



Camille Tsvétoukhine, *Du jardin au tapis*, 2022. Acrylic, oil pastel, velvet, wood and threads on silk; 140 x 140 cm, © ADAGP, Paris. Photo Fabrice Coussat.

CAMILLE TSVÉTOUKHINE

INTO MY EYES, INTO MY PURPLE MIND

CURATED BY PATRICE JOLY

22.03.2024 - 25.05.2024

GALERIE LOEVENBRUCK
6, RUE JACQUES-CALLOT, 75006 PARIS

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6, rue Jacques-Callot
75006 Paris

The brush witch

The first encounter came about because of Lili Reynaud Dewar, who invited her to take part in the exhibition “Suite,” for which eight artists who had put on solo exhibitions at Zoo Galerie in Nantes were asked to invite another artist of their choice in order to complete the list.¹ Lili chose Camille Tsvétoukhine, who was then a student at the prestigious Haute École d’Art et de Design (Head) in Geneva.² Camille’s pieces were immediately snapped up by collectors, most of them Parisians, who miraculously turned up at the gallery on the day of the opening, as were those of the other artists, who were swept up in this unexpected whirlwind of purchasing. The young’uns were thus able to benefit from the benevolence of their elders. I must admit that the speed with which the pieces by Camille and the other artists were acquired filled me with happiness and pride.

The pieces exhibited at the time of this first collaboration already featured some of the elements characteristic of the artist’s work, which in the interim have continued to develop and become more pronounced. The ceramic hamburgers (*Famille des gras*, 2013) were a great success: placed on logs, as if to evoke a kind of country conviviality in which two cultural registers were mixed: that of the popular mass-market product, the famous burger, and that of the evening gathering around the fireplace, registers that are ultimately rather contradictory but that neatly encapsulate an era that has a widespread penchant for oxymorons. In this association, however, one could observe a marked interest in vernacular objects. Art, in this case, has the power to sublimate what might be considered vulgar or ugly: transformed by the ceramic kiln, the trivial, which we no longer pay much attention to, becomes a source of aesthetic wonder. The function of art has been described many times, and the use of everyday objects revisited by the artist’s brush or the ceramist’s kiln has also been much analysed. With Camille Tsvétoukhine, another dimension of the artefact comes into play, that of the animated object, or more precisely the object that “smiles” at you or “seems to express” an ironic thought about the world. Later, the artist continued in this direction with a series of clubs (*Massue préhistorique animiste*, 2017) produced for the exhibition “(I.C.) Intelligence collective” (Geneva, LiveInYourHead, 2017). The latter feature a face from the middle of which look out the eyes of a small, sensitive creature anticipating its fate as a ceramic club with a very limited life expectancy. Many other objects of the same ilk have since populated her universe, such as a giant paintbrush “dressed” in silk and gold thread (*Sabbat mou*, 2019) or, more recently, an oversized horseshoe with crude outlines (*La chance vous sourit*, 2024). Animism, the enchantment of objects, the re-enchantment of everyday life in the manner of Merlin: with Camille Tsvétoukhine’s “animated” ceramics, we sail between the wonder of the Forest of Broceliande and Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*, between children’s nursery rhymes and the grotesque vertigo of Franz Kafka or, closer to home, Emir Kusturica.

¹ “Suite” at Zoo Galerie, Nantes, 2013: Mark Geffriaud/Jurgis Paškevičius, Florian and Michaël Quistrebent/Katja Novitskova, Bruno Peinado/Romain Bobichon, Émilie Pitoiset/Pascaline Morincome, Blaise Parmentier/Glen Loarer, Morgane Tschember/Hugo Lemaire, Claire Fontaine/Achim Aachen, Lili Reynaud Dewar/Camille Tsvétoukhine.

² Camille Tsvétoukhine was one of the winners of the New Heads - Fondation BNP Paribas Art Awards - C’est moi qui choisis, which led to an exhibition curated by Marc-Olivier Wahler.

Of course, the Pop artists come to mind here, and the way they seized on mass-market items such as Andy Warhol's beloved can of Campbell's soup. And it's only a short step from Campbell's soup to the burger, a step that the Americanisation of French society, all the way to its culinary habits, makes it pretty easy to take. Tsvétoukhine's practice flirts with Pop Art, but a Pop Art that is more playful, more feminist than that of her illustrious predecessors, a Pop Art that doesn't take the high road of commodity fetishism and its denunciation/fascination, but instead wanders down the more ethereal and comical corridors of the witch and her famous broomstick. Camille Tsvétoukhine's objects have more to do with the derisory and comic signs of a domesticated black magic than with the charged symbolism of Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg. Pop Art, then, is more whimsical, leaning towards witchcraft, but again without borrowing from emancipatory discourses. The witchcraft to which Tsvétoukhine refers is burlesque, de-dramatized, closer to the facetiousness of *Bewitched* than to the rightly denunciatory positions of Carlo Ginzburg. This fantasy, combined with the love of the supernatural that permeates the artist's sculptural work, already informed the performance she devised for the Belleville Biennale, "Hanter Belleville" (2014), in which she seized on the popular representation of a ghost, a cloth pierced with two holes at eye level, and imagined a demonstration of these same ghosts, certainly with the idea of demanding greater visibility, or retirement at six hundred.

