

GALERIE CRÈVECOEUR
4 RUE JOUYE-ROUYE
75020 PARIS

AGNOSIE
BALTHAZAR LOVAY
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Interview between Balthazar Lovay and Fabrice Stroun, november 2010, Genève

Fabrice Stroun: Your new pictures made with a computer play on a saturation effect. Unlike your previous drawings, Noise Drawings, where every stratum remains clear, here the images tend to disappear.

Balthazar Lovay: In both cases, it is about piling images layers. Unlike the drawings handmade, here, through the Photoshop matrix, the more layers you add, the more they seem to vanish. It is a good thing since all those images exhaust me.

FS: How is that? Do you refer to the nature of the images you use or to their number?

BL: Both. Some are images that I have been piling in boxes for years, taken in magazines, books, any kind of prints. Some come from the Internet. A part of them carry an anxious content, slightly paranoiac, some are more ordinary. I have a diogenic trend. By piling up in my boxes, they eventually form an oppressive mass, just like the images all around us every day. It is liberating to see them disappear as I pile them.

FS: In the past, you have worked with this kind of appropriated images in a much more direct way. I refer to your series of watercolours shown in the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris, where you stated fantasmatic représentations of Hitler (Vacuumed Images, 2006). Don't you think it is important for the viewer, to perceive the « material » you work with ?

BL: Not in this case. To be honest, if I use images taken from my « collections », a large amount of them are taken randomly elsewhere, and do not represent something specific for me. This sampling allows me to take distance with my own obsessions, so as to introduce foreign bodies in the mixture, to be sure all the components do not have the same function. It is also important not to establish a norm. What matters is the act of leading all those images to their disappearing.

FS: Is it more important than the final visual result ?

BL: I started the Noise Drawings with a rather intellectual reflexion about the future of abstraction, the héritage of processes coming from Appropriation etc. But in the end, they were treated in a drawing automatic way, almost in a trance state. The pictures made here with a computer are different: it is more about cold handlings made from a computerized cockpit, as in a sci-fi film, where a mad-doctor would force worlds to interpenetrate in a misty collapse. Nevertheless, I wanted the viewer to be connected with the idea of « sublime », thanks notably to the dimensions. I don't know if it works.

FS: In which extent this image is random, simply the fruits of this computer process, and in which extent is it composed?

BL: It is 86% chance, and 14% composition and settings on luminosity and contrasts.

FS: You also present a work from a new series of three-dimensional piece inspired by Appenzeller Sylvester Klausen headgears.

BL: It is a fascinating popular tradition. For New Year's Eve, men dressed up as women wear masks and big hats on which they built playlets of daily life. As you look closer, you notice that they evoke the position of the man in the world, they deal with its social identification through a glorified vision of the everyday. If you consider them with a critical point of view, those scale-downs also interrogate our distance to the cultural environment, the ambiguous status of any self-representation, the public image that you make people believe in and the private realities that we hide.

The masks and hats that I have been making for less than one year are versions about these allegories, and also about related issues: utopian and eccentric social models, eschatological and spiritual matters, likely or absurd uchronias, etc.

FS: These sculptures are also saturated of images, that keep on merging over each other.

BL: They do, and they literally do in some cases. On the walls of the Nochronos for instance stained glasses

are inserted and they are lit from the inside. You can find Dürer's *Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, a painting by visionary artist Alex Grey, an apocalyptic painting by illustrator Larry Carroll made for Slayer, a philosophical painting by Veronese called *Dialettica* and a Dali version of Piero della Francesca. The urban apocalypse is one of the recurring issues of visionary art, with the idea that the modern town is the paroxysmal expression of our violent domination on our ecosystem, that we are heading for a fall, that our towns will finally implode. Salvation would come from a return to shared community values, out of the towns, in the middle of the nature. This option is represented by a 1969 painting of Frank Bruno and by a recent painting by Vidya Gastaldon.

FS: These image associations build a meaning, a readable narrative more than a sensation of generalised confusion.

BL: To a certain extent, they do, even if it is here a more allegoric than narrative meaning. The meaning appears and disappears according to the watching point. It applies to the paintings and the sculptures. Currently, I am swayed by the apocalyptic views and the ideas of regeneration promises. But I try to include in it other references, to confuse a too quickly identifiable outline, which could be used as a total position, or to which I would end up by entirely believe in.

FS: Your refusal to adopt a single guideline is reflected in your formal choices. It seems sometimes that each series was made by a different artist. Your work is clearly led by polyphonic attempts. Can you explain the strategies you use to produce these other « voices » ?

BL: Maybe like my previous work of musical programmer, or currently my work of co-manager of Hard Hat, where it is always about bringing together mixed elements in a specific context. But is also about taking part in several different « worlds », such as extreme Metal with its own iconography, its tours with four bands in two-floor buses, or Balkanic music, with its internal conflicts, its star system... For each of the hats, I put myself in different fictional creator shoes. Here, an esoterist talking about end of world and fertility, there a member of a sect building theories about the future evolutions of homo sapiens, there again a captive locked up for civil disobedience.

FS: Whether it be about the musical genres you quoted or all these odd theories about evolution of our species, all these fields are close to you. Unlike a lot of artists of your generation, you seem to be not an ethnological side, but more like a scholar amateur.

BL: "Scholar" is not appropriate, I don't pretend to be so, but I let myself go following my interests, which are many, and sometimes contradictory, even if I am not able to identify with them totally. We do know, thanks to Philip K. Dick, David Cronenberg, or more theoretically thanks to Nelson Goodman that what we call reality and truth are overlaps of possible worlds beams and kaleidoscope of subjective perceptions. For this series of sculptures for instance, I asked other artists to make their own hats. Soon, in the middle of my productions, I will show pieces from Kim Soeb Bonin-segni and John Miller, two artists with whom I work through Hard Hat. It is not only about penetrating these cultures or worlds that I own more or less, but also to let external worlds come inside the one I build.