

## 2 : ON THE WAY TO ABSTRACTION

**It just came up like that.** I started to note small landscapes, but my sketches were already quite abstract, I mean non-figurative, and I felt immediately that the little amount of beauty –id pleasure- that I could find in it was in these abstract combinations of colors that I could see, not in the realism of the landscape itself.

What is more common, more basic and down to earth than a sunset? But what is more abstract than a sunset?

The other thing is that when I prepared my canvas I used to spread a mixture of white acrylic and white hevea rubber glue. Looking at it I felt that, because of my weak abilities and little experience in painting, I would probably never manage to get more beauty on it than what I already had under my eyes. Painting would be like spoiling the whole process. I felt very discouraged, of course, especially because, like most people, I had the implicit feeling that abstract painters were jokers, that Malevich was a crook! But what I had under my eyes fulfilled me. It was simple, like snow.

Another reason why I gave up landscapes very quickly is that what I got by making photos, to my point of view, was hundreds of times more beautiful than what I could ever achieve by painting. It is as humble and stupid as this. The camera makes that transformation work of nature into a convention that our brain also makes, but as a part of nature too the camera's re-creation process is also as perfect as nature. I could not compete with the genius of my camera! Actually I could not compete with nature itself either. Sitting in a field,

under a tree, and watching white clouds calmly expanding on a bright blue sky, the glittering willow leaves and the fiery yellow grasses bending gently under a mild pleasant breeze, is simply terrifying. You'll never translate sensations into colours, not even colorful sensations, it is as simple as that.

The ambition of Monet, his courage, was above human standards, like Virginia Woolf's in literature, and in a way he certainly failed however prodigious has been his success in "competing" with nature. (I do not mean by "competing" looking alike in a photographic way, but moving us as powerfully). His last abstract period was, in a way, in that sense, more realistic, because abstraction is the only realistic way to apprehend reality, although there is little hope ever to understand reality at all. The human intellect is not made for this. It was, I think, long ago, but Adam and Eve have been chased out of Paradise because they tried to experience the taste of knowledge, haven't they? Knowledge is understanding reality as a whole. So we were left away with abstraction to play with.

Then, I imagined that I could start some work on that way, explore this abstract stuff, I mean the rubber white cover, by drawing in it, with my fingers for example, drawing directly in pure paint. My failure could become real matter, the real pleasure, the fulfillment. I think this white stuff appealed to me also because I felt depressed and endangered at that time. The answer, peace, could be found in there. It took only two or three days to develop from landscape to abstraction, you know, from view to vision. But this process from view to vision is all what painting is about, isn't it?

Actually the process in painting is not limited from view to vision, as it may have been in the romantic era. The aesthete also has his vision of beauty, which is his taste. What is about in modern painting is creation, which is a re-creation from a vision to a real thing. What you paint goes back to reality,

things that can be seen by other people. It's a feedback process, which usually ends in attics or flea markets, rarely in museums! This creative process I'm talking about is so strange, incomprehensible and different from one artist to another that it seems that, for some of them, it is disconnected from any kind of vision, or even view. It becomes a world apart, even though there must be some kind of vision underneath. Exactly at the opposite, what a classic or romantic painter was seeing was exactly what he planned to paint. His vision was absolutely normalized by society. He did not paint what he saw, he saw what he painted, and what he painted was his vision, a conventional recreation of reality. The re-creation process was about copying, as precisely as possible, the romantic visions, and that was made possible because these visions were acceptable for society, and welcomed. When the copying process showed too precisely extravagant visions (Turner, Blake) the artist was blamed, until these visions became acceptable too, and then the way society turned out to see too. The taste.

