's paintings tell us about.

CHRISTIAN BONNEFOI, June 2020

Doctor of Art History (Sorbonne) and author of numerous articles and writings.

As an Artist, he is one of the leading representatives of contemporary French art.

The Pompidou Centre already gave him a retrospective in 2009.

Text taken from the catalogue Extraordinary Flat Book, Marc Renard, 2020