

THE EXHIBITION

In the beautiful *église des Célestins*, Guillaume Bresson displays paintings he made specifically with this place in mind, as well as older ones. Based on his immediate surroundings, but also on elements from various sources reorganised on the canvas, his work, beyond its apparent naturalistic innocence, is mostly fictional. After the long period of deconstruction of the medium that was modernism, then its reconstruction with postmodernism, painting is reinventing itself and trying to find new paths towards its future, planning its “next move.” A genre in which the ordinary and the extraordinary, the crude and the sublime, the autodidact and the classically-trained are on an equal footing. This is why Guillaume Bresson’s paintings are like so many strange narrations, at once close to and far from us: life-size portraits of barelegged and K-Way-wearing characters, homeless people or prophets of an uncertain future maybe; surreal, quasi-antique battle scenes in which groups of youths fight in a fast food restaurant; or the portrait of a teenager grabbing his helmet before getting on his motorcycle, bathed in the morning light, that of renewal.

GUILLAUME BRESSON

Born in Toulouse in 1982, Guillaume Bresson lives and works in Paris. His work has been shown in many exhibits in France and abroad, such as in *Dynasty* in the Palais de Tokyo in 2010 and at the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris in 2011; *Lumière Noire* at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe in 2013; *La Belle Peinture II*, at the French Institute of Bratislava, Slovakia; or in 2015, in *Desdémone, entre désir et désespoir*, at the Arab World Institute in Paris. He is represented by the gallery Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, and accompanied by Alain Berland, artistic adviser for the exhibition in the *église des Célestins*. His work, inspired by the great tradition of figurative narrative painting, is based on a brilliant oscillation between an apparent desire for visual realism and a contemplative ideal. From the Toulouse archways to the strange circular shopping centre of his neighbourhood, from the fast food restaurant around the corner to his own kitchen, from the bodies of his friends to those of his family members, his painting feeds on what surrounds him. That being said, Guillaume Bresson isn’t a realist painter, nor is he a painter of everyday life. His body of work builds a complex and imaginary temporality, in which the past reinvents the present of painting.

INTERVIEW WITH GUILLAUME BRESSON

Back in 2006, your first paintings surprised their audience. Your work could be described as belonging to the tradition of visual realism. Those first paintings showed night scenes in urban landscapes, in which youths violently fought one another, in a chiaroscuro style, with powerful contrasts between light and shadow. Nowadays, you mostly paint day scenes and isolated, static characters, with much more nuanced contrasts. How did all those changes come about?

Guillaume Bresson: My work simply evolved with my life. It happened slowly, and wasn't the result of any prior decision. The fight scenes were a reflection of my environment as a teenager in Toulouse. The atmosphere could seem violent but had more to do with games, with energy; a sort of manly camaraderie that I most of all perceived as choreography. I worked on those scenes by inviting my friends to my workshop, asking them to wear their everyday clothes. I had them pose for me, then I photographed them and transposed those images onto the canvas. Meanwhile, as an art student, I assiduously attended a drawing and modelling class taught by a sculpture professor. That gave me an intimate understanding of the structure of bodies and of their pictorial representation. I also discovered all sorts of art forms and traditions, from all sorts of different eras. But unlike many of my classmates, I didn't understand classical painting as belonging only to the past, as a part of history. I saw in it a visual presence particularly relevant in its form. And even though I also did a lot of more experimental and looser painting, I decided to focus on figurative painting, which I saw as an infinite space where I could tell stories and ask questions. There followed a natural break with my original background that happened gradually. The spirit and energy of popular cultures, of hip hop and graffiti, were enriched by a much wider culture. I started working with different models, from more diverse social backgrounds, and photographing older, lonelier people. I started using a lighter colour scheme; I believe there is an inextricable link between a subject and how you treat it. Today, I'm more likely to work on colours than I am on light. I have to admit, I've used the technique of the chiaroscuro so much that it hardly surprises me anymore. I also read a lot of theory, which is a constant influence on the way I work.

Your works are eloquent, in that they tell stories without having to use words. There is a narrative dimension to them, but they are also richly polysemous and mysterious, even those scenes that seem the most precise and realistic.

