

BLACK CUBE

Bruno Rousseaud or the mythology of the race car driver

For the last twenty years or so, Bruno Rousseaud has elected the automobile field as a visual art invariant. From this coherent formal world, from which the artist retrieves the components, surfaces a series of pseudo familiar polymorphic works of art, made of number plates, sanded car hoods and reflecting windshields, piles of studded tyres and slit rear-view mirrors. Erected as sculptures or mimicking a painting, the artworks subvert the automobile axiom and accommodate pictograms, oxymorons and borrowed formulas, and several imperious adjectives that betray the emergence of a unique language. Which could be decrypted as follows.

The result of an autonomous and empirical practice, Bruno Rousseaud's artworks induce a sensitive relationship to the object which the artist processes with measure and veneration. Each intervention takes into account and magnifies the scarifications of the piece, its uses and its past. Each action, which is thought ahead and materialized by a sketch, is the result of a long manufacturing process which takes the form of a hand-to-hand fight with the selected fragment. Whether it consists in piercing thousands of rivets into four worn out karting tyres (*I Turn Around*, 2017), studding a skai slab (the *Mantras* series, 2015) or sanding a car body part for hundreds of hours until having a handful of words spring up from the mastic (the *Sandings* series, 2012), the artworks are born out of the incongruous and visceral encounter between traditional trades and the art of mechanics and customization. A patient and endemic confrontation of the different types of activity which aggregates the plurality of the references that are echoed in the artwork, from minimal art to abstract expressionism, from ornamental purity to geometric abstraction.

The concept of time which is specific to each object is extrapolated by the title of the artwork and the formula hints contained therein. Because the automobile aesthetic here serves as a semantic vector: "I Am Still Alive", "I Shall Not Give Up", "I Believe In Myself", "I Am Incredible" all constitute chanted statements to better convince us of the mandate which the artist has assigned to himself. Bruno Rousseaud's personal mythology thus becomes the point of attachment and resource of his artworks, their pivot. Claiming for himself the iconic figure of the race car driver, he dissects the urban attributes and behaviors thereof. Just like the flamboyant character he has created for himself, the works glare and catch the eye. The messages exuded gladly borrow from the macho vocabulary, are sometimes aggressive and often absurd ("Eat My Dust" / "Move Or Die", *Jeux de plaques*, 2010), and also play with the economy of language (*Séquences*, 2017), or even with a certain muteness with the writing in Morse code (*I Am Back*, 2017) and in Braille (*Mantras*, 2015). Their joint decryption unveils an attitude tied to a philosophy of life and thought: that of a rebellious and subversive mind, and an unconditional freedom, which only the automobile, the last urban emancipation space, according to the artist, can still offer. "Find What You Love And Let It Kill You", said Charles Bukowski. A principle which sets the tempo of a performance reenacted in the form of road cookies (Disks, 2014), expressing a rage for life and a desire for emancipation through the creation process, which echo the counter-culture alternative practices – nomadism, underground scene and rock music, drugs and other syndromes.

The conjunction of antinomies plays with human paradoxes, and with the scrambling of codes likely to enable the burgeoning and survival of such a life dogma within the social world ("Susceptible & Mystic", *Shadows*, 2005); which is also illustrated by the apparent contradiction of the logos stitched onto the SUV wheel protective covers, which invite both to go and to stay, flagging a friendly territory, as well as a danger (*Coast to Coast*, 2006). In this interstice nestle Bruno Rousseaud's wordings, which are filled with humor and seriousness, and for everyone to understand. Among his most recent works, a confluence of neon tubes flashes in its two complementary colors. The green pentagram confronts itself to the red one which blinks to the Morse rhythm of "I Am Back" (2017). The mysticism of the symbol and the message delivered, both anchored in the artist's mythology, proclaim the promise – or the pardon – of a man engaged in his ideologies. Roland Barthes viewed the automobile as a "the supreme creation of an era, designed with passion by unknown artists, consumed in its image, if not in its use, by a whole population who appropriates a perfectly magical object". The automobile gives Bruno Rousseaud something to think about, and to discourse on his art. And is the place where the contradictions necessary for the emergence of an authentic way of life, manage to meet.

Cécile Godefroy, July 2017

Bruno Rousseaud, born in 1969, works and lives in Paris

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