Actually I did appreciate painters like Matisse or Marquet, who sometimes became almost non-figurative. I was fascinated by their ability to sum up things so fast, so convincing, with a compact and dense result, on a short even surface, and before them Derain, most of the Fauves had magnificently succeeded in this way. Some of Monet's work is like this too, the "débâcle" series showing abstract blocks of ice drifting away on the muddy Seine river, or his rose tree boughs. You may go back to Velazquez, because you have everything in Velazquez, haven't you? Pure poetry like in "Les Fileuses". Also in the late Titian's work, when Titian's brush plays the partition of a majestic dialogue with his own experience, a free meditation. A moment comes in everyone's life when everything doesn't *become* abstract, but shows its abstract side at least, or is understood by the spirit more than the mind, in a more abstract, more real and deeper way.

The lovely portrait of Titus at his school desk contains a pure, charming and dark abstract piece of painting, the wood board of the desk. It is a pure poem of love from Rembrandt. We live, move and die in abstraction, don't we? We see, feel, love and suffer through our brain, our whole body is a brain, the senses are tools our brain uses to fulfil itself. Having sex is also, most of the time, a lonely and intellectual process. When it happens to become a fusion, it is a fusion of spirits more than a fusion of bodies, so whatever happens, from the dirtiest copulation, to the highest dialogue of tenderness's, it still is abstraction at work.

So, when I put colour on a canvas and play within the colour with the movements of my mind, I am not in abstraction at all, as a speculation, I am in abstraction as what reality is made of. This reality is the reality of our life as a mental process, sure, but not only, the reality of the earth, the matter made of atoms, the reality of light playing on infinite combinations of chemical structures and substances (substances which, for a painter, are unfortunately quite stinking! Oils, petrol, glues etc...)

I know what you're gonna ask me. Why don't you talk about Mark Rothko? Well I should, for sure, because Mark Rothko worked on all the questions that I raised in this conversation, and deeply pondered on them, obtaining a stunning result in his work. He is an artist I greatly admire. Standing in front of one of his paintings is a rare, deep and moving experience. And being moved is all we've got, since Paradise was lost.

This is how it all started for me.

May I add something? Making the difference between a non-figurative work and an abstract work is not easy, although these two ways are almost opposite. When Rembrandt paints his child's desk, he gets the opportunity to

express his love by painting a poem of colours, hence making a marvelous piece of abstract painting. When he paints the flag of the left hand side soldier in "La Ronde de Nuit", he brushes it in large, sensuous, and free strokes of brown and purple oil. This flag is a master piece in a master piece. It is non-figurative, but has nothing abstract in it. Rothko is abstract, Joan Mitchell is non-figurative.

Stating it this way, I am aware that I make my former developments difficult to understand. Let's just remember that I said that a moment comes when reality shoes its abstract side. ABSTRACTION IS WHAT REALITY IS MADE OF. This is a mental process. But being aware of the mental dimension of our perception does not necessarily lead to an abstract result. After all classic painters were driven by "ideals", romantics by "passions". Things are never clearly sliced like a sausage. Rothko vehemently rejected the idea of being associated to the action painting movement, obviously totally opposite to his prophetic ideals, but he never rejected figuration. His ambition of making a deep impression on the spectator, and communicating with other human beings through the colour is shared by Mitchell, and most painters who are not abstract at all. On her side many of Mitchell's large paintings are not only a response to a direct and joyful exultation in the nature. Some are filled with deeper and less comprehensible feelings and express her spiritual interrogations, her distress, her sorrow or just how she felt in her life at a particular moment.

So, don't forget that when you paint, you paint! I mean that a moment comes when the formal and scholar categories have no importance at all! The painter is confronted to technical questions far more important than intellectual speculations, the most important of them being that the painting must be coherent and has its own dynamic which was usually not planned. The painter is torn between the will of painting what he had "seen" mentally, and what he

gets on the canvas, that he really sees, and which progressively gets its own will and existence. Sometimes the result is far better than what had been planned, or far different but still coherent and good. It is important to keep this sensitivity to what chance brings up, and to the pleasure of the sensuous effect of colours on our mental activity. Then the separation between abstraction and non-figuration becomes ridiculous. Painting is just fun !

O. FAUCHEREAU. 01/09/2009

