

## The One and the Other

‘Is evil of great importance to the good?’, a question covering a painting by Johan Clarysse can be rightly interpreted as a key to his work. This doesn’t mean that Clarysse can be attributed with moral intentions (although his philosophical training is unmistakably present in his work) but the artist likes to put things and concepts in opposition; sometimes it even looks a bit obsessional. Good against evil but also figuration against monochrome, (surely in his former works), image versus text, film versus painting, editing versus still, colour versus black and white, etc. It clearly amounts to more than a mere juxtaposition, they interlock, they influence one another, they attract or reject each other, yet even cancel out. Of course ‘evil’ is of great importance to the ‘good’ because without the one it would be impossible to know the other. This is fundamental in the work of Clarysse: the one and only Truth does not exist, there is always the Other that may be true just as well.

Clarysse likes to question ‘the status of the image’: what is the significance of an image, how does it affect the onlooker? And what does the onlooker do to the image? Or what does the artist do to the image and vice versa? And where do the look of the artist and that of the spectator meet if at all they do? What does the one do to the other? This question is being raised all the time when Clarysse is drawing or painting and never a final answer is provided.

Each drawing, each canvas is a partial answer arrived at from a certain viewpoint or from a specific mental leap. It could even be argued that it is the result of a certain position of the camera which in the next scene will be totally different.

A few years ago Clarysse started a posterproject in the centre of Roeselare. The painted head of a furious young man and that of a furious young woman were being reproduced on a thousand posters all over the city, sometimes together, sometimes separately. It looked like an election or an advertisement campaign but then one with a disturbing uneasy image of two angry young men. On their faces a reference to the Bible was painted ‘Joh. 7’ (man) and ‘Matt.5.’ (woman). But they could just as well have been meaningless slogans because Clarysse used the same imaginary strategies as the ads do to unmask them.

Advertisement as a lubricant, a painting as an unruly image.

Something similar can be seen in the project ‘art d’ O’. In a walnut tree a hundred photos of eight youngsters are displayed; sun, rain, and wind have free play. Each photo carries a word referring either to an emotional mood or to a characteristic of the young adolescent, such as ‘anxious’, ‘adventurous’, ‘amiable’, ‘excited’, ... (the expression on the face does not match the word) or to

a medicine used in psychiatry ; anafranil, aurorix, frenatil, xanax... It creates a work full of exciting associations : do we see portraits of youngsters with psychological problems? Or are we dealing only with image and language playing at each other? Does the artist try to manipulate our capacity to associate? Who is here the I, who the Other?

In the series 'Acts' Clarysse continues this play pictorially. We are in front of images apparently taken from films ( and in many cases indeed they are), stills depicting actions ( dramatic or not) of characters on which the word 'acts' has been painted. Which acts? Biblical? May be but not always can we trace them back, some only having one figure to go by. The 'status' of these images is obscure, on purpose, the artist opts for a free and open interpretation in the knowledge that no interpretation can pretend to be the only true one. The same applies to the paintings of the series 'Alle Lust will Ewigkeit' where legible sentences are covering the images. Often they are questions : sometimes the artist seems to interrogate himself; sometimes we have fragments of songtexts (of Frank Zappa e.g.), sometimes taken from 'Difficult questions' by Max Frisch. At first sight the questions bear no relation to the (film)image but yet we are seduced to search for relationships. Fundamentally they are referring to the essence in the work of Clarysse : the relationship between the one and the other. 'Are shadow and substance identical?'. ' Does reality equal appearance?' The form and its shadow , reality and appearance : are they equivalent? Certainly in the paintings where Clarysse obviously plays with the hierarchy of image and text. Many images refer to films by Alfred Hitchcock and Wong-Kar-wai, precisely directors who in their films always have experimented with the ambiguity of the image.

The series 'Ecce Homo- Is evil of great importance to the good?' ' originated from the experience of the artist during the Semana Santa celebrations in Southern Spain in 2006. The images of the traditional procession have been painted as if the artist did a 'shoot' of the whole event.

We are confronted with the procession, the very heavy ingeniously cut wooden portable platforms( some look like cathedrals), Christ in passion, the women with their mantillas, the procession clothes... Undoubtedly here again we meet with the typical Clarysse dichotomy : these works refer to religiosity, the problematic issue of faith and its outward appearance but at the same time to pain and violence : some images seem to refer to the Ku Klux Klan in the South of the United States. This is even rendered stronger by four small portraits of four black children murdered by a Ku Klux Klan member in 1968.

This brings us to the bottom line of Johan Clarysse's painting : his work doesn't only show what you are looking at, it offers relationships and allusions, instruments with which you can/may/should (re)construct yourself the film of images.

The typical flat painting style of Clarysse, together with the use of faded colours enhances the feeling that you should get to work yourself with these 'pre-images.'

Exactly as in the diptychs, triptychs or multipanels that you regularly meet as pieces of a puzzle.

Clarysse puts intriguing questions, seducing the spectator to get actively involved in the 'status' of the image. And it is precisely there that artist and spectator meet, each with his own story that never will be the One and the True but the One and the Other.

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