



ALL OVER NYMPHÉAS

INTERVIEW WITH EMMANUEL EGGERMONT

The title of your new creation draws a link between two “moments” in the History of paintings: Money and his *Water Lilies* and All-over painting, a style that appeared in the postwar period and is still used today, and which consists in covering a canvas in an almost uniform manner, without edges or centre, thus rejecting the very concept of backdrop. Jackson Pollock was one of its most famous practitioners. But it can also be the repetition of a motif, as can be seen in Claude Viallat’s paintings. Can you tell us more about how you work and what your conception of dance is?

Emmanuel Eggermont: In each of my shows, I also use one or more artistic references as inspiration for the scenography. The idea isn’t to reproduce a work on stage, but to draw inspiration from an artist’s working principles. In my new creation, Monet’s *Water Lilies* were a trigger both for the scenography and for the very conception of the show. The idea of using the pond in his Giverny garden as sole motif for over 250 paintings is a fascinating artistic choice. To draw inspiration from those *Water Lilies* is to ask oneself how Monet came to create that series, moving “despite himself” from figuration to abstraction. It’s also appreciating the influence his work had on some modern painters—including the practitioners of All-over. In some of his works, the water lilies are not as clearly delineated, textures change, shapes and colours break free from reality as revealed by the light. Without our realising it, this limitless garden, which continues beyond the frame, absorbs us completely. Subject and object become one; the gesture of the painter becomes as important as the painting itself. Those considerations are my take away from All-over painting, and what gave me direction for this creation.

At the heart of your reflection, the concept of motif turns out to be essential. How do you explore it through movement?

I approach it as a figurative or abstract pictorial element, as the subject of a series. Its repetition creates a dynamic and makes possible new readings of the whole. If the concept of motif can be found in painting, with Claude Money, Keith Haring, or Claude Viallat, it exists in other fields as well: music, textile, architecture... and, of course, choreography. Every show is for me an opportunity to learn about artistic practices or a historical context. Anything can become a motif: our work consists in isolating motifs that had a deep impact on who we are today. If I were to play with words, I’d say it has something to do with our *motive*, our reason for doing something. To create *All Over Nymphéas*, I asked my team what was essential for them, what made them who they are or changed them, on the fundamental impulses that guide their movements. Other references started appearing and guided the performers in the definition of choreographic motifs. We then built a very rich “palette” of choreographic motifs, both in terms of style and depth, each of them linked to a sensorial and essential experience.

Your show is characterised by perpetual movement, from the gestures of the bodies to the floor made of geometric shapes that change over time. The costumes, sometimes worn, sometimes left behind, are also part of those metamorphoses...

I think dancers are on the same level as choreography, music, or costumes. Each element serves the show at the same level—which could also be seen as a link to some All-over artists. In this show, there is no room for a performer’s ego. They all exist within and as part of their environment. Often, when a scene offers a powerful image centered on a dancer, its lifespan, its impact, is very short. We have to accept that the show will continue to transform. The same is true of an object or a costume. A lot of ideas don’t even make it to the end of the creative process, their relevance evaporated before reaching that point. *All Over Nymphéas* is like a fragmented garden in constant evolution where all sorts of metamorphoses take place one after the other.

Isn't there, in your group shows, the expression of a desire to invent a community, sometimes with an urban dimension, which comes close to representing a cosmopolitan "fauna"?

In my shows, I always want to question our capacity to communicate and build together. With that in mind, I always invite collaborators from widely different backgrounds but with beautiful human qualities. And during the creative process, this precious time we spend working and sharing together turns out to be just as important as the show itself. The urban dimension is real; I'm surrounded by it on a daily basis. I see it as a gateway for the spectators who aren't familiar with contemporary dance. It quickly turns into a vector towards a more poetic dimension, which aims to carry them much further...

***All Over Nymphéas* also plays mischievously with the border between posture, sculptural spirit, and pose, like a game between being and seeming...**

Humour plays an important part in my work. It offers balance and allows me to have more dramatic moments. I do play with the limits and borders between style, moving from an image or a sensation to its opposite very quickly. The idea is to bring nuance, to take a step back, in order to be fully aware of what's happening on stage—and to feel free to go much further. This duality between being and seeming once again brings to mind the *Water Lilies*, this garden of Eden which seems like it was always there but was actually built from the ground up by that great gardener Monet. There's always a troubling link between the original and the artificial. We all build who we are based on deep experiences and references, but also on other, more superficial ones.

Your writing as a choreographer is also largely inspired by plastic arts: Soulages's *Outrenoir* in *Polis* or Kandisky's thoughts on white in *Aberration*. What other fields inspire you when creating a show?

I do have this sensitivity to plastic arts, which can be seen in each of my works. In *Polis* (2017), we questioned the creation and organisation of the "city." On stage, the show unfolds in a monochrome of black which is a reference to Pierre Soulages, to his structured layers of black and luminous matter. *Aberration* (2020) explored personal reconstruction through the study of the chromatic field of the colour white. The graphic and plastic dimension of a show acts like a through line that the spectator can grab onto to travel through the choreographic world I've created. While I like to offer the audience several points of entry, including this plastic dimension, I make sure to put it into perspective with the quality and diversity of the dance, the humanity of the performers, the emotion that arises from the link to music, the diverse references... Other fields of action also influence my work: fashion, architecture, history (which was the basis for my solo *Strange Fruit*, inspired by archives recently brought to light by a historian), etc. Music also plays an essential part in my creative process. For the past few years, composer Julien Lepreux has stood alongside me for this chromatic and choreographic study. But my biggest source of inspiration remains the performers themselves. Each new project teaches me further how to open my eyes to the other.

Are you trying to invent a dance that would be a total art in which choreography, music, and plastic materials upend our conception of space and perception?

I think that the main challenge in my work is indeed to question our perception of our environment, of space and time, in order to explore our relationship to the other, to their body, their thought, their history. Any medium can be used if the goal is to reveal our capacity to communicate beyond social and cultural backgrounds, as long as you do so with sincerity and without shying away from beauty. It's a vision of dance I shared with German choreographer Raimund Hoghe, who passed away in the spring of 2021, and to whom I've dedicated this show. *All Over Nymphéas* was conceived like an invitation to the other, to shape together an evanescent, graphic and poetic landscape, a garden like that of Monet's *Water Lilies*, this hypnotic Eden in constant movement where the original and the artificial become one.

Interview conducted by Marc Blanchet