



**Louise Sartor – *De haut en bas et back again***

La Società delle Api, Monaco

Louise Sartor's solo exhibition at La Società delle Api brings together a series of paintings and drawings realised over the past three seasons at Moulin des Ribes in Grasse. Executed on cardboard or as digital drawings, the works revolve around two central motifs: that of the cypress tree and the bouquet of withered flowers. Beneath these realistically-rendered representations borrowing from a classical style, the choice of medium, as well as the juxtaposition of two vegetal states — one persistent, the other in decline — articulates a broader reflection on the temporalities of living things, cycles of transformation, and modalities in the way images come into being.

The choice of cardboard packaging as a pictorial support is an essential entry point into the economy of Louise Sartor's work. A humble material from the consumer chain, it signals both an aesthetic and political positioning: to paint on cardboard is to reject a traditional material hierarchy — that which crowns canvas as the noble material *par excellence* — while suggesting a proximity to the ordinary and quotidian. Cardboard introduces into the field of painting a sense of instability, a precariousness, a form of familiarity. It gestures toward the 'banal' and to logics of circulation and exchange, but it also points to possibilities of creation with accessible and readily available means. And yet, the pieces of cardboard on which Sartor paints are not quite so 'simple'. Each has a specific shape — often asymmetrical,

sometimes torn, always singular and ultimately unique for the painting it carries. This gesture, this inversion — similar to strategies employed by artists like Thomas Hirschhorn or Richard Tuttle, for whom cardboard operates as a fragile and seemingly worthless support — opens up a critical space, asking: What is produced within the act of painting? What is given value? What is represented, and on what ground(s)?

Multiplied across deliberately chosen pieces of cardboard, the cypress motif performs its own inversion — first and foremost on a symbolic level. Quintessentially Mediterranean, the cypress is often associated with cemeteries and mourning, yet it is also an evergreen, emblematic of immortality and longevity due to its year-round foliage. Van Gogh, who painted numerous representations of the cypress, described it as a tree that 'connects the earth and the sky.' This cosmic dimension is in full evidence in *Nuit étoilée à Saint-Rémy* (1888), where the cypress arises from the darkness like a dark flame onto which the stars seem to cling. In Louise Sartor's series, the nearly obsessive reiteration of the motif, combined with a formal rigour in its verticality, produces a sense of momentum and ascendent movement that seems to defy entropy. From one painting to the next, it is not the tree that changes, but its surroundings: the sky, the light, other nearby foliage. This minimal variation between works reveals a form of continuous vitality that transcends the modest support on which it unfurls.

Considered against this upward dynamic, seemingly stronger than the passing of time, the series of wilted flowers stands out for its tranquil, silent, almost pious mood. Rooted in the still-life tradition, these vanitas evoke the finitude of existence, the transience of earthly pleasures, and the uselessness of material goods in the face of death. The flower, captured here in its terminal phase, appears as an inward form, curled in on itself. But the artist manages to breathe into this subject a unique vitality. These bouquets, their tenuous verticality sustained by discreet containers, emanate a subtle yet undeniable presence. The precision of the painterly gesture allows us to perceive the tipping point, this interval between life in all its brilliance and its eventual demise. The slender, fragile stems are represented by almost nervous lines that express a residual energy; the leaves undulate like small streamers charting a memory of movement, prolonging the zest of life in one final ballet.

If the cypress embodies an upward, persistent force through its form and repetition, and the wilted flower a downward, intimate, interior motion toward ephemerality, the exhibition's title — *De haut en bas et back again* — proposes a cyclical, non-linear reading of this relationship. It is less a confrontation than a dialectic, in which one cannot exist without the other. Life and death are not staged as opposites, but as co-present, intertwined states that are replayed within the very act of painting.

On this level, Louise Sartor's practice also engages a reflection on the status of the image and its reproducibility. The use of seriality — whether in terms of subject matter or format — situates her work within a lineage that extends from Warhol to the conceptual artists of the 1970s. The title of the exhibition is an explicit nod to Andy Warhol's book *From A to B and back again* (1975), in which iteration becomes a mode of thought. Here, repetition is not redundancy, but a Pop-inflected act of variation: it displaces attention, excavates divergences, reveals subtle shifts. It

inscribes the works within a space of expanded temporality, where each image is a moment in a process rather than a finished object.

In counterpoint to the works on cardboard packaging, a series of digital drawings broadens the scope of reflection. Presented on a flat-screen monitor, these drawings have been assembled into a slideshow that weaves a narrative both personal and imaginary. An integrated constellation of older works bearing the cypress motif blurs the chronology of their creation. The use of digital media extends questions around the circulation, reproducibility, and instability of images. These drawings respond to the logics of the digital realm, such as the juxtaposition of narrative fragments, the coexistence of disjointed temporalities, and the layering of visual strata. Painting thus becomes a porous space traversed by a plurality of image regimes, expanding beyond the pictorial tradition to reflect an embeddedness within an ecology of contemporary and industrial visual culture. Even on cardboard, the painted image enters into this network, often with a view to confrontation or resistance.

What remains central in Sartor's work is the persistence of a gaze turned toward elementary forms — a tree, a flower, a vase — not in an effort to extract their essence, but to recast and reactivate their presence within contemporary material and symbolic conditions. The act of painting becomes a gesture of measurement denoting the space between things, between images, between states of living. It is also a way of thinking through duration, passage, and transformation. 'From top to bottom and back again' is not just a title but a methodology — a way of transversing forms, of returning, of holding an active tension between rise and fall, persistence and erasure. The exhibition does not aim to deliver a univocal or spectacular statement, but rather to open up a space of perception, of slow reading, in which each work functions as a point of inflection. Between formal rigour and sensitive attention, between an economy of means and symbolic density, Louise Sartor's work interrogates what makes an image today.

Oriane Durand