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Cats crying over an apparently sparkling surface

Regardless of the language that utters them, repeating a word or a sentence like a material to knead ends up being captivating and disconcerting in the same movement. If we play at twisting these scattered words or these sentences of coherent syntax, their meaning fades away to become something else, in favor of a visualization without apparent continuity. After having seen the work of Louis Gary in exhibition contexts or during studio visits, the enigma posed by Lewis Carroll in *Alice In Wonderland* came to my mind several times : « Why is a raven like a writing desk ? » (1). As if each time, layers of matter and imagination were superimposed in front of his work's syntax, allowing me to grasp a tip of the enigma, but whose meaning would continue to elude me. In Louis Gary's work, there is a modelling of experiences that seem mismatched, but turn out to be wandering across the dazed language, memories, desires and also doubts.

Let's begin by the end. The titles of Louis Gary's exhibitions such as *Et le cœur devient un flacon de parfum* (2), *You wanted it darker* (3), *Mathilde & Mylène* (4), or *Magic Saliva* (5) could each reference a poem, a hit song from the 1990s or a forgotten film by Eric Rohmer (6). If we circle back to Lewis Carroll, *Magic Saliva* could very well have been a handwritten inscription on the label of a vial so that the character of Alice regains her initial size, changes scale again or slips away from the adult world. These tracks are then obviously to be understood as stemming from a field of personal references. Beginning by the titles does not mark a desire to maintain Louis Gary's work in an abstraction, on the contrary, they reveal both what his entire practice projects in concrete form and what it contains under short fictions, as humorous or psychodramatic as we may create without ever imposing a (unique) meaning.

Sculptures, photographs and bas-reliefs hold an autonomous space within Louis Gary's practice, as much in the way they are thought, *formed*, as in their display. Considered as mediums passing from one production to another, the work of Louis Gary is in this sense, slithery. It would be tempting to add a few qualifiers to his practice such as absurd, childish, improbable, etc... but that would only carry on a suspension of meaning where the deliberately elusive language avoids all discourse, freeing formal intentions from any desire to question or conceptualize. Think about attempting the beginning of an answer or creating a story between the pieces and you will quickly realize that the bodies of the characters have disappeared, that the perspectives do not exist, and that the objects are what they are and perhaps already something else. As if somewhere, each one the pieces had its own logic tethered to its surface where colors knead the shapes.

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In Louis Gary's earlier sculptures, seemingly banal objects, in sum, have a relative banality that would be determined more by the nature of the materials – mainly wood – than their appearance. The form of these sculptures is appropriate to its object, and can at times be close to furniture literally transcended by fruits, while some have a function that remains to be determined or left undetermined; there are also floating or rolling boats, others more static in the manner of modules placed on the ground or hung. I watch short video clips of some of these sculptures filmed in action; they have left the context of the exhibition for an outdoor setting which I assume is not far from the studio. These have become the archive of a sculptural practice.

Over time, production has simplified their form, and the sculptures have gained in pictoriality through their covering in lacquered paint, and they participate in more garrulous situations. This time the sculptures take the shape of the object they dress while passing for a decoy. Some seem to be playing a skit, and take part in a game at the same time as they initiate it. The story of his sculptures draws close to a jumble of feelings, a certain speculation, almost defined by color. More in volume, they participate as much in an infinite comedy as they each seem to take turns to replay the riddle posed to Alice.

In 2018 in Wellington, New Zealand it is said that Louis Gary returns to photography; he takes a press camera out of his storage. Quickly perceived, these photographs would be the opposite of sculptures in black and white only. However, they have everything to do with the everyday mentioned previously. At the moment when you think you have come across a family photo album (again, a decoy), a wedding follows, children on the table, women at the car wheel or even people who tell their dreams whose poses are captured as an attitude rather than a staged scene. In this sense, the subject matter is quickly evacuated in favor of the medium and the objects that surround Louis Gary. The compositions hold together like sculptures, by a degree of strangeness or let's say, of unusual quality. The editing of these photographs and their plasticity responds to a fetishism specific to each of the contexts either of the exhibition or of the publication (*Ici, Bonjour Alan*) while always preferring to discard an iconic presentation. The photographic language is above all for Louis Gary a question of daily and affective fictions deprived of their plot.

In his bas-reliefs, Louis Gary sculpts shapes made of styrofoam and plaster that take on colors in the manner of coloring pictures and whose gestures and techniques are those of house painters, facade designers or film decorators. The layers of lacquer cover and connect the forms, smoothing and coating them. These bas-reliefs are for Louis Gary paintings relieved from the relationship to Painting, as if the forms had ended up absorbing the window to preserve only the objects: « it is rather these things that come to see us and that are there » (7). We encounter portraits in all smiles, close-ups, lynxes in tears and situations where the scales grow larger or smaller adhering to a distance from things. The imaginary world present on the bulging surface

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of these paintings is very close to us, filled with doubt and tender awkwardness, flirtation and laughter whose order of distribution seems cut off from all logic. Everything or almost everything characterizes the image of a moment of embarrassment or a carefully modeled foolishness giving way to a kind of storyboard of which we would not have all the frames. In this equivocation, the concrete side remains mysterious, the associations of the mind are confusing, yet with a very familiar resemblance retrieved from the ordinary.

If Louis Gary's pieces are tinted with colors that become inlaid in the retina, we must consider this apparent brilliance, like a varnish, an epidermis under which a whole section of reality is compressed and to which it confers a tactility. Situations, figures and objects have something larger than words and reappear at their surface like the proof of an interiority which could not be successfully nor completely disguised. The friendships and the intimacy of Louis Gary weave through it but they also slip to the surface in order to keep the necessary distance to let us in. His work is produced out of an apprehension of gestures and inexpressible attentions that fill lived experience, as if to enlarge what, in actuality, does not take up space. Everywhere the forms are affective and try to function, their flexibility, almost like the least common denominator, holds in a balance devoid of any goal. Thus, like the enigma posed to Alice, there is an unsettled meaning in the sequence of forms and their changes.

Fiona Vilmer, 2022

- (1) Lewis Carrol, *Alice in Wonderland*, Bibliothèque lattès. p163
- (2) *Et le cœur devient un flacon de parfum*, exhibition at POCTB, Orléans, 13 January – 13 February 2022.
- (3) *You wanted it darker*, exhibition at Glassbox, Paris, 28 May – 13 June 2020
- (4) *Mathilde & Mylène*, exhibition at l'Ahah, Paris, 9 May - 29 Juin, 2019
- (5) *Magic Saliva*, exhibition at Project Space, Semiose Galerie, Paris, 31 August – 15 September 2019
- (6) A nod to the text written by Éva Prouteau for the exhibition *Mathilde & Mylène* at l'Ahah, Paris 9 May - 29 June 2019.
- (7) Statements by the artist about the objects for the exhibition *Et le cœur devient un flacon de parfum* at POCTB, Orléans from 13 January to 13 February 2022.