More recently, the artist has turned to painting, or rather to the tableau form, reintroducing her favourite themes into it, such as her ties to the land and her relationship with Catholic iconography. The use of textiles is not just illustrative or convenient for colour reasons (the background, in particular, becomes irrelevant, the fabric acting as a support and primer), but also refers to a well-established symbolism: the mauve velvet, for example, refers to a priest's robes, with their warm colours and the shimmer of the finery that contribute to the solemnity of the service. Tsvétoukhine's pictorial works instil a narrative through their composition, which blends elements of disparate consistency. The materials she incorporates and the fabrics she chooses for her backgrounds are not purely aesthetic accessories; they build a narrative out of their assembly, linking earthly and celestial elements in a rather unexpected mix. Certain motifs, such as the carrot, reappear regularly, adding a touch of strangeness that might leave us perplexed if we didn't know that the orange vegetable could, in the artist's mind, conjure up images of kleptomaniac capitalism via the reference to Pinocchio's lengthening nose, a sign of the "carrotage"³ and the lies inherent in the economic regime in question. In certain paintings, this motif swells to the height of its fictional referent, taking over the entire composition (*L'Homme carotte 1*, 2023). The branches that punctuate the large blue painting (*Du jardin au tapis*, 2022) form, with the rest of the canvas, a landscape reminiscent of Michel Foucault's heterotopias: these are other spaces, concrete utopias that escape the confines of ordinary life by becoming vehicles for the imaginary. The cemetery is a perfect illustration of this central concept in the philosopher's thought, representing a parallel "black" city; for her exhibition at Atelier 8,⁴ the artist gleaned elements from the Miséricorde cemetery in Nantes and incorporated them into a series of small-format works on velvet (*Carpet Cosmogony #1 to #9*, 2022). By reproducing the miniature form of the French garden in this way, she doubles the reference to Foucault's thinking, for whom the garden is another emblematic example of the heterotopia.

Added to this are eco-feminist concerns, as most cemeteries are no longer sprayed with pesticides, and are becoming places that encourage diversity and the preservation of species. These concerns are echoed in her ceramic objects, such as her giant feet (*À bras le corps*, 2019), which symbolise a desire to reconnect with the earth, despite their slightly disquieting strangeness, since they are filled with earth

3 The slang meaning of the verb *carotter* is to take something by trickery.

4 "Ainsi c'est ainsi, même les feuilles meurent aussi et ici," Nantes, Atelier 8, Bonus, 2022.

and are naked. Here the artist evokes the thinking of the American writer Starhawk, who advocates this reconnection through rituals that might be considered neo-pagan.⁵ The narratives that run through the artist's paintings and artefacts, like the references they invoke, intertwine, composing a formal and intellectual vocabulary that is baroque to say the least, eco-feminist, anti-capitalist, esoteric and neo-pagan, but which also registers resurgences linked to her Christian upbringing.

The exhibition at Galerie Loevenbruck recreates the atmosphere and space of the studio thanks to the light produced by the various accessories (lava lamp, white standard lamp, fireplace on screen), the music played on a selection of vinyl records placed on a pedestal table, and the furniture and objects brought in. For Lars Bang Larsen,⁶ the more or less faithful reconstruction of the artist's studio allows the viewer to enter his or her world and grasp his or her ghostly presence. The artist's brown sofa sits proudly in the middle of this partial reconstruction, which includes a purple carpet – an evocation of her palette – inviting the viewer to enter further into his world. The idea is not only to capture the essence of a practice, but also to demonstrate a formal continuity between some of the artist's works and the objects that populate her daily life. The relationship to the domestic is an essential dimension of Tsvétoukhine's work, and she considers these objects, gleaned from various second-hand goods shops and the rich Parisian street, to be a major source of inspiration. She is not far removed from Marc Camille Chaimowicz, whose work is largely composed of assemblages of objects with a strong "personality," an inexhaustible source of everyday enchantment and an unparalleled invitation to daydreaming.

Patrice Joly, February 2024

Camille Tsvétoukhine was born in 1987 and lives and works in Paris. She holds degrees from the École Supérieure des Beaux-arts (ESBA) in Angers (specialising in visual communication) and the Haute École d'Art et de Design (Head) in Geneva (contemporary artistic practices). In addition to numerous group shows, she has had solo exhibitions at Indice 50 (Paris, 2015), Galerie Interface (Dijon, 2016), artist run space Salon (Madrid, 2016), Zoo Galerie (Nantes, 2018), Bains-Douches (Alençon, 2018), Parc Saint-Léger (Nevers, 2019), and Ateliers Bonus (Île de Nantes, 2022). In addition to her own work, since 2017 she has been developing an artist run space called Idealfrühstück in her own living and studio area, exhibiting the work of other visual artists. She is also a member of the Association Française des Commissaires d'Exposition (C-E-A).

Patrice Joly is the editor of *O2*, a free French-English quarterly in which he publishes interviews, portraits, criticism and essays.

He is the director of Zoo, a contemporary art centre in Nantes, backed by the City of Nantes and Ministry of Culture, dedicated to supporting young artists.

He is also a freelance curator.

5 "Our personal energy field is never wholly separate from the earth's energy field. We are each a ripple in the earth's aura. When we connect deeply with that greater source of energy, we can renew and replenish our own vitality constantly. Anything negative we encounter can pass through us into the earth, as lightning can be grounded. If we become partially disconnected, as we often do under stress, we become un-grounded in every sense." (Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark. Magic, Sex and Politics*, Boston: Beacon Press (1982), 1988, p. 53.

6 Lars Bang Larsen, "The Other Side," *Frieze*, no. 106, 14 April 2007.