My paintings aren't supposed to be speeches or essays about some issue. They are more like symptoms, moments, or hypotheses that I put to the test at the same time as my relationship to the world changes as I grow older and more mature. Classical painters most often worked for sponsors who asked them to interpret a specific story and to represent it using a specific pictorial form. My creative process is always ongoing, my paintings aren't based on specific references, there is always a sense of suspense. I want to break away with narrative ties by offering several interpretative options. I work by subtracting what I feel is unnecessary, so that the event I'm depicting can't be easily identified. So as to avoid univocity, I don't give my paintings names and

I associate works in different media that seem to have little in common to create polyptychs and give rise to multiple stories and tensions. I sometimes repeat the same figure within a single work to do away with the unity of time and create a rhythm, a scansion. If I try to make an analogy to writing, I would say I'm trying to be a poet rather than a novelist.

Your last exhibit, in the Nathalie Obadia gallery in Paris, contained many meditative, pared-down, even elliptical works. Those characteristics are often associated with melancholy, a sentiment that is always absent from your work. Would you agree that your paintings are silent but intense?

I mistrust words, I like silent paintings better. It's always been my goal. I'm trying to get closer to it, but painting is a very long path. I take elements out of the physical world to put them back into an abstract, geometrical space. I'm building a space some see as metaphysical, but if it is, there is no quest for transcendence behind it. That is also why I can paint things as prosaic as a football, a motorcycle helmet, sports clothes, a car, a construction crane, or a water tower, that I'll then very consciously place alongside lonely figures standing among cold and grey concrete buildings. I know it can seem strange. This industrial material surrounds me, since I live and work in a Paris neighbourhood that is overwhelmingly mineral. Buildings play a large part in my work at the moment. Sometimes they are at the source of the action, sometimes it is bodies that describe or create those spaces. I always try to paint things taken from my everyday life, to organise them within the space of the canvas, mixing the touch of the painter with photographic coldness.

The very specific light you use in your paintings plays a large part in this idea that they are silent. It brings the space of the canvas together. How do you create this effect?

In my latest works, I have tended to use a morning light to create a space of possibilities, of new beginnings, that of the beginning of the day. It's a key element in my work as a painter. I bathe all the elements of a painting in the same light to create a unity of place. It can be hard to do, since those elements come from different places, aren't necessarily lit the same way. I recreate it on the canvas so that everything is bathed in a homogenous light and to avoid the heterogeneous effect collage would create. And since you sometimes have one character accomplishing several different actions, it produces an effect of strangeness, the paradoxical movement of a cinematic sequence within a painting. Again, this is something that happens intuitively, without having conceptualised it. I don't work with conceptual categories, the creative process comes first.

Interview conducted by Alain Berland / Translation Gaël Schmidt-Cléach

THE PAINTINGS

Untitled, 2009-2014
Oil on canvas
203 x 278 cm
Marcel Brient collection, Paris

Untitled, 2013
Oil on canvas
26 x 39 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2013
Pencil and painting on paper
56 x 38 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
30 x 50 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
122 x 240 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
122 x 250 cm
Lebois-Albertini collection, Paris

Untitled, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
122 x 195 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
153 x 198 cm
Private collection, Paris

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas
195 x 85 cm
Guillaume Bresson's collection
Courtesy Gallery Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas
195 x 130 cm
Guillaume Bresson's collection
Courtesy Gallery Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas
36 x 24 cm
Guillaume Bresson's collection
Courtesy Gallery Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas
39 x 17 cm
Guillaume Bresson's collection
Courtesy Gallery Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

Untitled, 2015
Oil on canvas
37 x 25 cm
Guillaume Bresson's collection
Courtesy Gallery Nathalie Obadia,
Paris/Brussels

AND...

EXHIBITION

Patrice Chéreau, un musée imaginaire: an oil on canvas by Guillaume Bresson will be displayed at the Collection Lambert / from 11 July to 11 October, from 11:00 am to 7:00 pm

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69th
EDITION

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In order to bring you this edition, over 1,750 people, artists, technicians, and organisational staff, have worked tirelessly and enthusiastically for months. More than half of them are state-subsidised freelance workers.